

Romans 3:21-31 Answers Justified by Grace as a Gift

Overview: Romans has 16 chapters and 5 sections: Sin, Salvation, Sanctification, Sovereignty and Service. Today we begin the second section: **Salvation**.

Importance: Romans 3:21-26 is the heart of Romans. It concerns God's costly forgiveness wherein God Himself bears the full cost of forgiving our sin (Cranfield, p. 200).

Review:

Based on 1:16, how can a person get the God's power for salvation? (Reread). It is for everyone who believes. Righteousness comes by faith. The Reformers called this *sola fide*. The concept of salvation by faith is consistent with the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures, as evidenced in Paul's quotation in Romans 1:17 of Habakkuk 2:4.

“To the Jew first and also to the Greek” (1:16): Chronologically, salvation came to the Jew first, then to the Greek (1:16). In chapter 1, Paul wrote that God's wrath is upon those who suppress the truth about God. In chapter 2, Paul taught that simply knowing the law of Moses and being circumcised did not exempt the Jews from God's wrath since they committed the same sins as the people described in chapter 1. Not only is salvation to the Jew first (1:16), but also is judgment (reread 2:9-11).

Why did God give the law to the Jews (3:19-20)? The purpose of the law was not so that people could be justified before God by keeping it. The purpose of the law is to bring about knowledge of sin (3:20). It showed the Jews basic right from wrong.

— Righteousness —

******How can both Jew and Greek obtain righteousness from God (3:21-26)?** It is by faith, apart from the law, as a gift of God's grace, 3:22a, 24, 26b. Earlier Paul simply declared salvation to be by faith. He specifies that the object of faith is Jesus Christ.

According to 3:21, what has been manifested apart from the law? The righteousness of God has been made known apart from the law.

What is “righteousness” (3:21)? It is from *dikaïosuné* (1343), “the state of being righteous.” The root, *dikaïos* (1342) means “right, correct,” and thus by implication, “innocent.” It is the state of him who is such as he ought to be, the condition acceptable to God (Thayer). “Righteousness” is conformity to the demands and obligations of God's will. It cannot be earned through obedience to the Law but is a gift of God's grace (NBD, p. 103). Synonym for 3:21, “rightness.”

What does “apart” (3:21) mean (as in “apartheid” or “apartment”)? The Greek word is *choris* (5565), “separately, without” (Thayer). A system of apartheid exists between righteousness from God and the law. The two are in different apartments. They are apart from each other.

1. In what sense do the Law and the Prophets bear witness to the righteousness of God (3:21)? The Greek word for bear witness (3:21) is *martureo* (basis for martyr). The **law** showed the Jews right from wrong; it helped them understand God’s righteousness. But it could not make a person righteous. Its purpose was to show them their sinfulness. The Old Testament **prophets** were like Bible cops; they were covenant enforcers. They pointed out people’s sins, based on the law, and called them to repentance. However, the prophets could not make people righteous. They mostly condemned people for not conforming to the law. Much of the content of the prophetic books consists of sermons of judgment.

The fact that the Hebrew Scriptures (through the Law and the Prophets) attest to the gospel is a very important element of Paul’s argument (Cranfield, p. 203). It is not as though God’s plan failed. The law and the prophets pointed to God’s righteousness, but it was never God’s plan to earn righteousness by keeping the law.

2. Based on 3:22, can a person obtain the righteousness of God? It comes through faith in Jesus Christ. That it comes by faith means it does not come by the works of the law. Furthermore, we must have faith in Jesus, not faith in faith, nor blind optimism, nor believing in music, not believing that for every drop of rain that falls a flower grows, or faith in science.

Notice how in 3:22 for the sake of clarity Paul repeated himself: righteousness comes **1)** through faith **2)** for all who believe (Cranfield, p. 203). He said it going and coming!

When Paul wrote there is no distinction (3:22b), what did he mean? See 3:23-25a (*Read*). He meant there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. Both sinned and both are justified as a gift.

