

How Can We Be Righteous?

Romans 3:21-31

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"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" - Romans 3:21-24, ESV

No doubt you've heard the story about the man whose wife was pestering him to stop and ask for directions. When he finally did stop and ask the older man sitting in front of the gas station, the man looked around, scratched his head, thought carefully and then said, "Well, you can't really get there from here."

That's how the last couple of chapters in Romans have been:

1. We're all condemned justly by God, under His wrath, which is being revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness. ([Rom. 1:18ff](#))
2. Trying to be righteous by being religiously moral can't save you, because religious people who have the law know they have broken it. ([Romans 2:1-11](#))
3. Following your conscience as your guide can't save you, because your conscience condemns you as guilty. ([Romans 2:12-29](#))
4. Thinking that God has to forgive people because everyone sins can't save you. ([Romans 3:1-8](#))
5. We're all not just a little less than perfect, but we're all totally sinful and without any righteousness at all. (Romans 3:9-20)

So, how can we be righteous before God? Not by being religious or by being conscientious or by making excuses or by minimizing your sin. In other words: You can't get there from here. If you insist on starting with yourself and asking, "What can I do to make myself righteous before God?", then the answer will be "Nothing!"

What is the solution, then? We need a different starting point. We can't start with what we can do, but we can start with what God has given freely and revealed in the good news of the Gospel. God's own righteousness has been revealed apart from the law - which means, apart from all works. The Law and the Prophets of the Scriptures do testify to this Gospel, as much of the New Testament explains, especially in Matthew, John, Galatians and Hebrews.

What has God given? God has given a way for us to be made perfectly righteous with the very righteousness of God. It cannot be earned, but it is given as a gift. How? We are "*justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*"

- **By His Grace:** That means it is His undeserved favor and kindness and not our own merit or worth.
- **As a Gift:** That means that God purchased it for us, at a very high price, and he gives it to us for free.
- **Through the Redemption:** To be redeemed is to be bought back from condemnation.
- **In Christ Jesus:** The only way for us to be bought back and made right before God is in Jesus Christ Himself.

Why is this redemption found only in Jesus? It is because Jesus is the only One "*whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*" The whole explanation of the power of the Gospel to make us right with God is found in this single word summing up the work of Jesus: propitiation. What is it?

Well, let's ask another question: Go all the way back to Romans 1:18. What is our danger, the essential problem from which we need to be rescued? The wrath of God! Propitiation simply means that Jesus took the wrath of God due to us for our sins on Himself in our place on the cross. God put forth His own

Son to be the satisfaction of His wrath, the appeasement of His just anger. We receive this satisfaction by faith alone. We are made righteous by trusting in Jesus, plus nothing else.

Is that's true, what do we contribute to our own redemption, our own salvation? What does a slave held in bondage contribute toward his redemption when someone comes and buys him and sets him free? What do you contribute toward gifts you are given? Nothing!

"Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."

That is the good news of the Gospel, and there's nothing left for us to do but to believe in Jesus and give thanks to God!