

## The Perfect Picture Of God.

Text: Rom 3:19-26

Suggested Hymns:

37, 264, 747, 851, 458

1) A Perfect "Picture" Of God

2) However, There Is Interference

3) God "Adjusts" The Picture For Our Benefit

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Romans 3:19–26, *<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

*<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, <sup>26</sup> to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The last Sunday after the Epiphany, Transfiguration Sunday, very obviously deals with the theme of this season, the manifestation of God in Christ Jesus. The Gospel<sup>1</sup> reminds us of the reality of the glory of Christ as it was manifested in history on the holy Mount of Transfiguration. The Epistle<sup>2</sup> assures us that this revelation of God is made secure by the inspired Word.

And our text directs us to consider the manifestation of God in these sin-filled lives of ours.

Let us examine our text through the imagery and characteristics of a Television and its signal. We will consider three characteristics, A perfect picture, interference, and God adjusting the picture. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### 1. A Perfect “Picture” Of God

A perfect “picture” of God is extremely revealing. Firstly, we would see the righteousness of God.

If we were able to get a perfect picture, this is what we would see: We would note the righteousness of God. This would not be an abstraction, but would be seen in terms of the reality of Jesus Christ. What cannot be seen of the nature of God is revealed in the incarnate Jesus. He embodies the revelation of God.

We would see God as a God of love, for Jesus loved. We would see Him as a God of life, for Jesus lived. We would see Him as a God of healing, for Jesus healed. We would see Him as a God of compassion, for Jesus helped the sinner, the outcast, the unclean, and the brokenhearted.

God’s righteousness would not be a static thing at all; it would be the God of love in action. Peter writes in the Epistle that this picture of Christ given to us in the Word outranks, even the view of Jesus he saw at the Transfiguration.

We read in 2 Peter 1:16–19, <sup>16</sup> *For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.* <sup>17</sup> *For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* <sup>18</sup> *And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.* <sup>19</sup> *And so we have the prophetic word confirmed.*

Secondly, we would also get the picture that the righteousness of God is shared. It is for us. God does not work in a vacuum. His emotions and His acts as He reveals them are not for His sake, but for ours. Whenever He manifests

Himself, He affects man. His wrath is realised in punishment. His holiness revealed strikes fear as it did in the heart of Moses.

His love is not idle, but warms the heart of man. In the case of His righteousness, it is revealed to us, and it bears with it righteousness for us.

Our text says, <sup>21</sup> *But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,* <sup>22</sup> *even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;* <sup>23</sup> *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* <sup>24</sup> *being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

From the Greek, we learn that *being justified* does not here mean to “make righteous” but “to call righteous” or “to regard as righteous” or “to declare as righteous.” In other words, the righteousness of God effects righteousness for us. Those who believe the Gospel have the very righteousness of God ascribed to them.

Thirdly, having viewed this picture on our television set, we would leave as people of power. His power would have begun to restore the image of godliness within us and the power to live more like Him.

We would be able, although not perfectly, to live triumphant over sin and to vanquish Satan and his hosts. We would live like people liberated from sin, free to serve God in our fellowmen.

We would find ourselves serving as Jesus served, loving as He loved, giving as He gave, worshipping and praying as He was accustomed to do. The encounter with God make us new beings, born again as the obedient children of a loving God.

## **2. However, There Is Interference**

However, we seldom get such a perfect picture on our television sets. There are all sorts of interference. There is interference in our own lives and in the world around us.

The world denies the true picture of God. There is the consensus of the world that the picture we just described is not at all a true picture of God. The

world reasons that righteousness is not something God declares, but something that He demands.

Instead of considering the righteousness of God, they consider the righteousness of men. For heaven, they insist, we must do this or do that. Or more frequently, *“Don’t do this,”* or, *“Don’t do that!”*

For them religion is a matter of attempting to be like God on the basis of what we do, or do not do. For them religion has morality as its chief concern. For them righteousness is humanly orientated and relative to the standards of others. In short, their views might be summed up in the judgement of the Lutheran Reformers: work-righteousness.

This false picture of God is the first way that people invariably look at God. It is the natural look. It is the common view of religion.

With a view like this, it is like a TV channel that has a lot of interference. With old TV’s you get static, horizontal lines, brilliant flashes, and unintelligible noises, and with the new TV’s you get pixilation — either way you get no meaningful picture or sounds.

This is about as much as the world gets to know about God when it approaches Him on the basis of its righteousness, its human reason, and its concepts of what God and people should be like.

However, even the Christian view of God can be distorted. For the Christian, of course, the matter is not as extreme as above, like a TV channel with poor reception. But it is still very serious.