3. Based on 3:22b-24, why is there “no distinction” (3:22) between Jew and Greek?

There is no difference in that both have sinned and both are justified by grace as a gift.

In context, to whom does “all” mean (3:23)? In this context, all refers to both Jew and Greek (so effectively, everybody).

4. How can sin be defined based on 3:23? Sin is falling short of God’s Glory.

Word Study: “Fall short” (3:23) is from *hustereo* (5302), “to be left behind, to come short, to be late.” We get our word hysteria from it. It was used to describe runners who were left behind and who failed to reach the finish line (Thayer). It is also translated in the NASB as “lacking, destitute, gave out, inferior, worse.”

What is God's "glory" (3:23)? From *doxa* (1391); the root, *dokos*, meant "opinion" (i.e. a good opinion). Thus, "estimate, praise, honor" concerning someone or coming from someone. The Hebrew concept of glory carried the idea of "magnificence, excellence, dignity, majesty, absolute perfection" (Thayer). In the Old Testament it denotes the revelation of God's being, nature, and presence to mankind, and is so used in the New Testament (NBD, p.423). Synonym for 3:23, "perfect character."

Paul wrote in 3:24 that believers are justified as a gift. What is a gift? It is from *dorea* (1431), "freely, for naught, gratis" (Thayer). It means "freeness, bounty" (NBD p.420). The point is that like a gift it is free, without charge. You don't work for it (3:20a).

5. How is being "justified" (3:24) different from having "righteousness" (3:21)? There is no difference. Both are the same Greek root word; one is a verb and the other is a noun. To be "justified" means you are "righteousified." Synonym: "declared righteous"

What is "grace" (3:24)? From *charis* (5485), "kindness." Also in NAS as "blessing, favor." It is "good-will, loving-kindness"; especially "kindness which bestows upon one what he has not deserved" (Thayer). It is "undeserved favor" (NBD, p.442). Synonym for 3:24, "undeserved favor."

— Redemption —

6. According to 3:24, we are justified as a gift of God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. What is a modern, secular example of redemption (3:24)? Coupons are redeemable. Some soda pop bottles are redeemable. The manufacturer will pay you a ransom price of 5 cents to get you to release the bottle to them.

What is "redemption" (3:24)? It is from *apolutrosis* (629); *apo* = "off," *lutrosis* = "to ransom." It is a release affected by payment of a ransom (Thayer). It is deliverance from some evil by payment of a price. It was used to refer to the release of prisoners of war by the payment of a price, and also of the release of slaves. The price paid was the atoning death of Jesus. Synonym for 3:24, "ransom paid"

ESV **Galatians 3:13** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

ESV **1 Corinthians 6:20** . . . you were bought with a price.

ESV **1 Timothy 2:5-6** . . . there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all . . .

What is it we have been redeemed from (3:24)? He bought us out of slavery to sin and inevitable death (NBD, p. 1013). We are redeemed from God's condemnation, God's wrath and the condition of having an unrighteous status before God (Cranfield, p. 208).

— Propitiation —

What does “propitiation” mean (3:25)? Propitiation is a Latin word that translates the Greek *hilasterios* (2435). It has to do with appeasing, having placating force (Thayer). It signifies the removal of wrath by the offering of a gift; similar to the Hebrew word meaning “atonement.” *Hilasterios* was also used to refer to the cover of the ark in the holy of holies, which was sprinkled with blood on the Day of Atonement. The blood of the sacrificial lamb was offered in place of the people who deserved death because of their sins (Thayer).

From the context of Romans, it is evident that Christ saved men from the very real peril of God's judgment (wrath) against sin. The fact of propitiation is a reminder that God is implacably opposed to everything evil, that His opposition may properly be described as “wrath” and that this wrath is put away only by the atoning work of Christ (NBD, p. 986). The NIV renders this as “sacrifice of atonement.” Atonement can be thought of as “at-one-ment” (one with God). A synonym for 3:25 might be appeasing sacrifice or even simply appeasement.

According to 3:25, who put Jesus forward to be a propitiation? God put Jesus forward as a propitiation.

