

In the Sight of the Lord

Romans 3:19-28

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Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

- I. Introduction: If you've heard very many of my past sermons, you may recall how I often rejoice in quoting Colossians 1:22 where we're told how through the death of Christ for all those He saves, they are presented unto God the Father as ***"...holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight:"*** I believe that through all eternity I'll never stop marveling and rejoicing over the good news of the Gospel of God's sovereign grace that sets forth how sinners like you and me are truly viewed as ***"...holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight:"*** – in the sight of the Lord. That's the title of this morning's message. As I was thinking of this verse, many other scriptures came to mind in which we see that same phrase (or one similar to it). So out of curiosity I did a Bible search of the phrase, "in the sight of the Lord" and other variations of it such as "in His sight" (as we just read in Colossians 1:22), "in the sight of God," "in thy sight," and God speaking saying "in my sight." And I counted a total of 169 different places where that phrase is found in the Bible.

The sheer number of times in which God relates to us how He sees things should cause us to see that God's sight of things – His perspective – is vitally important for us to understand. In fact, when it comes to the final judgment that all will face declaring where we shall spend eternity (heaven or hell), His sight / His perspective is the only one that ultimately matters because He is the ***"...judge of all the earth"*** as He is called in Genesis 18, the ***"judge of all"*** as He is referred to in Hebrews 12. So that makes it incumbent upon each of us to examine how we stand before Him now – in His sight. So a good question to ask ourselves is, "Is my sight in alignment with God's sight?" Do you see things (as it pertains to your eternal salvation) / does your perspective on that coincide with the way God sees things / His perspective? It sure better because He's the judge; not you or me. Well, graciously, God speaks to us through His Word, telling us how things are in His sight. Certainly many of the passages where this phrase is found do not pertain to His sight regarding our standing before Him as either justified or condemned; but, today we will look at 4 New Testament passages containing this phrase that do address that eternally vital subject. If you'd like to turn to the 1st one it will be Luke 16.

From these passages we will consider first 1) God's depiction of our sight – of how we naturally see things if and when we first consider how we might be saved – our natural thoughts, meaning how we think in the spiritually dead state with which we begin our lives, not having yet received the faculties of spiritual life so as to see things God's way.

2) Secondly we will look at God's commentary on that, on our natural sight or perspective – His perspective of our perspective. 3) Thirdly, we will look at how we must be viewed in His sight to be found acceptable – how all who are saved are viewed in His sight. 4) And then lastly we'll examine how saved sinners are able to obey God acceptably so as to be found well pleasing in His sight.

- II. Luke 16:15: So 1st let's look at God's depiction of our perspective from Luke chapter 16. Here Christ was speaking to His disciples and we're told there were some Pharisees there listening as well. In verse 13 Christ declared that ***"No servant can serve two masters:... <adding> Ye cannot serve God and mammon."*** "Mammon" here is a word that is the personification of greed, of gain (or wealth)-seeking. And in verse 14 we're told that these Pharisees were covetous (i.e. – they were gain-seekers at the expense of seeking to know the true and living God as He is) and so in response they derided (or ridiculed) our Lord. So in verse 15, He then said to them, ***"...Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."***
- A. Now He is telling them that they presume to justify themselves – but that their justification was only before men, not before God who knows their hearts. By nature, apart from being given spiritual sight to see things God's way, none of us recognize that this describes all of us as well because none of us can know our own hearts. In Jeremiah 17:9 God declares that ***"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"*** <And then verse 10 begins, ***"I the LORD search the heart,..."*** Like these Pharisees, in our natural, spiritually dead states we are all deceived about ourselves. But the all-knowing God knows our hearts and so He declares in His Word the reality of things in His sight.
- B. Our natural tendency is to imagine we can justify ourselves. If we presume to meet conditions or requirements (as perhaps prescribed by the religion we practice) that causes us to consider ourselves (in our sight) to be saved thereby, we in essence are presuming to have justified ourselves. And to others of like mind who adhere to the same condition(s) that we presume to have met to be saved, we will be justified from their perspective – justified before men, but not before God. Unless and until we receive the spiritual eyes of God-given faith, we will seek to justify ourselves on the basis of that which is naturally highly esteemed by others. But God says those things we value and esteem are in fact an abomination in His sight, in the sight of the Judge of all. That means it's revolting, disgusting, detestable in His sight. We may go to church, we make a profession, we get baptized, live a moral life, etc. But those things which are held in high esteem by others, when presumed to be the difference-maker in our salvation – if we presume to be justified – to be found acceptable before God on the basis of any such things that we do, then that is when they are an abomination in God's sight.

