

Start your study here

Read Read, Record, Reflect, Respond		Intensively	Questions: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How. . .
Prayerfully	Conscious dependence		Repeated Alike Different Accentuated Related
Reflectively	Constantly	Specifically	Purposefully—with the view of the author in mind
Extensively	Background issues Big Idea Basic structure and flow Broad strokes		Effectively
Creatively	Imagination and View points	Observation <input type="checkbox"/> What does it say?	

Romans 3:21-31

- 21 But now the righteousness of God
has been manifested apart from the law,
although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—
- 22 the righteousness of God
through faith in Jesus Christ
for all who believe.
For there is no distinction:
23 for all have sinned
and fall short of the glory of God,
24 and are justified by his grace as a gift,
through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood,
to be received by faith.
- This was to show God's righteousness,
because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.
- 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time,
so that he might be just
and the justifier
of the one who has faith in Jesus.
- 27 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.
- 28 For we hold that one is justified by faith
apart from works of the law.
- 29 Or is God the God of Jews only?
Is he not the God of Gentiles also?
Yes, of Gentiles also,
30 since God is one.
He will justify
the circumcised by faith
and the uncircumcised through faith.
- 31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?
By no means!
On the contrary, we uphold the law. (ESV)

Review: God has revealed His righteousness, but mankind has rejected it and find themselves enslaved to sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested. . .

Observations: "righteousness, justified, just" from same root

This is the Gospel/salvation from God's point of view—the demonstration of God's righteousness in the light of man sinfulness

Key Question: What does God have to do for man in order to have a relationship with Him?

With Christ a shift has occurred in salvation history—He is the pivot point

Definitive righteousness—what is needed to have a right relationship with God. His character is the measuring rod.

Echoes of 1:17 in 3:21
For in it (the Gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed
But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law

Romans 3:21-31

temporal

21 But now the righteousness of God

has been manifested apart from the law,

22 the righteousness of God

through faith in Jesus Christ

for all who believe.

23

For there is no distinction:

for all have sinned

24

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,

whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood,

to be received by faith.

How He Redeemed

25

This was to show God's righteousness,

because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

Why He chose to Redeem—to demonstrate His Justice

26

It was to show his righteousness at the present time,

so that he might be just

and the justifier

of the one who has faith in Jesus.

It is God that justifies on the basis of what Christ did received through faith

27 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.

28

For we hold that one is justified by faith

apart from works of the law.

29

Or is God the God of Jews only?

Is he not the God of Gentiles also?

Yes, of Gentiles also,

30

since God is one.

He will justify

the circumcised by faith

and the uncircumcised through faith.

31

Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?

By no means!

On the contrary, we uphold the law. (ESV)

"boasting" will become a common word

No personal credit

Summary of Doctrine of justification by faith

How? Reveals God's righteousness Defense against antinomianism

The Law does not help give salvation The Law is significant in salvific history —pointing us to the Character of God—Holiness —now fulfilled in Christ

To reveal, to show, to make known. Though different works same basic concept in v 25-26

Luke 24:21, 27, 44 Jesus the fulfillment of the Old Testament

See 2:11-12; 3:9-18; 10:12

summary/review of 1:18-3:20

What was lost in Adam--

Court Room declared righteous in Christ

Market Place purchased through exchange of Christ

Temple atoning sacrifice satisfying God's holiness by Christ

Imagery: Day of Atonement Lev 16

Working Idea (this is to help you see how the main idea was developed)

God has revealed His righteousness
but mankind has rejected it and they find themselves enslaved to sin
“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested. . .”
in Jesus Christ
through faith
for all who believe
It is a gift of God’s grace which
justifies and redeems man and satisfies God’s righteousness
man can claim no personal accomplishment—it’s all of God

Main idea

God’s righteousness is revealed though Christ’s substitutionary death enables man, by faith, to have a right relationship with God.

Teaching idea

The core of this lesson was presented during the 2007 August Coordinated Study
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Introduction

Perspective

Which of these pictures is more beautiful? (Compare two famous picture and then two nature scenes)

What is your favorite hymn and why?

We are going to look at salvation from God’s vantage point.

