

## The Gift of Being Right with God! Romans 3:21-31

The letter to the Romans is Paul's attempt to explain, expound, and interpret ***the gospel: the message of what God has done in Christ***. This short and final section of chapter three, concludes Paul's argument that he began in verse 16 of chapter one. In this final short section of eleven verses, Paul fittingly responds to the ***dire and hopeless situation*** that governs all humans when facing God as judge. The whole world for all time stands guilty before God for not living the life that he had called them to live. Paul strongly asserted in the sections leading up to this section- that ***no one in the world*** would be declared righteous in God's sight-but instead would be declared at God's final judgment ***to be unrighteous before him***. A grasp of ***this main point*** that Paul has tried to hammer out in his argument up to this point, prepares us for what Paul will now expound in this classic and familiar text from chapter three that summarizes his gospel. This section is viewed by one recognized scholar on Romans as: "***the heart and centre of this letter***".<sup>1</sup>

So, let us take a closer look at this text and discover for ourselves what these verses tell us about ***the gospel that Paul preached and taught***. Let us discover for ourselves, in this short- but highly compressed section of ideas, what Paul wants us to see concerning ***what God has done in Christ for us***. Let us also discover for ourselves why the gospel is such wonderful news to those who hear it.

Overall, I see ***this concluding section of eleven verses*** is divided into four subunits. The first subunit (vs.21-23) is centered upon Paul declaring ***that God has done something for us***. In the second subunit (vs.24-25a) Paul briefly expounds upon ***what God has done for us in Christ!*** In the third subunit (25b-26), Paul spells out ***the consequences of what God has done in Christ***. Finally, in the five concluding verses of his final section Paul picks up and expounds upon the ***implications of what God has done*** in response to what God has done. (vs.27-31).

### I. ***God did something for us. (vs.21-23).***

In terms of Paul's ongoing argument from chapter one, these three verses function in a ***transitional way*** in terms of the lengthy argument that he is presenting to us. The section serves to ***reiterate Paul's main points*** up to now; yet, the section goes further and ***helps position*** us to see ***something more!*** All three verses are focused on the theme ***of being righteous before God***, which as we have seen, is a ***major concern*** that Paul has addressed in the first three chapters. Please note that right from the beginning of this final section, Paul signals ***that something new and decisive has happened*** that has changed things for them and even for the whole world. Paul cryptically states this in verse 21. "***But now, a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known*** to which the Law and the Prophets testify." This is a key introductory verse of a very important section.

Yes, I have already asserted that ***the theme of righteousness*** is critically important for understanding these verses. Yet, there is an even a ***more basic and fundamental theme*** present in this verse that we must grasp first, in order to appreciate the overall message of this final section. What could this theme be? It is the simple, but critical idea ***that God did something for us!*** Paul primarily asserts this idea by carefully inserting the qualifying expression in verse 21: that God has ***made know or manifested "righteousness"***. The idea of making something ***known now-*** in contrast to something ***that has not been done in the past-*** is a key idea being asserted. Specifically, Cranfield, makes this a major point in his comments on the section by maintaining that this is a reference ***to the***

<sup>1</sup> Cranfield, C.E.B. Romans vol. 1 The International Critical Commentary. T & T Clark 1975 p. 199

**events associated with Jesus' death and resurrection.** <sup>2</sup> While Paul does not explicitly state this for us, the following verses especially verses 24-25 confirm this interpretation. Thus, let us clearly see that fundamental to everything else that Paul will say in the following verses **the affirmation that God did something for us** is critical to understanding the message that Paul wants us to grasp in this concluding section. In addition to this main point, let me suggest three other subordinate points that tie into this main assertion.

**A. God provided what we could not provide for ourselves: righteousness!** This is obvious! Yet, Paul never wants us to forget this essential point. This is why this chapter must be seen as the climatic conclusion of everything that Paul has argued up to this point. This is why Paul reiterates key concerns that must be remembered by us. This righteousness from God has been made known in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This righteousness is now becoming available to everyone "apart from the law". Point: Being righteous or declared justified before God cannot come by keeping the law. Being declared righteous can only come through faith in Christ.

