

(3) God's gift of a right relationship to Him and to His law

(4) God's production of an upright character and conduct in human beings

In chapter 3, verse 21 it appears that the third meaning is intended: God's gift of a right relationship to Him and to His law. This is confirmed by verse 22, where Paul says that "this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ." The first and second meanings of "the righteousness of God" cannot be meant, since neither God's characteristic of righteousness nor His law comes through our faith. God is righteous whether or not we believe Him to be so, and God's law is binding whether or not we believe it. They are not dependent on our faith.

When Paul says that this righteousness of God through faith is apart from law, we should understand that he means apart from our fulfillment of the law of God. It does not mean that God simply sets aside His law in order to bring us into a right relationship with Himself and with His law. This may be seen in chapter 3, verse 31, where Paul writes: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law."

Also here in verse 21 Paul says that the Old Testament witnesses to this righteousness apart from our fulfillment of the law. The phrase "the Law and the Prophets" should be understood as a reference to the whole Old Testament.

Here we should pause and state a very important principle: the Old Testament does not teach that salvation is by human works, or by a mixture of faith and works. Salvation has always been by grace through faith, and has always rested on the atoning work of Christ, whether viewed in prospect or in retrospect. Salvation from the time of Adam to the time of Christ was always "apart from [our fulfillment of] the law. In fact, in Romans chapter 4 Paul provides us with two instances of salvation by grace through faith alone, as seen in the lives of Abraham and David.

Chapter 3, verse 22 says that this gift of right relationship to God and His law comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. This righteousness comes through faith (the method) to faith (the recipients), without distinction between Jew and Gentile.

In verse 23 Paul states that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Perhaps you have never noticed that "all have sinned" is in the past tense, and that "all fall short" is in the present tense. Is this significant?

In addition, although we understand "all have sinned" to mean that all