C. It's just natural for us as fallen, spiritually dead sinners to attempt to justify ourselves – to get ourselves saved so as to be accepted into God's eternal presence in heaven. We attempt to justify ourselves whenever we imagine that we do something to gain that favorable standing before God. That is to believe that salvation is by works. And as we often quote from Ephesians 2:8-9, ***“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast.”***

D. In our day, many will claim (as some of us once did) that Jesus Christ is their Savior, presuming they too are saved by what they call “grace,” all the while believing Jesus Christ lived and died for everyone, even those who perish. So their version of grace is that God sent Christ (but not to actually save anyone) but rather merely to make it possible if they will do their part – accept Him, invite Him into their heart or respond in some form or fashion. But that is to attempt to mix grace and works and actually describes not the God-given gift of faith but a faith that would be of works (or a work done by the sinner). And God declares that can't be – that grace and works can't mix. In Romans 11, those whom God has chosen in Christ to save from all eternity are referred to in verse 5 as the ***“election of grace,”*** followed by this in verse 6: ***“And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.”*** In other words they are opposites. If there's any element of works involved, it's not grace, no matter how often you may call it “grace.” They can't be mixed.

I'm currently reading a book that is showing how irrational it is to imagine that there is no God. And one aspect of the argument made evolves from the use of what is referred to as the law of non-contradiction. As an example, the famous quote uttered by Shakespeare's Hamlet is cited, “To be or not to be, that is the question.” And it was pointed out how the question wasn't, “To be and not to be.” Something might exist or it might not exist, but it can't be both – he couldn't exist (or be) and at the same time not exist (not be) – that would be an absurd contradiction. Well, the all-knowing Judge of all is telling us the same thing as it pertains to grace and works – they are mutually exclusive opposites which cannot coexist. You either believe one or the other. So when folks are confronted with the contradiction of calling Christ their “Savior” while at the same time imagining His work alone really doesn't save anyone; and then when they imagine they settle that contradiction as I once did by replying, “Oh, it's of grace and He is the Savior, but you must believe” or “You must do your part” in order to be saved – Do you see how that is just as absurd – an irrational contradiction according to God's who declares that grace and works do not coexist?

Salvation by grace (God's way of salvation) is a way in which all the conditions or requirements for a person to be saved are fully met by the Lord Jesus Christ – i.e., based upon nothing meritorious proceeding from the one being saved. That's the definition of salvation by grace. Words mean something.

Salvation by works on the other hand is the mistaken presumption that salvation is conditioned at least in some way or to some degree on the person being saved – that would be a work that proceeds from themselves. Many call that ‘grace’ but that doesn’t make it so – that defines a salvation that would be by works. So to consider Christ as your “Savior” while believing He died for everyone, having done no more for those who are saved than for those who are lost, is absurd, particularly if you also claim to believe the Bible. Something other than (or in addition to Christ’s Person and work has to be presumed to make the real difference – and all we’re left with is to presume it to be some work proceeding from the one being saved. And that highly esteemed among men, self-justifying work, is an abomination (detestable) in the sight of God.

- E. But that’s the natural predisposition of our desperately wicked hearts. Apart from being taught by God through His preached Gospel of grace, that’s where we place our hope – on something done by or through us. And so we’re justified among men because the standard by which we presume to be judged is found in our contrast with other men. We presume to do something that others will not do that gets us into heaven. And so instead of measuring ourselves by that which God says we will be judged in Acts 17 – the perfect righteousness of the risen Savior, we measure our suitability for heaven by comparing ourselves with others. That’s what we do when we presume to meet the prescribed condition that they won’t. And in that way we are better so there is room for us to boast.

In 2 Corinthians 10, as Paul was defending himself against the false apostles who were attacking His authority as a gospel minister and apostle, he contrasted the true with the false as he made this statement concerning himself and other true followers of Christ in verse 12 saying, ***“For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”*** That’s precisely what men do when they presume to have a hand in saving or justifying themselves.

But now what about God’s commentary on this – His perspective on our natural perspective? Be turning now to Romans 3.

- III. Romans 3:20: In Romans 3 we see what God has to say about those who compare themselves with themselves because that describes what we all do by necessity when we initially imagine that salvation is somehow or to some degree conditioned on the sinner.

