

**Romans 3:19-22**

**Pastor:** Romans 3:19-22: Through the works of the Law no one will be justified.

“Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin. But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Yeshua the Messiah for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.”

3:19-20 Romans 3:19-20 are two verses which can catch many of today’s Messianic readers completely off guard, not only because of some traditional understandings which have been challenged by some contemporary examiners (in particular, proposals seen in the New Perspective of Paul), but most especially because of some translation issues present from the Greek into English.<sup>1</sup> The rendering of the clause *en tō nomō* (ἐν τῷ νόμῳ) in Romans 3:19 as “under the Law” is quite unfortunate, as it is more properly “in the law” (YLT), “within the Law” (LITV), “inside the Law” (Moffat New Testament), or “within the *Torah*” (TLV)—namely describing those who decisively sit within the sphere of influence of God’s Torah.

Furthermore, for evaluating what is intended in Romans 3:20, is whether “works of the Law” (*ergōn nomou*, ἔργων νόμου) pertains to “observing the law” (TNIV), or is somehow connected to the *ma’asei haTorah* (מעשי התורה) of the Dead Sea Scrolls document 4QMMT, the Qumran community’s selective *halachah* or Torah praxis. If this latter option is considered, then Romans 3:20 does not speak of Jewish people keeping the Torah to “be saved” as it were, but rather how their justification—meaning membership among God’s own community—is not contingent on their self-defined barriers. Instead, the purpose of the Torah (Romans 3:20b) is to reveal the sinfulness of all people, and not be used as a means to separate out Jews from the nations as proverbial haves, with the rest as have-nots.

Romans 3:19 can be appropriately viewed as a summarizing statement of what Paul has stated previously in Romans 3:9-18, which continues much of his motif that his own Jewish people are just as much sinners and guilty before the Creator as pagan Greeks and Romans. The good Apostle says, “What then? Are we Jews<sup>2</sup> any better off? No, not at all; for I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin [*huph’ hamartian einai*, ὑφ’ ἁμαρτίας εἶναι]” (Romans 3:9, RSV), then substantiating the universal consequences of sin with an entire litany of Tanach quotations:

“[A]s it is written, ‘THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE [Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3; Ecclesiastes 7:20]. THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING, THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS [Psalm 5:9; 140:3]; WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS [Psalm 10:7]; THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN [Isaiah 59:7-8; Proverbs 1:16]. THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES [Psalm 36:1]’” (Romans 3:10-18, NASU).<sup>3</sup>

Romans 3:19, as it appears in the RSV, asserts, “we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to

<sup>1</sup> This entry has been adapted from the commentary *Romans for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>2</sup> Grk. *proechometha* (προεχόμεθα); “Are we better...?” (NASU). Versions like the RSV, ESV, and CJB/CJSB add “we Jews,” and this is probably justified. But what immediately follows in the remark *proētiāsametha* (προητιασάμεθα), “we have already charged,” would pertain more to the discussion that Paul is having with his Roman audience as “we.”

<sup>3</sup> Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), pp 525-526; cf. Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition* (New York: American Bible Society, 1993).

God.” Notably absent from the source text is the clause *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμον) or “under the Law”; what appears instead is *en tō nomō* (ἐν τῷ νόμῳ) or “in the Law.” Everett F. Harrison explains his view of how what is commonly rendered as “Under the law” is more literally ‘in the law’; so the thought is probably not so much that the Jew is under the law’s authority and dominion in the legal sense as that he is involved in Scripture, which has relevance to him at every point. Otherwise the shift of meaning of *nomos* (law) is very abrupt. Yet the legislative aspect of the law is involved by virtue of being a part of Scripture.”<sup>4</sup> It is inappropriate for many modern English Bibles to have “under the law” for *en tō nomō*,<sup>5</sup> rather than “in/within the law.” Noting the Greek of Romans 3:19, and comparing it to other clauses that appear in the Pauline letters, James D.G. Dunn indicates,