I love the way Moo introduces this section

MARTIN LUTHER CLAIMED that this section was “the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible.” Quite a claim! We will not try to defend it here, since there are so many other great paragraphs that could vie for the title “central place in the Bible.” But the paragraph is extraordinarily important. Rarely does the Bible bring together in so few verses so many important theological ideas: the righteousness of God, justification, the shift in salvation history, faith, sin, redemption, grace, propitiation, forgiveness, and the justice of God. Here, more than anywhere else in Romans, Paul explains why Christ’s coming means “good news” for needy, sinful people.¹

The great Donald Grey Barnhouse superinscribed a heart over these verses in his Bible because “I am convinced today, after these many years of Bible study, that these verses are the most important in the Bible.”¹ These verses are certainly the turning point in Romans, and they could be the turning point for each of us as we study this passage.²

Because this passage teaches salvation from God’s point of view, it may be helpful to remind the class that we see salvation, like history, from our vantage point.

Illustration

A number of years ago I was in Kiev, Ukraine. I had the opportunity to visit a World War II museum/monument. It was strange because it was first from a Soviet vantage point, then from a Ukrainian point of view. It taught me how much I see history through my American eyes.

The passage we are going to study today is the doctrine of salvation from God’s viewpoint.

¹ Moo, Douglas J. NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Romans. 125. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 2000.

¹ Donald Grey Barnhouse, *God’s Remedy, God’s River*, Volume 2 (Fincastle, VA: Scripture Truth Book Co., n.d.), p. 6.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Romans : Righteousness from Heaven*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1991). 82.

Review

In the first 3 chapters Paul laid the foundations for the key truths in this section and their explanation, development, defense and application in the rest of the book.

Key point from the first section—all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God—all are justly condemnable and separated from God because of sin.

Overview

When we seek to explain what was accomplished on the cross by Christ for us, there are many metaphors used in Scripture. And when we boil it down to one metaphor we may miss some of the wonder, the beauty—but it is still helpful to understand the core elements and key focus.

While some see as many as 13 metaphors, most would see between 3 and 5. In the two passages we will look at we will see 4 of those.

This passage is about the righteousness of God—or in summary fashion, up to this point in the book of Romans—what is needed to have a right relationship with God.

“but now” is a temporal clause more than a logical clause

With Christ, a shift has occurred in salvation history—He is the pivotal point.

Salvation’s history is tied up in Him.

First, the background that is vital to keep in mind is that Paul’s overarching theological agenda was the vindication of God’s righteousness. He had been viciously attacked by other ‘Christians’ for his stance on the gospel. Essentially, he said that Christians were not under the law, that works added nothing to what Christ had done on the cross, that salvation was a free gift from God. To some, this stance of Paul’s was a theological compromise, designed to get Gentiles ‘in’ without having to become Jews first. They felt it was a betrayal of what the Old Testament clearly taught. And since the Old Testament was the only Bible that they had at this time, they viewed Paul as heretical and as basing his gospel on thin air rather than on scripture. And most importantly, they thought that Paul was hawking cheap grace—grace that didn’t cost anything because Paul essentially added nothing to faith.

With this background in mind, note what Paul says in Rom 3.21: “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (although it is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed.” His opening volley explicitly says that God’s righteousness was both attested by the Old Testament AND could not be gained through the old covenant.³

Catch Phrase / Key Phrase

“But now the righteousness of God has been revealed”

Outline

- I. Doctrine: Justification—The Righteousness of God Revealed 1:18–11:36
 - God’s Gracious Provision of Righteousness is Acquired by Faith in Jesus Christ*
 - A. The Need of It 1:18–3:20 *What a Mess!*
 - The Righteousness of God Revealed in Condemnation: The Universal Need of Righteousness*
 - The Bad News: All condemned for sin—no exceptions*
 - 1. Condemnation of Pagan (Unrighteous): The Panorama of Sin Described 1:18-32
 - 2. Condemnation of the Self-Righteous Moralists: God’s standard not theirs 2:1-16
 - 3. Condemnation Against Unfaithful Jew: Privileged 2:17–3:8
 - Condemnation because of. . .*
 - a. Hypocrisy: A focus on externals 2:17-24
 - External possession of religious rights*
 - b. Trust in Ritual 2:25-29
 - External practice of religious rites*

³ Daniel Wallace, from the *Parchment and Pen* blog at <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/> (Note: Dan Wallace was my favorite Greek professor in seminary.)

