

Romans 3:21-31

Up to this point in Romans Paul has proven that both Jew and Gentile stand before God and God's law in their natural state as condemned. He showed that there was an advantage to the Jew in that they were blessed with having the oracles of God. But having them did not often reveal regeneration, The law did not get the Jews right with God. Then Paul went into a list of characteristics mankind has toward God in man's natural state. That leads us to the text this morning.

You could even jump from Chapter 1:16,17 to this verse and it would make sense. It would leave out all the proof of damnation, but it would enter right back into the righteousness provided by the Gospel. Remember back to Chapter 1 when Paul said this-

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

Here we see that the Righteousness of God is revealed, just as in our current text. But it is a different word for revealed than what we have in our current text.

Revealed in 1:17 *apokalupto* □

Thayer Definition:

- 1) to uncover, lay open what has been veiled or covered up
 - 1a) disclose, make bare
- 2) to make known, make manifest, disclose what before was unknown

²¹But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

The "But" is placed here in contrast to the lost-ness of man. Man is totally lost in his natural state, BUT now righteousness from God is revealed. What a life saving BUT that is. Without

this BUT we are helpless and hopeless. With this BUT, we can live forever in God's presence.

The word "**Now**" is also important. In fact this text wrestles with the mechanics of how God can be Just in passing over sin from past years and yet still declare those who did those sins to be righteous. What is fully revealed and displayed **NOW** is the explanation of that mystery.

the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed

Righteousness- 1) in a broad sense: state of him who is as he ought to be, righteousness, the condition acceptable to God. This is the same word used for righteousness in most of the texts in Romans

Here we have the righteousness of God, as opposed to the righteousness of man. The previous text was talking about no one being justified by their own works, by their own righteousness. Now a righteousness is revealed above and beyond any righteousness we could ever imagine counting for us.

Apart- separate, apart 1a) without any 1b) besides

Law- nomos This word is used in a way similar to our English word for law. It can mean a principle, like the law of nature, or it can mean a law that man has created or the law that God has created. The word law is used in several different ways in the new testament and you pretty well need to determine its use by its context. Here it could mean the Old Testament law of God or it could be even the gentile understanding of right and wrong. In either case, the law does not grant righteousness because no one ever does as good as they know to do.

Revealed- 1) to make manifest or visible or known what has been hidden or unknown, to manifest, whether by words, or deeds, or in any other way

1a) make actual and visible, realized

1b) to make known by teaching

1c) to become manifest, be made known

So when we put all this together we have the righteousness of God being made known, made visible, realized in a way that has not been seen manifested in previous times. And this means of righteousness is separate from, apart from the law. The law is not a means of gaining this righteousness. The law does not produce righteousness, it reveals it, much like a ruler reveals how long a board is. The ruler doesn't make a board 18". It just tells you how long 18" is and you can compare the board to it to see if it measures up.

Using this example with the law as the ruler and us as the boards, the law says the board must be 18". But the board is in a bind. It is not 18". The ruler will never change the board. It will just keep showing how far off the standard it is. What the board needs is a way to meet the standard. But it will never get it from the ruler. Just like the ruler, the law will never make us a better person. It will not change us from the inside out. It will only prove that we need to be changed. We must look elsewhere to be changed. We must look elsewhere to obtain righteousness

But does this means of obtaining righteousness contradict what the law says? Absolutely not.

being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets

This righteousness being spoken of was witnessed to by the Law and the Prophets. Paul will go on to tell us how righteousness by faith is shown to us in the life of Abraham. The whole Old Testament is a witness, it bore witness or testimony that salvation is by faith. It told us that the law did not save nor was that its purpose. The oracles showed that salvation was by Faith in the One who gave the Oracles. This means that careful scrutiny of the law would have led a person to see that it is by faith that righteousness is obtained. The law was on the witness stand giving testimony to this fact. The law was not, as many Jews thought, testifying against Christ. It was giving clear factual testimony that righteousness can only be obtained by faith in the sacrifice to

come. The law required a blood sacrifice over and over and over again. Clearly the sacrifice was a looking forward to a once for all sacrifice. The scapegoat took the sins out of the camp, but only temporarily. This had to have a permanent cure as well. The law was pointing forward to the new testament where Christ would be the lamb of God sacrificed for us. He, the innocent and perfect sacrifice would take upon himself the sins he never committed for our sakes. There are literally hundreds of references in the OT pointing to Christ. Pictures of Him and types of Him are on nearly every page. The OT is a strong witness to the fact that righteousness is only obtained by faith.

