

THEOLOGICAL LOGIC OF ROMANS 2-3

- A. In several verses in Romans 2, Paul appears to teach that people can be saved (justified) by *obeying* the Law or doing good [works].
- 2:7 – “persistence in doing good” brings eternal life
 - 2:10 – “glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good”
 - 2:13 – “obeying the Law” leads to being declared righteous before God
 - 2:26 – “keeping the Law’s requirements” one is regarded as belonging to God’s people (“circumcised”)
- B. In other verses in Romans 3 and elsewhere, Paul denies that people can be saved / justified by works and declares that justification before God comes only through *faith* (in Jesus Christ) apart from any works.
- 3:20 – “no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the Law”
 - 3:28 – a person is “justified by faith apart from observing the Law”
 - 4:5 – to the person “who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.”
- C. How do interpreters resolve this apparent contradiction? Four main views:
1. Paul simply *contradicts* himself—he usually teaches salvation by faith alone but in Romans 2 he allows for salvation by works (e.g., Räisänen, Sanders).
 2. The Romans 2 texts fall into a *special category* (e.g., hypothetical promises; reference to the old covenant era [but, cf. Gal. 3:21]; reference to justification in a different sense [vindication] and time [future]; or reference to “the right kind of works,” not works done in a legalistic spirit or to claim an exclusive status).
 3. Paul is referring to *Gentile Christians* who have *already* responded in faith to the Gospel (Cranfield). Their works are products of saving faith that express their spiritual status and confirm their destiny of eternal life.

This view assumes that “doing the Law” is fulfilling it *as a faith response* to grace in Romans 2 even though Paul says nothing about putting faith in Christ / gospel in Rom. 1:18–3:20.
 4. Paul is referring to *Gentile non-Christians* who by their works (theoretically) meet the standard by which God judges each person impartially. The reality is, however, no one outside of Christ meets God’s perfect standard as Paul demonstrates in 3:9-20, 23. All fall short of the “law” they have. The human condition under sin *prevents* what Paul states in 2:7, 10, 13, 26 and is the *reason* for 3:20, 28 and 4:4-5.

This view assumes that “doing the Law” is fulfilling it *perfectly* for obtaining eternal life apart from Christ in Romans 2, something that Paul points out is impossible in the climax (3:9-20) of his discussion in Rom. 1:18–3:20.