“ὅσα ὁ νόμος λέγει τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ λαλεῖ [*hosa ho nomos legei tois en tō nomō lalei*], ‘whatever the law says it says to those within the law’; not ‘under the law’ [NIV]—the distinction in Paul’s choice of prepositions should be observed. οἱ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ [*hoi en tō nomō*], ‘those within the law’; cf. οἱ τὸν νόμον ἔχοντες [*hoi ton nomon echontes*], ‘those having the law’ (2:14), οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον [*hoi hupo nomon*], ‘those under the law’ (1 Cor 9:20; Gal 4:5) and οἱ ἐκ νόμον [*hoi ek nomon*], ‘those from the law’ (4:14, 16).”<sup>6</sup>

Dunn’s point is clear enough: the language of Romans 3:19 has “those within the law” and “not ‘under the law.’” The Moffat New Testament actually has a correct rendering here: “Whatever the Law says, we know, it says to those who are **inside the Law**, that every mouth may be shut and all the world made answerable to God.” What is seen in Romans 3:19 is the same as *en nomō* (ἐν νόμῳ) or “in law” appearing previously in Romans 2:12, the addition of the definite article being only a minor difference. However, given the large number of Tanach quotations that Paul has provided in Romans 3:10-18 preceding in Romans 3:19, it is appropriate to identify “law” as involving much more than just the Pentateuch, as the Tanach Scriptures as a whole are more broadly in view. Douglas J. Moo states how, “‘those in the law’ are the Jews, who live within the sphere of the revelation of God given in the Scripture/law,”<sup>7</sup> in that Paul’s own Jewish people who know the Instruction of God, are the very ones who should be quite aware of its condemning function upon every human being as a sinner.

The issue in Romans 3:19 is the fact that God’s Instruction, in both the Torah and the Tanach, communicates to Paul’s Jewish people that the entire world is somehow “accountable” or “guilty” (NKJV) before Him. This is likely because of basic principles of right and wrong impressed on the human psyche via His image (cf. 2:14-15). *Hypodikos* (ὑπόδικος) specifically means, “Under sentence, condemned, liable, subject to prosecution” (AMG)<sup>8</sup>—a status for *pas ho kosmos* (πᾶς ὁ κόσμος) or the whole world. Paul will continue in the next verse, stating, “since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20b, RSV), but for many Jews of his generation it was turned into various man-made “works of law” intended to separate them out not only from the nations, but even fellow Jews (discussed further). Quite contrary to the thought that only those who are *en tō nomō* or “in the Law” are expected to follow and obey it—the whole world will be held accountable, in some way, for violating God’s Instruction. Tim Hegg’s observations on Romans 3:19 are well taken:

“[U]nder the Torah’ is a bad translation of τοῖς ἐν τῷ νόμῳ [*tois en tō nomō*], which literally would be ‘those in the Torah.’ ‘Under the Torah’ would be ὑπὸ νόμον, *hupo nomon*, which is found in 6:14, 15...[T]he expression here, ‘those who are in the Torah’ should be understood to mean ‘those who possess the Torah’ or ‘those who know the Torah.’ Thus, the phrase repeats the premise already given by Paul that the Jews were

<sup>4</sup> Everett F. Harrison, “Romans,” in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al. *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 10:39.

<sup>5</sup> Brown and Comfort, 539, in their interlinear translation, even have the unfortunate “in(under) the law.”

<sup>6</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans*, Vol. 38a. (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 38a:152.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 205.

<sup>8</sup> Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 1422.

the first to possess the Torah (Scriptures) and thus those parts which clearly denote the universal sinfulness of man most surely apply to the nation to which God first revealed this truth.”<sup>9</sup>

If the pagan world of the Greeks and the Romans is to be condemned for violating God’s Torah, then it stands to reason that the Jewish people who knowingly possess the Torah could be found even more condemned. The sacrifice of Yeshua for all people is the only answer to the sin problem that the whole world has: because God’s Law universally condemns everyone to eternal punishment (Romans 3:22b-26).