So we have the **righteousness of God**- that is **what is being offered**

Apart from the law- that is the **origin** of what is offered, it is apart from the law

Revealed- This is by divine revelation, by divine creation and manifestation, not something of human origin.

Witnessed by the Law and the prophets- This proves the **legitimacy** of what is offered.

²²even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;

Again, just to make sure we all catch whose righteousness this is, Paul mentions again what he is speaking about. This is the righteousness of God.

And here is our **means** of obtaining what is offered. It is through Faith. Now this is not human faith. This is the faith that is a gift of God given to all the elect. And it is not some aimless faith.

The Faith is in Jesus Christ, He is the **source of what is being offered.**

to all and on all who believe- This is to **whom** it is offered- to everyone who believes. And this righteousness is **to** them and it is **on** them.

There is some debate on the original manuscripts. English Standard Version and NIV do not use this rendering. The ESV says the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ **for** all who believe.

But we have already seen that the righteousness of God is offered to all who believe. We have also seen many scriptures describing God's righteousness for us being offered as clothing and that theme runs from Genesis to Revelation. His righteousness is placed on us. We have already explored theology that says that whom God declares just he will prove Just. And that also will require that Christ's righteousness be upon a person. So whether or not it is in the original text, the truth would hold out by other sources in scriptures.

on all who believe. We must always keep in mind that there is true and false belief. But those who truly believe in Christ due to Christ's effectual call on their lives, they receive the righteousness of Christ. It is not via working but by believing, by exercising faith, that they receive that righteousness.

For there is no difference; There is no difference between what? Is this talking about the difference between Jew and Gentile or is between those who are proclaimed righteous now verses those who were declared righteous in the Old Testament? That is tough to know because in the prior context the focus is on those with the law. As the text goes forward it addresses the difference between those now and those in the past.

If the intent is there is no difference between Jew and Gentile- It is no different because lostness is lostness, no matter what flavor. And being saved is being saved, no matter what history.

If the intent is that there is no difference between NT saint and OT saint we may be gaining more understanding about Paul's focus of this whole passage. Is this passage intended to explain

how God is righteous, even in the light of His passing over sins in the past. How is God righteous while declaring the OT saints righteous prior to their sins being removed through Christ? In other words, how could God be just if He reckoned those righteous in the past prior to doing business with their sin?

²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

This is a verse we use frequently in witnessing. This is what Chapters one through three have been proving. We have all fallen short of the glory of God.

Fall short-

- 1a) to come late or too tardily
 - 1a1) to be left behind in the race and so fail to reach the goal, to fall short of the end
 - 1a2) metaphorically fail to become a partaker, fall back from
- 1b) to be inferior in power, influence and rank
 - 1b1) of the person: to be inferior to
- 1c) to fail, be wanting
- 1d) to be in want of, lack
- 2) to suffer want, to be devoid of, to lack (be inferior) in excellence, worth

We have not reached that which we should have reached and must reach in terms of righteousness. We were born a sinner and have willfully sinned. We did not deserve any slack from God because we had no righteousness to give glory to God. We only insulted God by our sinfulness. And we must hit the target. But we don't hit the target. That is what has come from us. That is our contribution. And we are all in this together, whether born in 2000 BC or 2000 AD.

Glory of God- I am not exactly sure what it means that we fall short of the Glory of God. Obviously we are not God and do not share his Glory. It could well mean that we, like Adam and Eve have fallen short of being able to be in a relationship with God.

We can no longer commune within the glory of God. I am not sure.

²⁴being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

But this is God's contribution to us. We were justified- made just, made righteous. We were given the righteousness of Christ on our behalf. We were justified freely. 1) freely, undeservedly This word is also translated in other places- without reason. We had done nothing to earn the justification. God was not compelled to give it by any reason we could give. It was all of Him.