ESV **John 3:16** . . . God so loved the world that he gave his only Son . . .

Based on 3:25, who ultimately crucified Jesus? See also *Acts 2:22-23*. God caused it to happen. Jesus' death was no mere accident. It was the whole purpose for which He came.

ESV **Acts 2:23** . . . Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God . . .

7. What does Jesus' blood have to do with propitiation (3:25)? In the Old Testament, blood represents life. To shed or spill blood represents death. In the Old Testament sacrificial system the blood of the animal offered had to be shed. To speak of Jesus' blood is to speak of His death. His sacrificial death on our behalf serves as a propitiation that makes possible our redemption. This is called blood atonement.

ESV **Romans 5:9** . . . we have now been justified by his blood,

ESV **Ephesians 1:7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

ESV **Ephesians 2:13** . . . in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

ESV **1 Peter 1:18-19** . . . you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

ESV **Hebrews 10:19** . . . we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus

ESV **1 John 1:7** . . . the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Liberal Bias: Theological liberals are embarrassed by the blood of Jesus. They call orthodox Christianity a barbaric, bloody religion that must be stripped of such superstition to be made palatable to modern man. The American Association for the Advancement of Atheism in its fifth annual report stated, “The spread of Atheism was never faster. It is not measured by the growth of Atheist groups, but by the decline of religious belief as a controlling factor in the lives of men . . . This loss of faith causes consternation among the Orthodox who are powerless to arrest the movement. The . . . Liberals and Modernists, are heroically saving the ship of Christianity by throwing her cargo overboard. With what zeal . . . the whole crew of rescuers toss out, first, the Garden of Eden and the Flood, followed by the Virgin Birth, Atonement, and the Resurrection, and then they gain a great victory by getting rid of Hell and Heaven and the Devil and God, though with much ado they keep the name of the last. They may save the vessel of Ecclesiasticism, but how long will men sail the seas in an empty ship? They will go ashore and enjoy life with the Atheists. We welcome the aid of the Modernists, and pledge them our fullest co-operation in ridding the world of Fundamentalism – of any serious acceptance of Christian theology” (W.A. Criswell, in a sermon delivered to the Southern Baptist Convention).

In case you missed it before, Paul stated it again in 3:25a. How can a person appropriate (receive) the propitiation that Jesus’ with His own blood? It is to be received by faith (*sola fide*).

8. In the ESV, a new sentence starts half-way through 3:25. This new sentence starts with the pronoun “this” (3:25b). To what does the pronoun “this” (3:25b) refer? “This” refers to the propitiation Jesus brought about by shedding His blood on the cross (3:25a). The crucifixion of Jesus demonstrates God’s righteousness.

9. What is the function of the word “because” in 3:25b? The word because introduces a reason why God put forth Jesus as a propitiation by His blood.

Based only on 3:25b, why did God need to show His righteousness? God needed to show His righteousness “because” (3:25b) God had (in the past) left sins previously committed go unpunished.* For God to simply pass over sins would be altogether incompatible with his righteousness (Crainfield, p. 212).

***Word Study:** “forbearance” (3:25) is from *anoché* (463), “to delay, to tolerate, to hold back.” In his divine forbearance God passed over former sins.

10. Whose former sins were passed over (3:25)? This refers to the sins of God's people prior to the coming of Christ Jesus. God held back judgment due the Old Testament saints since His plan was to pour out judgment for their sins on Jesus (substitutionary atonement). The merits of the cross reach backwards as well as forward (Hendriksen, p. 134).

11. To what does "it" refer in 3:26? The "it" refers to the same thing "this" did in 3:25, God putting Jesus forth as a propitiation by his blood. We are now about to read the second reason why God put Jesus forth as a propitiation.

What second reason is given in 3:26 as to why God put for Jesus as a propitiation (3:25)? It was to show God's righteousness as the present time.

Sum: The first reason had to do with past ("former") sins; the second reason had to do with "present" sins.