**B. Through faith in Christ.** Paul has insisted that now "a righteousness from God" is being made known or being proclaimed through the preaching of his gospel. This is the main burden of Paul's gospel. Everyone needs this righteousness. There is no difference. No distinction between different groups of people. Why? All fall short of God's standards. (vs. 23) "All have sinned and fall short of God's glory." All people from all times stand unrighteous before him. Yet, all people (potentially) can stand and **be declared justified or righteous** before him now. How? In verse 22, Paul strongly declares that this "righteousness" is available and can be attained by anyone and everyone as long as they have "faith in Christ"! "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul, in order to be very clear, tacks on the redundant "to all who believe". These two ideas are at the heart of Paul's gospel concerning Jesus.

## **II. What God did through Jesus Christ now makes it possible for any person to be declared righteous in his sight. (vs.24-25)**

If this final section of chapter three is considered by some commentators to be the heart of Paul's letter to the Romans, then these next two verses (vs. 24-25) proclaim what perhaps may be considered ***the core of the core of Paul's gospel***. In these two highly compressed verses, Paul gives us two fundamental ideas for us to grasp. What does Paul want us to know? First, Paul tells us that God redeemed/or saved us through Jesus so that **we can be declared justified or righteous in his sight**. Secondly, Paul tells us **how Jesus redeemed us!** Keeping these two main points in mind, helps both to simplify and bring into focus what we should know and remember in these two verses that are loaded with rich theological ideas.

**A. Our Redemption/Salvation/Deliverance came through Christ. (vs. 24).** Up to this point in his letter, Paul has strongly conveyed a number of interrelated ideas. No one lives up to God's standards. All are under the power of sin. All stand guilty and condemned before God. **All are unrighteous.** And all will suffer God's wrath and punishment! But now, Paul says something big has happened that changes all of that. But now **through Christ** a person can be declared righteous! (vs.21-22) How is this possible? Paul succinctly declares in verse 24 " and (all ) are justified ...**through the redemption that came through Christ Jesus**. Paul's basic point is first that the means by which anyone and everyone can be justified before God is by the redemption that Christ brought or achieved.

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<sup>2</sup> Cranfield, Ibid. p. 201 " But now refers "the fact that in recent past a decisive event has taken place by which justification which is God's free gift and is now (being made known). "

Paul here does not spell out or elaborate what he means by this term. To his readers redemption would carry the ideas of deliverance, liberation, or being saved from something! In the context of what Paul has been saying so far, redemption at the very least conveys the idea that God has rescued anyone and everyone from their hopeless condition of being under sin and under the condemnation of God's righteous judgment. Paul explicitly draws attention to this radical good news that God has made available in Christ: "But now a righteousness from God has been made known" and now through Christ (all) "are justified freely by the redemption that came by Christ." (vs.24) **Point:** God has provided for everyone what they themselves could not do otherwise! God declares us to be justified before him. But note carefully this redemption by which God declares us justified or righteous was obtained through what Christ has done for us. Let us take a closer look.

**B. How this redemption was achieved for us!** (vs. 25a) One tiny short half verse! This one verse that briefly stated sums up what Christ achieved through his death! This verse is focused upon by Paul here in his argument in order to say **something very meaningful** concerning the redemption and the consequent changed state of affairs concerning just how God is able to see people justified through Christ. How is this possible? How was redemption achieved by Jesus? Verse 25a simply states the unfathomable mystery in a straightforward way. "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood." (NIV). "Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood.." (ESV) or "whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood." (RSV). Three different translations of this verse. Three different terms used to interpret the original Greek term: Expiation or removal of sin. Atonement or (Meaning what)? . Or Propitiation or removal of God's wrath. Who is right? All three versions are right in describing from a particular perspective: the nature of what Christ's death accomplished for us in order to achieve redemption for humanity.

a. Christ's death was a means of cleansing and removing sin. Thus it was and should be rightly seen as a means of expiation.

b. Christ's death was and should be seen as a sacrifice of Atonement bringing forgiveness and reconciliation between God and humanity.

c. Christ's death was and should be seen as a means of propitiation. To propitiate means to appease God who has been offended. Some like C.H. Dodd thinks this to be a pagan concept. Not necessarily so. For God himself took the initiative to make things right with himself. God himself did what was necessary to satisfy his own anger against sin.