Paul’s Jewish people who sat inside of the sphere of the Torah, knowing its statutes, should definitely know that the whole world—including themselves—stands *hupodikos* before the Creator. As Dunn indicates, “his object is...to show that their own scriptures place his own people just as firmly ‘in the dock’ along with everyone else.”<sup>10</sup> Given the thought of many First Century Jews that ethnicity, likely including possession of the Torah (cf. Romans 2:17), guaranteed them a place in the world to come (m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1), Paul’s reorientation in Romans chs. 1-3 as the Torah chiefly defining and issuing appropriate penalties for sin could have been met with some hostility. Yet, Paul appeals to the words of the Torah and Tanach to substantiate this reality. C.E.B. Cranfield concludes,

3:20 “[E]verything which the OT says (including the things which are said about Gentiles) is indeed addressed in the first instance to the Jews and is intended for their instruction, so that, so far from imagining themselves excepted from its condemnations of human sinfulness, they ought to accept them as applying first and foremost to themselves.”<sup>11</sup>

There is a significant purpose to the Torah, as Paul explains in Romans 3:20: “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.” The intention of the Torah, “for through the *Torah* comes awareness of sin” (TLV), is something that Paul will be elaborating upon more fully in his discussions of Romans ch. 7 of the condemned sinner searching for help and resolution. Much discussion has taken place in recent years, however, regarding what Paul means concerning *ex ergōn nomou ou dikaiōthēsetai* (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται). What are “works of the Law”? How are readers to approach “justification”? Traditionally, Romans 3:20 has been viewed from the perspective of meaning that “no person will be acquitted in his sight on the score of obedience to law” (Moffat New Testament). Yet, this has been significantly shifting among various interpreters—especially within the Messianic movement—to regard instead Jewish *halachah* or Torah application, reckoning people as members of God’s covenant people, with “justification” *here* not meaning some sort of pronouncement of innocence for human sin.

There continue to be Romans interpreters<sup>12</sup> who will certainly view “works of law” from the customary view of it pertaining to general obedience or adherence to the Torah. Romans 3:20 would then communicate how human observance of the Torah cannot provide justification, viewed as meaning salvation. While this is Biblically a true concept, is this what Romans 3:20 is saying? A significant alternative to “works of law” or *ergōn nomou* (ἐργων νόμου) meaning obedience/observance of the Torah, which is present in many sectors of the Messianic movement, is based on Cranfield’s view that “works of law” is Paul’s language for legalism. As he summarizes,

“[T]he Greek language of Paul’s day possessed no word-group corresponding to our ‘legalism’, ‘legalist’ and ‘legalistic’. This means that he lacked a convenient terminology for expressing a vital distinction, and so was surely seriously hampered in the work of clarifying the Christian position with regard to the law. In view of this, we should always, we think, be ready to reckon with the possibility that Pauline statements, which at

<sup>9</sup> Tim Hegg, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: Chapters 1-8* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2005), 69.

<sup>10</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:152.

<sup>11</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *International Critical Commentary: Romans 1-8* (London: T&T Clark, 1975), 196.

<sup>12</sup> Moo, *Romans*, pp 211-217; Colin G. Kruse, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), pp 173-176.

first sight seem to disparage the law, were really not directed against the law itself but against that misunderstanding and misuse of it for which we now have a convenient terminology.”<sup>13</sup>

Messianic Jewish theologian David H. Stern, following Cranfield, in both his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* and *Complete Jewish Bible* publications, has accepted the view that *ergōn nomou* involves some kind of legalism. Stern remarks, “I submit that in every instance ‘*erga nomou*’ means not deeds done in virtue of following the *Torah* the way God intended, but deeds done in consequence of perverting the *Torah* into a set of rules which, it is presumed, can be obeyed mechanically, automatically, *legalistically*, without having faith, without having trust in God, without having love for God or man, and without being empowered by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>14</sup> A verse like Romans 3:20 appears in the CJB/CJSB as, “For in his sight no one alive will be considered righteous on the ground of legalistic observance of *Torah* commands, because what *Torah* really does is show people how sinful they are.” Stern has done an admirable job in opening up alternative views of *ergōn nomou* to people within the Messianic community.