By His Grace- How was his grace given? Was grace a free check given by a God who has everything in his disposal so he dishes out some kind of free undeserved forgiveness? Well not exactly. His grace was the process of sending His sinless Son to earth to live a sinless life and then suffer and die for our sin, taking upon Himself His Father's wrath for our sin. So that he could have His righteousness count for all those who believe. That is grace. If you are like me you may think of Grace as a wonderful character of God that really costs him nothing. You might see it as the Grandfather that always has candy in his pocket. But the Grace of God on our behalf performed powerful business. The Grace required costly transactions done for us that we could not do for ourselves. We did not deserve it. We could not earn it. And yet Christ provided it. That is grace. It is not free grace in that it had no cost to Christ. No, it cost him dearly. But it is grace freely given to us.

through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

Redemption- 1) a releasing effected by payment of ransom

1a) redemption, deliverance

1b) liberation procured by the payment of a ransom

Christ paid a ransom for us. He liberated us from the penalty that God would have justly extracted from us. He bought us back

from our slavery to sin and he released us into the freedom of His Spirit to love Him and serve Him.

And that redemption is in Christ Jesus and only in Christ Jesus. I don't think there is even another religion out there whose leader claims to do what Christ did. It is only Christ that provides redemption.

²⁵whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith,

God set Christ forth as a propitiation- relating to an appeasing or expiating, having placating or expiating force, expiatory; a means of appeasing or expiating, a propitiation

Expiate- to extinguish the guilt incurred

The word propitiation has a dual fold meaning. It can mean appeasing wrath or it can mean removing guilt. And while both of these are done by Christ, the topic we have been dealing with in the first three chapters of Romans has been wrath so propitiation most likely here is focusing on appeasing that wrath. Christ was set forth as appeasing God's wrath toward us by fully taking upon himself God's wrath Himself. Blood had to be shed to pay the penalty of our sin. God hates sin and He had to pour out on our sin its just penalty. And so he did, by punishing Christ.

to demonstrate His righteousness,

God is righteous. He cannot allow a guilty person to go free. Whether it is the sin of Abraham or the sin of us. Whether the sin was done in 2000 BC or today. Sin has to have a penalty. Everything about God is right. So in order to be righteous, God has to punish all sin. Yet no one could be spared if He were to do so. So He demonstrates his righteousness in two ways.

1. He requires the full payment that sin deserves
2. And 2- He provides the only righteousness that could appease God's wrath. He provides the only propitiation, the

only redemptive price that could be accepted. He is right and righteous. He is just and the justifier.

because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

Forbearance-) toleration, forbearance

Passed over- passing over, letting pass, neglecting, disregarding The King James version uses the word remission here and that is probably not the intention here. Remission means the sin penalty was paid in full. But here in context it appears that we are talking about sins that God passed over until a future date.

The penalty that was necessary to be paid for the appeasement of God's wrath was never paid for in the history of mankind until Christ paid it. Every sin of every believer previous to this was looking forward in faith for God to do that which must happen to fully pay the penalty for their sin. That means Adam, Abraham, Issac, Jacob, David, Elijah, Elisha and on.... None of their sins were paid for before Christ. They were all passed over. They were tolerated. They were waiting to be paid for. The blood of sheep and goats didn't forgive sin. They were a sign that God gave to Israel to have them understand that death is required to pay for sin. Sheep and goats were a substitute for Christ, but they were still that... a substitute. These sacrifices were a way that faithful people could do business with sin, a way for them to have God pass over their sins. And the passing over always involved blood.

But it was their faith that was counted as righteousness. It was their looking forward to God providing the propitiation he requires that was counted for them. They had to believe in Christ's blood, or in essence, the Gospel, in God doing for them that which they could not do for themselves.

²⁶to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness,

All the blood of sheep and goats shed over the thousands of years of Jewish history was just a drum roll for what was to happen at the crucifixion of Christ. Every drop of their blood was an object lesson of the importance of this event in about 33 AD. All history of the forgiveness of sin was holding its breath for this moment. For it was at this moment that God would fully demonstrate his righteousness. What the OT saints would have called the most amazing act of God on their behalf we call history. What they would have celebrated for months and years we call doctrine. What they would have described as the best news the planet has ever heard, we call truth. How blessed we are to have seen and experienced the demonstration of Christ's righteousness.

At the present time- It is quite likely that a person in the Old Testament, even while living by faith in the blood of Christ, could not answer the question of how God could be righteous and overlook sin at the present time. But at the time of the writing of Romans, that question at the present time had an answer. The demonstration was made. All the evidence was laid out for how God's actions are just and have always been just.

that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

What a mystery this would have been to the Old Testament saint. God is just. Justice is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The just penalty for sin is death. The soul who sins will die. How can God be just and let man off for their sin? How can he forgive sin in His justice? They were promised a Messiah, but most did not expect the riddle to be solved in His life, death and resurrection.