- A. In Romans 3:10, He begins to describe what we all are like by nature. He says in verse 10 that **“...There is none righteous, no, not one;”** I won’t read all of this passage but these descriptions of us all by nature continue through verse 18 with statements such as, **“...there is none that doeth good, no, not one”** (vs12b). And He tells us that **“...the way of peace** <that’s the way of salvation, of reconciliation or peace being made between God and those He saves> **- the way of peace have they not known”** (vs. 17). Continuing in verse 18 He sums up this descriptive passage saying, **“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”** I.e. - in their sight. By nature we have no regard for the honor of God’s character. That’s not our focus. We’re more concerned with figuring out if we’ve done our part. I know I once reasoned like this: “Okay, Jesus died and that made it all possible, but let’s move on now to where the rubber meets the road – to the real difference maker – what do I need to do to be saved.” The question so many major on is, “Have you accepted Jesus as your personal Savior?” Well, if we have regard for the honor of God’s character in salvation (this fear of God), regard for how things are in His sight, the question we would major on isn’t “Have I accepted Jesus?” It would be, “How can a holy God accept me, a sinner, who can do no good that is acceptable to God if judged on its own merit. The best I can do is tainted with sin. So in God’s sight, that which is naturally presumed to be so in our sight, does not cut it!
- B. Verses 19-20: Now just as the Pharisees and many of the Jews thought they could be saved by their keeping the law of Moses, likewise in each generation, all naturally will presume that we can meet a condition or requirement (akin to keeping a law) in order to be saved. With that in mind, let’s pick up reading in Romans 3:19. **“Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.** <Now in verse 20 we’re about to see something important – how God sees things as we read...> ²⁰**Therefore by the deeds of the law** <by your meeting a condition or requirement> **there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”** So our natural predisposition to justify ourselves won’t get the job done. The Judge of all declares here that by your keeping whatever law or requirement you presume will get you saved (your acceptance of Jesus, your baptism, your sincere religious resolve, your whatever) – by that, not one soul shall be justified in His sight!
- C. Verses 21-28: How then are sinners justified in His sight? Verse 21” **But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;** ²²**Even the righteousness of God which is by faith** <or the faithfulness> **of Jesus Christ unto all** <preached unto all> **and upon all** <that’s put upon, imputed or credited to the account of all...> **them that believe: for there is no difference:** <Justifying ourselves by meeting a condition which others don’t whereby we measure ourselves by other sinners, won’t get the job done – because in God’s sight there is no difference...>

²³**For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;** <Your righteousness before God has to equal that of the perfection rendered by the Son of glory in His obedience unto death. And sinners can't produce that. The only way we can possess the righteousness we need is by having His very righteousness imputed to us (credited to us) as undeserving, eternally blessed objects of God's sovereign mercy and grace in Christ. So...? ²⁴**Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:** ²⁵**Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation** <that's the sin-bearing, justice satisfying sacrifice of Himself whereby God's wrath (that would otherwise be due unto their sins) is appeased> **through faith in his blood,** <in His doing and dying> **to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;** ²⁶**To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.** ²⁷**Where is boasting then?** <We no longer measure ourselves as better than those who are lost – for this is what it is to be saved by grace. So boasting...> **It is excluded. By what law?** <what rule or principle?> **of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.** In other words room for boasting remains as long as the law or rule as to how we are saved is presumed to be of works. But boasting is excluded by the law of faith – by that which faith looks to – salvation by grace through faith that is not of itself, but the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast.> ²⁸**Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith** <by that law of faith or what genuine, God-given faith looks to> **without the deeds of the law.**

So we've seen that in our sight, from our natural perspective on how sinners are saved it is by deeds of the law – based upon some work of our hand. And in the sight of God that is an abomination. And we've also seen that God's perspective of our natural perspective is that we have no regard for the honor of God's character – no fear of God before our eyes. And now we've seen in Romans 3, God's clear declaration of 1) how in the sight of the Judge of all the earth, that no flesh shall be justified by the deeds of the law but rather how 2) sinners are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, wherein we see that His righteousness (the merit of Christ's obedience unto death) makes all the difference. It[s not based upon a presumed righteousness of our own making.