In the past two decades or so (1990-2000s), however, various New Testament scholars have recognized that there is a likely connection between Paul’s usage of the Greek *ergōn nomou* (ἔργων νόμου), and the Hebrew *ma’asei haTorah* (מעשי התורה), appearing in the Dead Sea Scrolls document 4QMMT. The final stanza of 4QMMT says that “Now we have written to you some of the works of the Law [Heb. *miqsat ma’asei ha-Torah*, מקצת מעשי התורה], those which we determined would be beneficial for you and your people, because we have seen [that] you possess insight and knowledge of the Law” (4Q399).<sup>15</sup> When reading through this document, what one sees are some of the principles that defined the Qumran community. They thought that when you performed these “works of law”—as defined by them—that you would be blessed and considered righteous by God.

In reading the complete text of 4QMMT, one sees that “works of law” were not, actually, some kind of macro-Jewish identity markers such as the Sabbath, appointed times, dietary laws, or circumcision, as various interpreters like James D.G. Dunn or N.T. Wright have often extrapolated. These appear to have been assigned somewhat arbitrarily by New Testament scholars. On the contrary, what one sees is a strict, sectarian style of *halachah*, not only focused on purity—but a praxis that will inevitably keep more people out of God’s community than welcome people into it. The “works of law” may be considered as some kind of micro-Jewish identity markers, specific to the group or sect that held them to be important. The issue in 4QMMT, in a manner of speaking, **is the club rules of the Qumran community**, which they felt were the proper interpretation and application of the *Torah*. Dunn actually concurs, “‘deeds of the law’ denote the interpretations of the *Torah* which marked out the Qumran community as distinctive, the obligations which members took upon themselves as members and by which they maintained their membership.”<sup>16</sup> N.T. Wright offers a further and more detailed explanation:

“The (sectarian) code of MMT is designed to say, ‘Do *these* particular “works of *Torah*,” and they will mark you out in the present as the true covenant people.’ These ‘works’ in question in MMT were not sabbath, food laws and circumcision...Rather, the particular and very specific codes in MMT include various aspects of ritual performance (the calendar, regulations about water, marriage laws and so on), some of which were markers against Gentiles, but most of which were markers designed to demonstrate membership of the particular sect, the people that believed itself to be the inauguration of God’s new covenant people. What the

<sup>13</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *International Critical Commentary: Romans 9-16* (London: T&T Clark, 1979), 853.

<sup>14</sup> Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 537.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, trans., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 364.

<sup>16</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 204.

author is saying is: these ‘works of Torah’ will bring upon you God’s reckoning of righteousness’ here and now, and that verdict will be repeated ‘on the last day.’<sup>17</sup>

Traditionalists argue that “works of law” simply means obeying the Mosaic Torah by rote. NPP advocates, in light of the evidence that 4QMMT provides, would argue that *ma’asei haTorah* employed here is “simply a sectarian and more particularist expression” (Dunn)<sup>18</sup> than how Paul would have used *ergōn nomou* in a more general sense to concern broad Jewish identity markers. Among Messianic interpreters, and taking into consideration the material of 4QMMT, Hegg observes,

“[T]hat there were those, who though recognizing the need for God’s mercy, nonetheless felt that their association within the people-group Israel *as they defined Israel* was the all-important factor in having a righteous status before God. For the Qumran sect, their entrance requirements (their particular *halachah* which distinguished them from other sects) were the ‘works of the Torah’ necessary to become part of the ‘*yachad*’ (unity, society, or the true expression of Israel [1QSa 1.1, 28]) and thus to be reckoned as righteous....However, for Paul, people-group status was not the basis for right standing before God, but rather Messiah-status, being ‘in Messiah’ was the requirement.”<sup>19</sup>