- c. Unbelief: The Jews' problem exposed 3:1-8
 - 4. Condemnation against the whole World: Everyone 3:9-20
 - a. The Charge: All are under sin 3:9
 - b. The Proof: Scripture 3:10-18
 - (1) The extent of sin: universal 3:10-12
 - (2) The nature of sin: total depravity 3:13-17
 - (3) The source of sin: no fear of God 3:18
 - c. The Application: All are Accountable 3:19-20
- B. What It Is 3:21-5:21**
- What a God—The Way of Salvation*
- Justification: The imputation of righteousness to all who believe*
- “But now the righteous of God has been manifested” 3:21***
- 1. Justification Explanation (Defined) 3:21-31
 - a. The Manifestation of Righteousness 3:21-23
 - Christ is the focus along with faith
 - (1) Kind of Righteousness: without the Law 3:21a
 - (2) History of Righteousness: attested by the Law and Prophets 3:21b
 - (3) Means of Righteousness: by (through) faith 3:22a
 - (4) Extent of righteousness: to all who believe 3:22b-23
 - b. The Provision of Righteousness 3:24-26
 - (1) The Plan: Justification of sinners 3:24-25c
 - (a) On what basis: grace 3:24a
 - (b) By what method: redemption / propitiation 3:24b-25b
 - (2) The context 3:25c-26
 - (a) The Past
 - (b) The Present: All condemned equally and all justified equally
 - c. The Availability of Justification through Faith Alone 3:27-31
 - (1) Faith Excludes Boasting 3:27-28
 - (2) Faith Eliminates Distinctions 3:29-30
 - (3) Faith Established the Law: The Law is vindicated 3:31
 - 2. Justification Illustration 4:1-25

Exposition / Key Exegetical Issues to be aware of:



3:21-31 (actually 3:21-26) starts another major section (3:21-4:25). The theme in 1:16-17 states that the “righteousness of God is revealed.” In starting this new section, Paul returns to that theme. The revelation of God’s righteousness has been made known.

“In God’s condemnation of the human race His own personal infinite righteousness was revealed along with the fact that not a single human being (the Lord Jesus Christ excepted) has ever or will ever be able to meet that standard and be accepted by God on his own merit. Now in this second major section of Romans Paul discussed God’s “provided righteousness” for people through Jesus in justification. Justification is a forensic declaration of righteousness as a result of God’s imputing to believers Christ’s righteousness, provided by God’s grace and appropriated through faith.”⁴

Now that Paul has established the need for righteousness for all people, he demonstrates its provision (3:21-5:11). First, it has been revealed through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, being granted to all who put their trust in him (3:21-26). Second, the terms for bestowal of this righteousness (namely, faith) are the same for all, because God is One (3:27-31). Third, Paul backs up this astounding assertion with proof from the life of Abraham (4:1-25). In essence, Abraham is seen to be father both of the Jews and of the Greeks—that is, he is a type of those who are saved by faith. This is illustrated by evidence that Abraham was not justified by works (4:1-8), nor by circumcision (4:9-12), but exclusively by faith in the promises of God (4:18-25). So too his spiritual offspring are justified by faith rather than by law (4:13-17, 23-25). Thus Abraham is seen to be the universal forefather of all believers, whether Jew or Greek.⁵

Introduction to Romans 3:21-31

⁴ John Witmer in Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B. (1983, 1985). *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (LOGOS)

⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, *Romans: Introduction, Argument, and Outline*, bible.org

Ponder the achievement of God.

He doesn't condone our sin, nor does he compromise his standard.

He doesn't ignore our rebellion, nor does he relax his demands.

Rather than dismiss our sin, he assumes our sin and, incredibly, sentences himself.

God's holiness is honored. Our sin is punished . . . and we are redeemed.

God does what we cannot do so we can be what we dare not dream: perfect before God.⁶

God is still God. The wages of sin is still death and we are made perfect.



Talk about it

Look for the key terms?

Justify, Redemption, Propitiation

3:21 Kind of Righteousness: **without the Law** 3:21a

Moo does a nice job of discussing the continuity and discontinuity between the old (the Law) and the new (righteousness revealed in Christ) see page 226.

Romans 3:21-23 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, (ESV)

Revelation of God's righteousness and the expression of "through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" is a restatement and elaboration of the theme of 1:16-17.

History of Righteousness: **attested by the Law and Prophets** 3:21b

"has been manifested" or revealed,

"has been made known" is a perfect tense—past completed action with present effect or benefit—in contrast to the use of the present tense in 1:17 where the present expression of the gospel was the emphasis.