**C. How this redemption must be obtained by us!** (vs. 25a) Paul is unequivocally clear in what anyone must do in order to obtain the assurance that he or she might be declared "righteous by God". **The answer:** Respond to God by faith! Look again at verse 25a! This verse is prefaced by the previous comment in verse 24 that there is no difference. "All are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came through Christ Jesus." Now in my words this redemption is achieved by his sacrificial death, yet made available to anyone is "by faith in his blood". Paul makes it clear concerning what must do in response to what God has done. Paul clearly asserts the importance and of believing what God has done and accepting the gift of being righteous as a result of what Christ has done. Four times (vs. 22, 25, 26) Paul stresses the need to believe in what Christ has accomplished. Going back to verse 22, Paul stresses the crucial role that faith plays in obtaining "the righteousness from God" that now has come through Christ. "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe." In this section Paul not only emphasizes faith by the sheer repetition of this idea, but Paul recognizes that we have done nothing to earn this redemption.

This is conveyed by Paul stating that this “justification from God” is seen as freely given and by his grace.

### **III. Consequences concerning what God has done through Christ in bringing us our Redemption. (vs. 25b-26)**

Having commented upon how Jesus has secured the redemption that we need, in order to make us right with God, Paul closes this section by drawing attention to how God himself satisfied his own need to be true to himself. God must maintain his own righteousness. God must himself do what is right. God maintained his own righteousness in the very process of securing the very righteousness that anyone and everyone needs- in order be right with him. God has provided the way to make this possible. God is righteous. God is good. God loves justice. God is fair and truthful. He will judge the world righteously. We know that! But Paul wants to underscore the point that God is righteous which means that he God had to be true to himself and thus has to punish sin and wrong doing. This thought is conveyed by Paul when he says twice. “he did this to demonstrate his justice” This statement, I interpret to mean that because of God’s own righteousness, sin had to be punished. The implication of all of this is that Christ was punished- he died for us. This means that God fulfills his own righteous standards. Thus, God is just.

### **IV. Concluding Implications stemming from what God has done in Christ for us! (vs. 27-31)**

This is Paul’s conclusion of his argument in this final section of chapter 3, as well as a fitting conclusion to his lengthy argument that began in the middle of chapter one. This conclusion functions to accomplish two main purposes. First, it reiterates Paul’s main point: Apart from the Law, God has made it possible for anyone to be made right or righteous in God’s sight. God offers anyone the free gift of being righteous by faith. Secondly, Paul in this concluding paragraph draws out two important implications that stem from his main assertion: There is no boasting about this righteousness! There is no other way of obtaining this righteousness apart from receiving it as a gift from God. Let us quickly take a closer look at these concluding thoughts by Paul.

First, let us briefly look at the main idea of being righteous or being declared to right before God. Even though Paul had strongly asserted this theme once again in the immediate preceding section, Paul makes it a point once again to declare this cardinal truth twice again in order to impress its importance upon us. *“For we maintain that a man is **justified by faith** apart from observing the law.”* (vs. 28).<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, let us briefly look at two key implications that stem from Paul’s main proposition of being justified by faith. Paul begins his conclusion in this final paragraph with *“Where then, is the boasting? It is excluded.”* (vs.27). In this first verse of the concluding paragraph, Paul sets our minds in motion by asking us to consider the role that “our boasting should play” in response to what he has been expounding concerning the fact that God has justified us. Paul simply states that our boasting is excluded. By that statement, Paul wants us to realize that we or anyone else cannot take any credit for achieving our own state of being righteous before God. As he maintained in verse 24, our righteousness is a free gift from God to be received by faith.

Finally, the second of two implications that can rightly be inferred from this concluding paragraph is that there is no other way of attaining this state/or status of being right with God other than by receiving this gift of righteousness by faith. This is one of the key main thrusts of this final

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<sup>3</sup> In addition to verse 28 which has justification as the main idea, the overall main idea in verse 30 is that God will justify every person in the world by the same way-by faith.

paragraph particularly verses 29-30. "Is God the God of the Jews only?" "Is he not God of the Gentiles too?" "Yes, of the Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised by the same faith." Overall Paul's main proposition is that there is only one God in this world and he has provided the only means by which any one can and will be declared right before Him. This justification has come and is now available through Jesus Christ. All humanity is and will be justified through Christ and by faith. No exclusions. No exceptions. All are and will be justified the same way.