A main, significant purpose of God’s Torah is to reveal the sinfulness of human people: “The law simply shows us how sinful we are” (Romans 3:20, NLT). It was not to be turned into various “works of law” which would keep outsiders to Israel excluded from God’s purpose, which in the context of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, mainly involved the non-Jewish Believers being errantly persuaded that they had to become circumcised as proselytes to be fully accepted and received as members of God’s own. And here in Romans 3:20, in his communication to the Romans, “works of the law” representing a Jewish exclusive claim to being God’s own, to only be overcome by non-Jews becoming proselytes—set over against the Torah purpose of revealing human sin—would be quite a contrast!

If the main purpose of the Torah is to define God’s standard of right and wrong, and what He expected of His people—then all the Jews of Paul’s generation should have known that their justification and identification as His people were to be found via their faith in Him (Romans 3:27a). But for many, this purpose of the Torah was instead supplanted by “works of law,” sectarian *halachot* that would have directly interfered with the mission of teaching the Torah’s standard of God’s holiness to the nations. The purpose of the Torah, according to the Apostle Paul, was not to turn it into man-made “works of law” where different Jewish sects found their identity; it was instead to understand “for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.” The Torah was to point sinful human beings to the Redeemer who had arrived in the person of Messiah Yeshua (Romans 10:4, Grk.).

3:21-22 Romans 3:21-22 has been often viewed from the vantage point of God’s righteousness being manifested separately, or apart from, people keeping the Torah. This, of course, is contingent on approaching *dikaiosunē* (δικαιοσύνη; Heb. equiv. *tzedakah*, תְּצַדִּיק) from the perspective of it pertaining to a declaration of innocence over redeemed sinners seeking salvation. God as Judge (i.e., Isaiah 3:13-14; Hosea 4:1-2; 12:2) is something that is certainly detectable in the statements made by Paul following (Romans 3:23-26); the question to be raised, though, is whether or not there are some additional components of righteousness/justification in view here, quite worthy of consideration. The NEB rendering of Romans 3:21, for example, has, “But now, quite independently of law, God’s justice [*dikaiosunē*] has been brought to light.”

<sup>17</sup> N.T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan & Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 146.

He continues in his remarks, stating, “The works in question will not *earn* their performers their membership within God’s true, eschatological covenant people; they will *demonstrate* that membership.” This is where I would disagree with Wright, as the main issue in Galatians, and to a lesser extent Romans, is indeed how you *get in* to God’s people: man-made “works of law” versus trust in Israel’s Messiah and what He has achieved for sinful human beings.

<sup>18</sup> Dunn, *The New Perspective on Paul*, 204.

<sup>19</sup> Hegg, *Romans 1-8*, pp 70-71.

Differently from *chōris nomou dikaiosunē Theou pēphanērōtai* (χωρὶς νόμου δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ πεφανέρωται) pertaining to Torah-keeping making room for salvation in Yeshua in Romans 3:21, is how “the righteousness of God” *here* should instead involve God’s covenant keeping promises being manifested in history. This is reflected in the Kingdom New Testament, which has, “But now, quite apart from the law (though the law and the prophets bore witness to it), God’s covenant justice has been displayed.” The righteousness of God involving His action on behalf of His people is surely something witnessed in the Tanach, as would be seen in a passage like Jeremiah 12:1-2:

“Righteous are You, O LORD, that I would plead *my* case with You; indeed I would discuss matters of justice with You: Why has the way of the wicked prospered? *Why* are all those who deal in treachery at ease? You have planted them, they have also taken root; they grow, they have even produced fruit. You are near to their lips but far from their mind.”