The point that the gospel message Paul taught was not new but tied to the Old Testament has already been stated by Paul in 1:1-2. The author of Hebrews elaborates on it

Hebrews 1:1-4 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. (ESV)

3:22 Means of Righteousness: **by (through) faith** 3:22a

Another controversy, which may be unfamiliar to some readers, is how to render the phrase *pistis Iēsou Christou* in Rom 3:22-26. Traditionally the phrase has been translated "faith in Jesus Christ," but lately more and more scholars prefer "faithfulness of Jesus Christ." The Greek is ambiguous and could be rendered either way. In recent years a veritable flood of scholars are endorsing the latter view. There is not space to enter into the debate here, but Moo defends cogently and convincingly the traditional view that "faith in Jesus Christ" is the superior interpretation. One argument in particular is decisive for me in this regard, and that is the continuity or flow of the argument from chap. 3 to chap. 4. Those who support "faithfulness of Christ" plausibly defend the idea that *pistis* in every instance in chap. 3 could refer to the faithfulness of Christ, but when we read chap. 4 it is abundantly clear that it is the personal faith of Abraham that is in Paul's mind. Paul introduces Abraham because he is a paradigm for the Roman Christians, and he is pragmatic because he obtained righteousness by faith. It seems quite unlikely that Paul would emphasize in such detail that Abraham was righteous "by faith" in chap. 4, whereas in chap. 3 he would say that we are righteous by "Jesus' faithfulness." Just as he emphasizes that Abraham was right with God by faith in chap. 4, so too in chap. 3 he stresses that Christians are justified by faith. Another problem with the "faithfulness of Jesus Christ" interpretation emerges—namely, that there is not a single text that unambiguously speaks of the "faithfulness of Jesus," whereas the necessity to exercise faith is often taught in Paul.⁷

⁶ Max Lucado, *In the Grip of Grace* (Word Publishing: Dallas, 1996) p. 55.

⁷ Thomas Schreiner, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Volume 41* (December 1998) 41:646.

See also Moo's discussion on page 127.

The means of obtaining God's righteousness is faith—a trust response to God.

3:23 The extent of righteousness—to all who believe (3:22b-23)
All saved by the same Savior, through the same faith

“fall short of the glory of God”
The majesty of His holiness
The wonder of His presence

Notice that “all fall short” not only means they cannot meet God's standards, it reveals that people do not simply come up short, they don't even go in the right direction.

The evangelism illustration of trying to throw a rock to the South Pole and missing illustrates how far short we would get. But 1:18-3:20 clearly shows that people don't go in the right direction by their own attempts. Mankind's natural inclination is to go the wrong way.

3:24-25

Teachers, you will probably want to spend the bulk of your time on these verses

The Provision of Righteousness 3:24-26

The Plan: Justification of sinners 3:24-25c

On what basis: grace 3:24a

By what method: redemption / propitiation 3:24b-25b

The context 3:25c-26

The Past

The Present: All condemned equally and all justified equally

The application of the death of Christ to us: Multifaceted

While Christ's death is a model of sacrificial service to God and love for people (cf. Phil 2:6-11), this is not the primary explanation of it in the New Testament. The primary explanation and summary of the multifaceted cross-work of Christ is to refer to it as vicarious atonement or penal substitution. This means that Christ's sacrifice paid the full penalty of our sin by dying in our place. The penalty for sin is death and Christ completely paid that penalty on the cross.⁸

All of what God does for us is based in Christ—without Him there is no salvation

There are not multiple avenues to God, though people's journeys may be unique and individual since God is personal, but He has stated that the means, the access to a relationship with Him, only comes through Jesus.

But what God does is conditional on a response from us—**faith**

The atonement

But let's define these key concepts Romans 3:24-25

Definition:

Justification Court Room Language declared righteous in Christ

Negative—forgiveness of sin—declared not guilty

Positive—declared righteous (legal declaration)

It does not mean “to make righteous”

⁸ Greg Herrick, http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=736

“just as if I had never sinned” is only half of the wonderful truth, it leaves us neutral with God

This is Paul’s favorite metaphor so it has tended to dominate evangelical theology—but it doesn’t capture the full breadth of what was done.