In the TV illustration, obviously the Christian views the right channel, the correct means of grace. But still, to use our illustration, the Christian faces many “ghosts” and much static that distort his picture of God. St. Paul in our text speaks to these problems of spiritual interference.

First, there is the interference of sin. It suggests that we will feel more comfortable if we will tune out Jesus for just a little while and enjoy a station that is much more fun and has a better picture.

It suggests that we do not have to be so serious about religion and that we should be able to let down our hair a little bit. It makes us feel that maybe we are

a bit too old-fashioned or narrow-minded. It suggests that perhaps there are other views of God, other channels or stations, that are just as valid.

Sin usually rears its ugly self in our lives in a most beautiful fashion and says: *“Do not watch God and the way He served — it will just make you feel guilty. Enjoy life. Take time out to relax. Watch out for yourself a little more. Don’t get taken in by the needy. No, don’t turn God off completely, just turn the volume down a bit. Just a bit more. A wee bit more. That’s Better! Now you can hardly hear Him at all. You can turn it up again next Sunday.”*

Second, there is the “ghost” of the mouth that praises self. It sort of projects a double image on this television screen of ours. The image of God is there, but there is also the image of our fellowman. That fuzzy picture we don’t mind comparing ourselves with.

We can reason, *“Well, I’m really not so bad. Why, look at some of these other people who call themselves Christian. I’m not perfect, I know, but at least I go to church. At least I give something to the work of the Lord. I am honest. I am not lazy; I work hard and support my family. I say my prayers. I am good to my family. I am respectable.”*

Somehow in that fuzzy, out-of-focus view of things we forget the pronouncement of God ***that every mouth might be stopped*** that the whole world may be held accountable to God. Or as we read in James 2:10, <sup>10</sup> ***For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.***

Third, there is also that static that seems to repeat and to repeat: *“Look, I have the law of God. I know it well.”* We somehow presume that the very fact that God speaks law to us must mean that He is on intimate terms with us.

Like the Jews of old we take great pride in the fact that God has deemed us worthy to hear the Law. We forget that He is interested in doers and not hearers only. Whatever the Law speaks it speaks to those who are under the Law!

This false reasoning is just about as sound as the criminal saying, *“The Judge has taken a real interest in me. He has really laid down the law. He is giving me 10 years in jail.”*

Fourth and finally there is that constant old “rerun” that ever crops up in our relationship with God. It is the presumption that we are able to please God by

these lives of ours. It is forgetting all about viewing the image of God on our TV screen and having the paranoid illusion that God is viewing us, that He is our audience!

We reveal this sort of heresy whenever we feel that God owes us something, whenever we are of the impression that God must be good to us, that He must keep us well and successful.

This presumption can especially creep into the life of the Christian whose life is good compared with others. Somehow it dials out this judgement of God which says, <sup>20</sup> *Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

Likewise we read in Ephesians 2:8-9, <sup>8</sup> *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

### **3. God “Adjusts” The Picture For Our Benefit**

Now, of course, no one intentionally puts up with a distorted television picture. His eyes could be damaged, he could miss important images, he could get a headache — in any event, one would find the sensation quite annoying and unpleasant. The natural thing to do would be for a person so disturbed to rise and readjust the picture.

However, it is not always as simple as that. Sometimes the TV set needs service, and sometimes one’s own eyes might be defective.

Likewise, to use our example, in matters religious one finds himself quite incapable of remedying his distorted picture of God. Oh, he might be able to make a few minor “adjustments” in his attitude toward the means of grace or resolve to read his Bible more or decide to have family devotions.

But usually the problem is more basic than this. God Himself has to make a “service call” and set things aright. He does this frequently in the course of history.

See how God enters Abraham’s life, how He directs Israel in the exodus from Egypt, how He deals with Jonah and Elijah. The Scriptures are full with such accounts of God’s saving intervention, particularly with that one great event

where He did the ultimate to put Himself in focus: the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Here God gives us a clear, undistorted picture of what He is really like. Here in human form God appears so all can see Him. Here we see God — caring, serving, loving, redeeming, restoring, saving us even at the great price of His death.

These actions of Jesus are so characteristic of God that He could tell His disciples in John 14:9, <sup>9</sup> *He who has seen Me has seen the Father*. Here we see God in a way that is the ultimate in clarity.

And then God resurrects His dead Son from the grave that He might unequivocally demonstrate to the world that He is the Victor over death, and over every enemy of His people. Suddenly in this picture which is presented so clearly in our Bible God comes to us, and we desire nothing but to see God in His grace and mercy.

Only in Jesus Christ, the Lord of mercy, we clearly see the source of righteousness, God Himself. How much we must depend on Word and Sacrament to get a clear vision of our transfigured Lord! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 17:1-9

<sup>2</sup> 2 Peter 1:16-21