It needs to be seriously considered that the *dikaiousunē Theou* or “righteousness of God” Paul is speaking about in Romans 3:21-22, reflects the Messiah event—meaning Yeshua’s interjection onto the scene of human history. This is something independent of the Torah and Prophets, **but is also something undoubtedly witnessed and affirmed by the Torah and Prophets.**

Previously in Romans 3:19-20, Paul has chastised the misuse of the Torah by many of the Jews in his day, having spoken of how “whatever the Law says, it speaks to those within the Law” (LITV), meaning those who sit within its sphere and have it informing them on a frequent basis. To those in the sphere of God’s Torah, it is to instruct them “that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God” (Romans 3:19b). The Jewish people of Paul’s day were to know this purpose of the Torah—that the Lord will hold all people to account if they disobey it—and they should have been able to reflect this in their approach to the greater world, by wanting to see *all redeemed*.

Contrary to this, though, much of the First Century Jewish community had turned God’s Torah into human-originated “works of law,” or varied *halachot* designed to keep people out of membership in Israel—something quite contrary to His actual purpose in the Torah. To this Paul said, “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight” (Romans 3:20a). Many of the *halachot* that the ancient Jews established for themselves—actually took them away from telling the world they were accountable for sin (Romans 3:20b). *Such rulings are not at all sufficient to be justified.* Human originated “works of law” inevitably cause people to forget the obvious mandate upon Ancient Israel to be the blessing that is written about in the Torah, and according to Paul, actually merit a penalty (Galatians 3:8, 10; cf. Deuteronomy 27:26).

To many Jews of the First Century, their identity was less concerned about the requirement for Ancient Israel to be a blessing (cf. Genesis 12:2; Deuteronomy 4:6), and more in how the Torah made them separate and special—forgetting how it condemned all people equally, *especially them*. While the Torah was certainly inspired as the Word of God, it had in various sectors taken on such a prominent role of national identity (in no small part due to the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E.),<sup>20</sup> that sometimes thinking of spirituality independent from the Torah was difficult. This is precisely, though, what Paul wanted the Jews he addressed in Romans to recognize.

So what must readers evaluate? Paul says, “now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested” (Romans 3:21a). Many simply take “righteousness of God” to just be the salvation of God provided in His Son. While this is by no means excluded, *dikaiousunē Theou* can definitely involve the vindication of God in delivering His people via significant events, something seen throughout the Tanach, in varied uses of *tzedaqah* (צְדָקָה). TWOT summarizes,

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<sup>20</sup> Consult the author’s article “The Impact of the Maccabees on First Century Judaism,” appearing in the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

“God is characterized as right in delivering his people (Psa 85:9-11 [H 10-1]); Psa 97:2)...Because God is always righteous, his saving action is properly signified by his righteous right hand (Isa 41:10). His saving righteousness is expressed with judgment, fidelity, and love (Psa 36:6-7 [H 7-8]) and with power (Psa 71:19). Those who experience this deliverance celebrate it in song (Psa 40; 10 [H 11]; Psa 71:15-16).”<sup>21</sup>

Considering an appropriate meaning of “righteousness of God,” Moo accurately describes, “Paul is...prepared to explain how the righteousness of God—his eschatological justifying activity—empowers the gospel to mediate salvation to sinful human beings.”<sup>22</sup> The righteousness of God, here in Romans 3:21a, is not to be understood as God’s justice, **but instead His ability to intervene in a very desperate situation.** Up until this point in history, the major event of God’s righteousness that guided the Jewish ethos was the Exodus. Now (Grk. Νου̅νι, *nuni*), in something apart from the Torah, that same righteousness has revealed itself. **The major event—now—that Paul is obviously thinking of is the death and resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah for human sin.** But contrary to Paul saying that this event negates the importance of the Torah, Paul says it is surely “witnessed by the Law and the Prophets” (Romans 3:21b). Without the Tanach Scriptures, you have no “Messiah event.” Wright further comments,

“[I]t carries all the flavor of Paul’s inexhaustible excitement at what God had done in Jesus the Messiah. It was, after all, news: not a new religion, nor a new ethic, but an event through which the world, Paul himself, and the situation described in 3:19-20 had been changed forever.”<sup>23</sup>