John Piper holds to the historic, Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone, which can be summarized in the following four points:

- 1) The sole ground of our justification is the righteousness of God, expressed in the alien, imputed, active obedience of Christ, climaxing in his sin-bearing, substitutionary death.
- 2) Faith alone is the sole means of justification. In other words, it is faith only, and not our deeds in any way (whether the external manifestation or the internal God-glorifying motive behind them), that connect us savingly to Jesus Christ.
- 3) Faith is distinct from its fruit, the obedience of faith, yet faith is of such a nature that it must and will produce love for people and a life of genuine, though imperfect, holiness in this world. Therefore, as the Westminster Confession of Faith (11.2) says, the faith that alone justifies (as the instrument which unites us to Christ, not as the ground or content of our justifying righteousness) is never alone;
- 4) Therefore, this reality of forensic righteousness, which is imputed to us on the first act of saving faith (as the seed of subsequent persevering faith), is different from transformative sanctification, which is imparted by the work of the Holy Spirit through faith in future grace.⁹

Grace

Unmerited favor, that which one grants to another, the action of one who voluntarily does something for another, the giving of undeserved good will or favor. Giving something that is not deserved. Reminiscent of the OT concept of loving-kindness.

Gift

“freely” δωρεάν — gift, something received without payment.

It also can mean “without reason” (John 15:25).

This is a powerful statement. There is no reason you can conceive of, for why you should receive God’s grace/righteousness/justification. As a matter of fact, based on what Paul has taught (1:18—3:20), we deserve justly to be condemned and punished.

Redemption **Market Place** Language **purchased through** exchange
through the blood of Christ

Redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις) is one of a group of words we translate “redeemed or redemption”
Redemption or deliverance (Luke 21:28; Romans 3:24; 8:23; 1 Corinthians 1:30;
Ephesians 1:7, 14; 4:30; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:15; 11:35)

A releasing effected by payment of ransom; redemption, deliverance, liberation
procured by the payment of a ransom

Other key New Testament words

⁹http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/AskPastorJohn/ByTopic/51/1438_What_do_you_believe_about_justification_by_faith_alone/

I’m quoting Piper on this because he has been make a strong case for the traditional understanding of Justification and imputation. You can read his book, *Counted Righteous in Christ* online at http://www.desiringgod.org/Store/Books/337_Counted_Righteous_in_Christ/

He has also just released a new book *The Future of Justification: A response to N. T. Wright*, (September 2007) which you can also read online or buy it at a reduced price http://www.desiringgod.org/Store/Books/728_The_Future_of_Justification/

ἀγοράζω (agorazo)

To buy or redeem (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23; 2 Peter 2:1; Revelation 5:9; 14:3, 4)

To be in the market-place, to attend it, hence to do business there, to buy or sell. The use of this term implies the need for a third party since the slave could not redeem himself. Thus it is Christ who pays the price for our redemption—the price demanded by the Father.

The price is the blood of Christ (Revelation 5:9-10).

Having been bought with a price we are to serve God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

ἐξαγοράζω (exagorazo)

“to buy out of the market, ransom out,” emphasis on deliverance and freedom—“to let loose, set free, ransom price, to release by paying a price” (Galatians 3:13; 4:5)

To redeem by payment of a price to recover from the power of another, to ransom; metaphorically of Christ freeing us from the dominion of sin and the Mosaic Law at the price of His substitutionary death. (Galatians 3:13; (4:5); Ephesians 5:16)

To buy up, to buy up for one’s self, for one’s use; to make wise and sacred use of every opportunity for doing good, so that zeal and well doing are as it were the purchase money by which we make the time our own.

Christ’s redemption of the sinner from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13) denotes the complete end of all obligations to the curse of the Law—death.

λύτρον (lutron)

To ransom (noun) (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45)

The price for redeeming, ransom, (paid for slaves, captives, for the ransom of life), to liberate many from misery and the penalty of their sins, the price for release.

λυτρόω (lutroo)

To redeem (verb) (Luke 24:21; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:18-19)

To release on receipt of ransom

To redeem, liberate by payment of ransom; to liberate; to cause to be released to one’s self by payment of a ransom, i.e. to redeem; to deliver: from evils of every kind, internal and external.

λύτρωσις (lutrosis)

redemption or to redeem (Luke 1:68; 2:38; Hebrews 9:12-14)

a ransoming, redemption, deliverance, esp. from the penalty of sin

“Redemption may be summarized around three basic ideas.

(1) People are redeemed **from something**; namely, from the marketplace or slavery of sin.

(2) People are redeemed **by something**; namely, by the payment of a price, the blood of Christ.

(3) People are redeemed **to something**; namely, to a state of freedom; and then called to renounce that freedom for slavery to the Lord who redeemed them.”¹⁰

When Paul says that we are, “justified freely by His grace through the redemption (**apolutrosis**) that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24), **he indicates that the meaning of this aspect of redemption is “freedom from the penalty of sin that Christ’s death gained for guilty sinners.”**¹¹

¹⁰ Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 292.

¹¹ Roy B. Zook, ed. Darrell L. Bock, consulting ed. *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), p. 271.