Yet we live in an age when we can see the solution. God is Just. But the only way we know of that He could remain Just and offer forgiveness is for the sinless to take on the sins of the sinners and then take the full brunt of God's wrath on Himself. Only then could God be a Just forgiver if He was also the Just-ifier of those who are forgiven.

Notice here too that it is not faith that CREATES justification. The justification was created external to anything that we will ever do or act upon. We had nothing to do with the transaction that allowed for our justification. The faith that God gives us and that we exercise appropriates that external act that Christ did and it is counted for us.

²⁷Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.

Where is boasting then? Given this situation, what is there to boast about? Who can brag and about what? Can we brag about our great record or our great works? Absolutely not. Why? Because the only part we played was in the sinning. We put nothing in the righteousness category. That was filled by God. Remember- it is the righteousness of God. So by the principle of works we accomplished nothing. There is nothing to brag about there because it accomplished nothing.

Then how about faith? Shouldn't we brag about what our faith accomplished? We would have to be idiots to brag about our faith. For one thing it is not our own, it was given to us. For the other it is only that which we have faith **in** that deserves any credit. Our faith did not save us. It is **who we have faith in** that saves us. So by the law of faith we are logically excluded from taking any credit for our great salvation.

²⁸Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

Now we take all that is said from verse 20 on and how does it add up? The only way that a man can be made just as if he never sinned is to receive the righteousness of God to count for him and so be justified by faith, by trusting what Christ has done. This justification is completely and forever separated from the previous acts of a spiritually dead man trying to obey God's law. His justification happened apart from that futile effort. You could say it happened in spite of those efforts. They did not contribute anything to the saving that Christ did.

²⁹Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also,

Now, back to the "there is no difference" idea. The Jews might think that all of this is addressed only to them. They may think that yes, we got this wrong. And we are now very glad to get this right. But this is really only for us special Jews isn't it? But Paul points out the nature of who God is. God is God of all. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. God is the God of all. It is only logical then that since all are damned in the same way, both Jew and Gentile, then all will be saved the same way, both Jew and Gentile. Isn't God the God of all. And isn't it He who shows no partiality? So God is God of Jews and Gentiles.

³⁰since *there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.*

Here we have it. Paul pulls together the Jews and Gentiles at the point where there is no difference. God is God of all. There are not gods for different tribes or nations. There is one God and our God is it. Since that is true He is going to save everyone the same way. He will justify them through Faith in Jesus Christ.

³¹Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

Now, what about the law? Have we just announced it useless? Has Paul proven it untrue or unhelpful. Is he saying that it no longer applies? Now that we are saved by faith, is what God has spoken in the past out of date and useless, no longer applying to our lives?

Paul says NO, we believe the law and apply it better than the self proclaimed lovers of the law do. We hold it in its proper place and we establish it. Establish- to cause a person or a thing to keep his or its place. The law always told us God's heart on many matters. It still does. It has not changed. And we will still continue to rely upon it for that information. Just because it cannot save us does not mean it has no use. It was never intended to save people. It always served as a standard to prove a man's need for salvation. It does that as good today as the day it was penned. Paul will go on to show how the law and the OT

always displayed salvation by Faith. So what Paul is talking about is not something new and different in regard to the law. It is simply the culmination of all that went before.

The law is still perfect in its intended purpose. It will prosecute the sinner and put him in Hell. It is a big deal. It called Christ righteous and it calls us unrighteous in our natural states. The gospel establishes and fulfills the law. The law vindicates the gospel. The Gospel doesn't side step the law, it doesn't make an exception to the law, it doesn't overrule the law. It fully satisfies the law. That is part of the greatness of what Christ has done for the elect.

Today we will leave this building and we will prove what all of this glorious doctrine really means to us. We will do it when we are faced with a temptation to do a wrong thing. Maybe even more, we will do it by our choices of priority. We will make some things important enough that we will do them and we will leave other less important things undone. The question is, what does the righteousness of God given to us deserve? And what does the righteousness of God compel us to do? The writer of Hebrews was dealing with a similar topic and this was his application. May we use it as ours this morning.

Hebrews 11: 40 God having provided something better for us, that they (saints of old) should not be made perfect apart from us. 1Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.