

## **Eighth New Testament Summary Romans Part 1**

Romans is probably the most systematic book in the Bible, though the omission of the Lord's Supper is glaring. In truth, however, the book is very comprehensive in covering the foundations of the Christian faith. I would like for you to thoroughly grasp a major theme in Romans (emphasized for example in Romans 4) that is translated in English as "justified" or "made righteous": (dikaioō) is the original Greek word (a transliteration so that you can pronounce it). Understand that within Christianity, there are two major ways of understanding this concept: 1) in a medical context; or 2) in a legal context. I would like for you to be aware that the medical concept is highly problematic. The medical concept suggests that God makes you righteous by virtue of "infusion" (that is, filling you with grace). Grace in this concept is like a substance. Some people therefore may have more or less grace than other people. By virtue of receiving enough grace, you are enabled or empowered to perform the works in your life that make you righteous. Thus, God justifying you is giving you the ability to live a Christian life, so that the end product of this life is what one would describe as "righteous." There are serious problems with this view, not the least of which resembles the problem of legalism in which people believe that they can be justified or saved by keeping the Law of God; The better view (and biblical view) is "made righteous" in a forensic or legal sense. Here, the courtroom scene that our text describes is right on. In this context, righteousness is not focused on the internal, but the external. God - outside of you (apart from anything you do) -- chooses on account of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord to DECLARE that you are righteous. You and I are still sinners by nature, but God chooses to see us as covered in His Son, Jesus Christ. In this condition (covered with Christ; this is what "atonement" means = covering or to be made one with), God declares/pronounces us as righteous in His sight. This is why the Christian confesses that Jesus is his/her righteousness. Again, this is externally established as opposed to the infused/internal view.

Going on in this overview of Romans: we have what is probably the most important section in the New Testament on what is referred to as "Natural Theology" or "the natural knowledge of God." This is presented in Romans 1 and Romans 2. Scripture asserts that *everyone* is given a basic knowledge of God's existence. This is as the Reformed theologian Alvin C. Plantinga would argue, "properly basic knowledge." This is obviously a bold assertion, and it should lead us to be -- at the very least -- more skeptical of the counter-claim that there are no indications of God in the universe. The Bible is saying that that is just not true. Romans 1 teaches that people know that God exists via the creation itself. When a person realizes the complexity and design of the universe, then there is a "natural" belief that there is a designer behind the design; or a cause behind the effect. This

basic idea has been much pursued by natural theology and the philosophy of religion in the form of "the cosmological argument" and "the teleological argument" for the existence of God. These do not "prove" the existence of God, but they are major "pointers" towards His existence. The cosmological argument presents the following syllogism: Premise 1: Everything that begins to exist has a cause; Premise 2: The universe began to exist; Conclusion: Therefore the universe has a cause. We then go into substantiating especially premise 2 through both science and philosophy. For example, modern science seems to substantiate the idea of an expanding universe and a universe that is NOT infinite, but one that appears to have begun at a given point and time. This beginning point infers a cause, something outside of itself (outside of the fabric of time and space). Interestingly, at this point Genesis 1:1 is not only a religious declaration, but it sounds surprisingly scientific as well. The teleological argument perpetuates the concept of design and the so-called "anthropic principle"...the fine-tuning of the universe that enables human life to exist. The various components for life to exist like the weak nuclear force, the strong nuclear force, the placement of the earth in the Milky Way galaxy, the relationship between the earth and the moon, the earth's location from the sun, the existence of water, etc. etc. (and we are just skimming the service) point to a design that seems to completely eliminate the possibility of a random existence. Again, a designer seems imprinted on our very existence. Anyway, guess what Romans 1 says? It says, "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." (vs. 20) Romans 2 mentions another type of "natural knowledge," namely CONSCIENCE. Creation (Romans 1) is the EXTERNAL pointer to God's existence; but conscience is the INTERNAL pointer. That is, people in general (even if they have never walked into a church or read the bible) have a sense of right and wrong. The great C.S. Lewis in his enlightening work "Mere Christianity" expounds on this "moral argument for the existence of God" (aka "the axiological argument"). Romans 2 actually says this: "[The Gentiles] show that the work of the law is written on their hearts...". Now, this natural knowledge of God is insufficient for salvation, because it is incapable of revealing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to us. It is, however, God's way of providing a "first step" if you will. It seems that we have a natural door or platform for sharing the faith with ANYONE, because the existence of God through the observation of the cosmos and the observation of one's own moral awareness seems complementary to the Gospel that rests on the truth that God has created all things and has provided salvation for this creation that He loves. In Christ, Dr. Espinosa