12. How did the public display of Jesus as a propitiation make God "just" in justifying the one who has faith in Jesus (3:26)? Justice demands punishment for sin. God would not be "just" in merely ignoring sin. Someone had to pay the price for the sins of God's people, and that someone was Jesus. Jesus was the substitute, the sacrifice of atonement, on behalf of the one who has faith in Jesus.

For God to have forgiven men's sins without payment would have implied that moral evil does not matter very much (Cranfield, p. 214).

******What applications to the doctrine of justification by faith are dealt with in 3:27-31? 1)** Boasting is excluded, **2)** God is the God of both Jew and Gentile, justifying both by faith and **3)** faith upholds the law.

13. How does faith exclude boasting? *See ahead to 4:1-8.* If a man could earn justification by good works, he would have something to boast about. The fact is justification comes by faith apart from the works of the law.

ESV Romans 4:2 . . . if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about . . .

ESV Romans 4:4 . . . to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.

What did Paul mean by the law of faith (3:27)? *See back to 3:21.* This could simply be a literary device, a play on words (law of works versus law of faith). However, it could instead be an actual reference to the Law of Moses. If so, this would in essence be an appeal to a proper understanding of the law, which never offered eternal life by obedience. Properly understood, even the law, Paul would be saying, pointed to faith.

14. Who was doing this “boasting” (3:27)? Hypothetically those Jews who held to justification by their own good works would do the boasting.

15. What is the point of 3:29-30? (*Reread aloud*). There is only one God of both Jews and Gentiles. Both groups are justified by faith, not by the law. There is no room for Jewish boasting, claiming they earned their own justification by keeping the law.

ESV **Acts 10:34-35** . . .Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

Synthesis: It appears 3:29-30 (both Jew and Gentile justified by faith) is a supporting argument to 3:27-28 (no ground for Jewish boasting related to the works of the law). Since God is the God of both Jew and Gentile, He will assuredly justify both by faith apart from the works of the Law. To deny this is to say he is the God of the Jews only since they alone had the law (Cranfield, p. 218). Thus there is no room for Jewish boasting.

What wrong application did Paul deal with in 3:31? He dealt with the wrong application that since salvation is by faith, the law is now overthrown. Although it sounds as if believers are still under the law, this is not what he meant.

Word Study: “Overthrown” (3:31) is from *katargeo* (2673), “to render inoperative, abolish, do away with, put an end to” (Thayer).

16. In what sense does faith “uphold” (3:31) the Law? *See Romans 2:20, 3:20, 21.* Properly understood, **1**) even the law is a law of faith (3:27b) and supports the doctrine of justification by faith (Cranfield, p. 224). Furthermore, faith recognizes that the law **2**) is the embodiment of knowledge and truth (2:20), **3**) that its true purpose was to give the Jews the knowledge of sin (3:20) and **4**) that it testifies to the righteousness that comes apart from law.

Later in Romans Paul made it clear that Christians are in fact under grace, not law. We have been released from the law (Romans 6-7). However, since faith upholds the correct purpose of the law (to show Jews their sin), faith also upholds the righteous requirements of the law. That which was unethical under Moses is still unethical in Christ. The moral aspects of the Law of Moses are renewed in the Law of Christ.

17. What may have prompted Paul to write what he did in 3:31? It is possible that those who opposed the gospel of salvation by faith accused Paul of antinomianism (lawless living).

So What?

What is the only way to be right with God? The only way to be right with God is as a grace gift through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the redemption he purchased for us through his propitiatory sacrifice.

What is righteousness (3:21)?

What is redemption (3:24)?

What is propitiation (3:25)?

18. What personal applications are obvious from Romans 3:21-31?

1. I have righteousness from God since I believe in Jesus & His propitiatory work for me.
2. My righteousness is the result of God's grace, not my obedience to any laws.
3. I have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
4. My faith that God grants righteousness apart from law serves to uphold the true purpose of the law: to silence all those under it (unbelieving Jews) by showing them their sinfulness. It was never meant to be a means of righteousness.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
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