What had been changed forever? The previous reality that “all the world may become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19b, KJV). *The penalties of sin have been remitted via the cross* (Colossians 2:14). The dilemma of reducing the Torah to man-made “works of law” that keep people out can be changed. Via the power of the New Covenant writing the Torah onto human hearts by the Spirit, God’s people can live out the Torah fulfilled by Yeshua’s example (Matthew 5:17-19). God’s righteousness has revealed itself in something independent from the Torah, but something by no means contrary to the Torah. Moo comments how,

“From God’s side, this includes his eschatological intervention to vindicate and deliver his people, in fulfillment of his promises. From the human side, it includes the status of acquittal acquired by the person so declared just.”<sup>24</sup>

Romans 3:22 states how the righteousness of God has been manifest to humankind: “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction” (RSV). While it is undeniably true that Believers possessing faith in Yeshua as the Son of God is mandatory for redemption, there has been some significant discussion surrounding the clause *pisteōs Iēsou Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) in academic examination, and whether the traditional rendering “through faith in Jesus Christ” is what is in view [here](#).

Literally speaking, the genitive clause (genitive is the Greek case indicating possession)<sup>25</sup> *diā pisteōs Iēsou Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) can be rendered as “through faith of Jesus Christ” (YLT). Some modern study Bibles are having to place footnotes for verses like Romans 3:22, indicating the alternative rendering, “by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ”<sup>26</sup> or “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” (TLV).<sup>27</sup> Daniel B. Wallace summarizes what has emerged in recent decades, in his textbook *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*:

<sup>21</sup> Harold G. Stigers, “קִדְּ (root),” in TWOT, 2:754.

<sup>22</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 219.

<sup>23</sup> N.T. Wright, “The Letter to the Romans,” in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:469.

<sup>24</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 222.

<sup>25</sup> Please note that this article does make references to various points of Greek grammar. For an easily accessible guide, consult David Alan Black, *Learn to Read New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> *God’s Game Plan: The Athlete’s Bible 2007*, HCSB (Nashville: Serendipity House Publishers, 2007), 1136.

<sup>27</sup> *Tree of Life Messianic Family Bible—New Covenant* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2011), 250.

“Older commentaries...see Χριστοῦ [*Christou*] as an objective gen[itive], thus, ‘faith *in* Christ.’ However, more and more scholars are embracing these texts as involving a subjective gen[itive] (thus, either ‘Christ’s faith’ or ‘Christ’s faithfulness’).”<sup>28</sup>

N.T. Wright’s Kingdom New Testament reflects a view in favor of the subjective genitive for *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou*, having “through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah,” and the CJB/CJSB also notably renders Romans 3:21 with “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah,” reflecting a view in favor of it as well. What is this faithfulness intended to represent? **It is intended to represent Yeshua’s obedience to the Father unto death for sinful humanity.** Even though he favors the traditional objective genitive view for Romand 3:21, Harrison interjects how “the possibility that our Lord’s own faith, or more precisely, his faithfulness in fulfilling his mission, is the thought [which might be] intended.”<sup>29</sup> Stern also states, “God’s moral integrity is demonstrated directly by Yeshua’s atoning death; it does not depend on the constitution of the Jewish nation, the *Torah*.”<sup>30</sup> The vindication of God upon a sinful world, accountable before Him, is shown in the life and ministry of Yeshua—One who gave Himself up for our sins. The reason there is no difference between Jews and any others **is because Yeshua’s faithfulness affects all people.**

There are Romans commentators who are not convinced that “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” is the correct view here. Dunn’s view is, “Christ’s faithfulness is not something which Paul draws attention to elsewhere in the extended exposition of Romans.”<sup>31</sup> But, this is *exactly* what Paul does later in Romans 5:6-11, explaining how through the death of Yeshua, redeemed Believers have “been justified by His blood...saved from the wrath of God through Him” (Romans 5:9). Moo actually does acknowledge that looking at *pisteōs Iēsou Christou* as a subjective genitive clause in Romans 3:22, is something that has to be exegetically considered, even though he still favors the traditional view of it being an objective genitive:

“Advocates of this interpretation argue that it is the more likely linguistically and that it makes better sense in the context....Despite...arguments, the traditional interpretation of the phrase is preferable...While the Greek word *pistis* [πίστις] can mean ‘faithfulness’ (see 3:3), and Paul can trace our justification to the obedience of Christ (5:19), little in this section of Romans would lead us to expect a mention of Christ’s ‘active obedience’ as basic to our justification.”<sup>32</sup>

Moo only looks at the immediate verse for evidence that “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” is the correct view of the genitive clause, and not the larger message of Romans. This conclusion may be supported by a following use of the verb *pisteuō* (πιστεύω), in the phrase “for all those who believe” (Romans 3:22b), *eis pantas tous pisteuontas* (εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας). Ben Witherington III, however, does not agree, arguing that “both objective and subjective means are referred to: the righteousness of God is revealed through the faithfulness of Christ (i.e., through the Christ-event), and it is revealed to all those who believe...This reading gives proper force to the two prepositions ‘through’ and ‘unto’...”<sup>33</sup> The “faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” demonstrated for us *is the very reason why people believe in the gospel.*

People choose to believe in the righteousness of God made manifest by Yeshua’s faithfulness. Paul says further on in Romans 3:26 that God declares “him righteous who *is* of the faith of Jesus” (YLT), *ek pisteōs Iēsou* (ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ). The Divine action of “the faithfulness of Yeshua” is to be clearly contrasted with the human action of *ex ergōn nomou* (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) or by “works of law,” where justification cannot be found (Romans 3:20). Wright further comments,

<sup>28</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 115.

<sup>29</sup> Harrison, in *EXP*, 10:41.

<sup>30</sup> Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 347.

<sup>31</sup> Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:166.

<sup>32</sup> Moo, *Romans*, pp 224, 225.

<sup>33</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 101.

“The train of thought is clearer [for this matter] if we read [v. 22] as ‘through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah, for the benefit of all who believe.’ This then corresponds closely to...[how in 1:17]: from God’s faithfulness to answering human faith.”<sup>34</sup>

Wright interprets Romans 1:17, where Paul refers to how “*the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith,*” *ek pisteōs eis pistin* (ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν), as relating “from God’s faithfulness to human faithfulness.” He concludes, “When God’s action in fulfillment of the covenant is unveiled, it is because God is faithful to what has been promised; when it is received, it is received by that human faith that answers to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>35</sup> This is by no means denouncing the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith—meaning that people are redeemed by the trust they place in Yeshua—but “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” in Romans 3:22 enables us to look more specifically at the issues Paul addressed, to an audience that was divided over various ethnic issues between its Jewish and non-Jewish constituents.

It is probably better for us to consider Romans 1:17 from the perspective of the initial saving moment of faith—something understood by people recognizing Yeshua’s faithfulness in dying for sinful humanity—leading to greater faith as one grows and matures in his or her relationship with God, which surely also involves obedience to Him.

Similar to how “the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” was to be the common denominator to unite the Believers in Antioch (Galatians 2:16), **so was it to be the common denominator among the diverse groups of Roman Believers as well.**<sup>36</sup> Because of various sectarian “works of law” (Romans 3:19-20) that were designed to keep people out, and fierce Jewish nationalism often associated with the Torah, God’s righteousness has had to act in a significant event separate from the Torah (Romans 3:21). Paul considers this Messiah event to be so significant, seen in Yeshua’s faithfulness by dying for humanity, that he will proceed to explain its universal effects for all men and women (Romans 3:23-25).

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<sup>34</sup> Wright, in *NIB*, 10:470.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:425.

<sup>36</sup> A careful reading of Romans 16 shows how the people Paul greets are likely various leaders of sub-congregations/assemblies in Rome, which were probably not (often) getting along (from time to time).