- IV. Colossians 1:22: Now I introduced this sermon from Colossians 1 and I'd like to briefly revisit that. There we see how those who are justified by the blood of Christ are viewed in God's sight – all based upon having the merit of what Christ (their Substitute and Surety) accomplished for them, His righteousness, having been imputed or reckoned to their account. In Colossians 1:19 we're told, **"For it pleased the Father that in him** <in Christ> **should all fulness dwell;** <Everything we need!> ²⁰**And, having made peace through the blood of his cross,** <again, not by anything we did, but the blood of his cross> **by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.**

<Now we've reviewed the natural sight or perspective of all of fallen humanity which the Bible teaches is owing to the blindness of the spiritually dead state in which we begin this life's journey. And in keeping with that, look how those who are saved are described as we continue in verse 21...> ²¹***And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled*** ²²***In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight***: Justified – not guilty but righteous! That's what it takes to be accepted before a holy God. This is how God describes all whom He saves – all who will in time be given that blood-bought gift of faith that excludes all boasting in themselves. “...***holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight***” – That's cause for rejoicing! Turn to Hebrews chapter 13.

V. Hebrews 13:21: Now those who come to see the necessity of (and are drawn to value) their righteous standing in Christ are also given a desire to serve and please God, not in order to be saved or to find favor with God, but from a motive of grace and gratitude for Christ having done for us what we could never do for ourselves – grateful for His mercy in not giving us what we do deserve and for His grace in giving us that which we don't deserve. Believers desire to serve Him and please Him out of the love for God they possess because He first loved them. (1 John 4:19) But as I noted earlier, there's nothing even a justified, born-again sinner can do that would be acceptable before a holy God if judged on its own merit. Remaining sin will taint all we do. And yet the Bible says that true believers do please God. So how is this so in God's sight?

1. Well, in the last of our 4 passages, Paul closes out his letter to the Hebrew believers by praying for them as we read in Hebrews 13:20: ***“Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹Make you perfect <complete> in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*”** So be it! A true believer's efforts to obey God and live in accordance with His revealed will is acceptable, even well-pleasing in God's sight, because we are His workmanship. It is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit that influences us, that keeps us ever looking to Christ for our acceptance, not to any works of our hand. Notice it is well-pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ! Our sin-tainted efforts to obey God and serve Him are well-pleasing because they have been sanctified and washed by the blood of Christ, who ever makes intercession for us based upon the blood of the everlasting covenant shed for us by which we are presented, holy, unblameable and unproveable in His sight!

As I studied this and contemplated how perfect or complete we are made in Christ, I was reminded of one of the stanzas of a chorus we sometimes sing. We sing, “He is all my righteousness. I stand in Him complete – and worship Him!” I like that song.

- VI. Closing: Notice how Paul closed out his prayer at the end of verse 21 speaking of Christ through whom our works are well-pleasing in His sight, “...**to whom be glory for ever and ever...**” The Bible teaches that God’s glory is the reason for all that He does, including why He saves any of us. Our natural sight or perspective will have us getting the glory. If we make the difference – we get the glory. But God will not have that. He won’t share His glory. Jesus Christ alone makes the difference. Thereby, God is glorified as He reveals Himself to us as both a holy, strictly just Judge as well as a loving, merciful, and gracious Father that He might be worshipped as He is – as both a just God and a Savior.

Believers are reminded of what takes place in their regeneration and conversion in 2 Corinthians 4:6-7, “**For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness,** <The One who spoke this world into existence – who said, “Let there be light” and there was light; likewise...> **hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face** <that’s in the Person and work> **of Jesus Christ.** ⁷**But we have this treasure** <this revelation by God-given faith> **in earthen vessels,** <We’re still just sinners but sinners saved by grace> **that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”**

Does your sight / your perspective as it pertains to the Gospel – to how God save sinners – does it align with God’s sight / His perspective – what He declares to be His way of salvation by grace in Christ alone? Well, it best – because His sight / His perspective is the only one that ultimately will matter. By God’s grace, all those for whom Christ died are in time given that blood-bought gift of faith whereby they see things differently.

In Matthew 13:13, when the disciples asked Christ why He spoke in parables, He said, “...**because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.**” But down in verse 16 He added, “**But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.**” I pray God’s grace will so shine upon someone-you who hears this Gospel message of how God saves sinners, so as to bless you with spiritual eyes to see God’s way of salvation – how sinners are saved “In the Sight of the Lord.”

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God’s grace found in the only infallible source, God’s word itself – the Bible.