

Contradiction or Out of Context?

KJV Rom 2:13 For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

KJV Rom 3:20 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.

These two verses, when read side by side, seem to contradict. However, when each is put into context, they complement Paul's statement in Rom 3:30... "Seeing *it is* one God, which shall justify the circumcision 'by faith' and uncircumcision 'through faith'."

Rom 2:13 in Context:

One of the themes, presented by Paul in Romans, is the mystery of blindness in part to Israel, leading to the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's redemption plans (Rom 11:11-25). Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, begins to lay his case in Romans 1 declaring the Gospel of God (Rom 1:1-6). Paul then ends up asserting his gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, for the obedience to the faith among all nations, now being debtor to both Jew and Gentile (Rom 1:13-16; 16:25-26). From his introduction in Romans 1, Paul then devotes the remaining of the chapter to the progressive demise of the ungodliness of man, who held the truth of God in unrighteousness, with final verdict of God giving man up to vile affections and over to a reprobate mind (Rom 1:18-32); this is representative of Gentiles.

In chapter two, Paul addresses the hypocritical man, who would judge another, while committing same sins (Jew; Rom 2:1, 17-24). As this chapter progresses, Paul deals with the fairness of God, being no respecter of persons, who would judge both Jew and Gentile based on every soul of man that doeth evil or worketh good (Rom 2:6-11). Here, it is essential to understand that the source of judgment, for the Gentile, was their conscience witnessed by the accusing or excusing of one another (Rom 2:14-15, 26-27), which action alone was a law unto themselves. The basis of judgment for each Jew under law was the law and it is in this context that Paul declares... "For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified." Rom 2:13

Rom 3:20 in Context:

Paul, in leading up to his statement in Rom 3:20, that by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, speaks to the advantage the Jews had over the Gentiles in having been committed the oracles of God (Rom 3:1-2). Then, to prove that all (both Jews and Gentiles) have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23), he uses numerous O.T. quotations to build a case against each and all ((Rom 3:10-18 (Ps 14:2-3; 52:2-4; Eccl 7:20; Ps 5:9-10; 10:7; 36:1-2; 140:3; Isa 59:7-8)).

Another of Paul's themes in Romans and one that compliments the prior theme of the inclusion of Gentiles in God's redemptive plans, is the means of the righteousness of God that has now replaced the means of His righteousness under law; Rom 10:4 "For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness..." Paul uses two contrasting phrases, in two separate verses, that clearly demonstrate that something now has replaced something that once existed; the righteousness of God in Christ has now, at this time, replaced God's law for righteousness:

Rom 3:21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

Rom 3:26 To declare, *I say, at this time his righteousness*: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

The truths presented in Rom 3:22-26, such as the ‘faith of Christ, ‘being justified freely by grace through the redemptive work of Christ’, ‘propitiation through faith in Christ’s blood’, ‘believing for justification’, etc., though witnessed by the law and prophets, is current truth... not prior O.T. doctrine.

The ‘Therefore’, in Rom 3:20, introduces a verdict to facts presented by Paul in verses 9-19, concluding that Gentiles, as well as Jews, to be under sin. Again, ‘But now’ in Rom 3:21, as well as ‘at this time’ in Rom 3:26, convey new and present truth. The law provided both a means of righteousness as well as knowledge of sin. However, Israel failed under law in God’s dealing with them ‘by faith’ (Rom 3:30), the law not having been sought by and mixed with faith. Rom 9:31-32 and Heb 4:1-2 clearly spells out this failure of Israel’s under law:

Rom 9:31-32 ³¹But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.

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

Heb 4:1-2 ²Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left *us* of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

²For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Israel’s sins and rebellion became so putrefying that even their sacrifices became an abomination to God and their appointed feasts He hated. God’s message to Judah was to cease to do evil and learn to do well (Isa 1:1-20), which are ingredients of ‘by faith’.

After Paul’s judgment that every mouth be stopped and all the world (Gentiles, as well as Jews) become guilty before God (v19), the ‘Therefore’ gives way to ‘But now’:

Rom 3:20-21 ²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

²¹But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

In conclusion, there is no contradiction between Rom 2:13 and Rom 3:20. Doers of the law were justified when sought by faith. Proved was the failure of both Jew and Gentile, the one under law, the other without law, evidencing that a new means of righteousness needed to be provided...the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ unto all (Jew & Gentile) that believe. This deduction is clearly supported in Gal 3:22-28:

Gal 3:22-28 ²²But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

²³But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

²⁴Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

²⁵But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

²⁶For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

²⁷For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.