Propitiation **Temple** Language atoning **sacrifice satisfying** God’s holiness by Christ

That this word should be understood as propitiation, a word associated with the sacrificial system is revealed by the term “present” in 3:25. “Christ has become the meeting place of God and man where the mercy of God is available because of the sacrifice of the Son.”

tn The word ἱλαστήριον (*hilastērion*) may carry the general sense “place of satisfaction,” referring to the place where God’s wrath toward sin is satisfied. More likely, though, it refers specifically to the “mercy seat,” i.e., the covering of the ark where the blood was sprinkled in the OT ritual on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). This term is used only one other time in the NT: Heb 9:5, where it is rendered “mercy seat.” There it describes the altar in the most holy place (holy of holies). Thus Paul is saying that God displayed Jesus as the “mercy seat,” the place where propitiation was accomplished.¹²

3:26

The context 3:25c-26

The Past

In the Old Testament period, God did not punish sins with the full severity he should have. People who sinned should have suffered spiritual death, because they did not yet have an adequate sacrifice to atone for their sins. But in his mercy God “passed over” their sins. In doing so, however, he acted against his character, which requires that he respond to sin with wrath. So the coming of Christ “satisfied” God’s justice. In giving himself as a “sacrifice of atonement,” Christ paid the price for the sins of all people — both before his time (v. 25b) and after (v. 26a).¹³

The Present: All condemned equally and all justified equally

Consequently, Paul summarizes, we can see how God can be “just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (v. 26b). He accepts as righteous before him sinful people who have faith, and he accepts sinners as righteous without violating his own just character because Christ has fully satisfied God’s demand that all who commit sin must die. By faith in Christ, we are joined to him. He becomes our representative, and his death is accredited to us.¹⁴

The first section of our passage ends with

“It is God that justifies on the basis of what Christ did received through faith”

Main point (Wow factor)

Now these are truths that many of us take for granted. We know this. We did that.

But when was the last time you were wowed by these truths. I hope it has been recently.

Notice the amazing truth

Justification is the means by which we can have intimate access to the Father – a relationship we don’t deserve

But He did not only deal with past sins

His sacrifice is what justifies me now—even though I am still not perfect

He deals with my present sin

I don’t have to be perfect by myself

Ponder the achievement of God.

He doesn’t condone our sin, nor does he compromise his standard.

He doesn’t ignore our rebellion, nor does he relax his demands.

¹² *The NET Bible First Edition Notes* (Biblical Studies Press, 2006). Ro 3:25.

¹³ Moo, Douglas J. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Romans*. 129. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 2000.

¹⁴ Moo, Douglas J. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Romans*. 130. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 2000.

Rather than dismiss our sin, he assumes our sin and, incredibly, sentences himself.
God's holiness is honored. Our sin is punished . . . and we are redeemed.
God does what we cannot do so we can be what we dare not dream: perfect before God.¹⁵

God is still God. The wages of sin is still death. And we are made perfect.

Summary

The Accomplishment of Justification (Romans 3:21-26)

The Plan: Centered in Christ, apart from law (all legal approaches), as prophesied by the Old Testament prophets (Rom. 3:21)

The Prerequisite: Salvation is provided through (not because of) faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:22)

The Price: The blood, the death of Christ (Rom. 3:24-25)

The Position: The believer is placed *in Christ*.

The Pronouncement: Pronounced just and no one can lay anything to the charge of the elect (Rom. 3:26)¹⁶

The Proof of Justification: The ascension and resurrection of Christ (John 16:10; Rom. 4:25)

Personal purity Rom. 6:7

One result is peace with God (Rom.5:1).

3:27-31

Having dealt with the great theological truths in 3:21-26, Paul turns to focus again on who the gift is for and how it is appropriated.

In 3:27-31 and 4:1-8 (really all of chapter 4) Paul will emphasize again that justification is a gift from God appropriated by faith (apart from works of the law) for both Jews and Gentiles

The Availability of Justification through Faith Alone 3:27-31

Faith Excludes Boasting 3:27-28

Faith Eliminates Distinctions 3:29-30

Faith Established the Law: The Law is vindicated 3:31

The need for faith for salvation vindicates the Law, because it served to reveal sin 3:20

The broken law made the redemptive cross work of Christ necessary 3:24-25

If you see the need for Christ's death, you will never feel you can meet God's righteous standard

Because the death of Christ provides the righteousness of God, then the Law's requirements are met

Key Point

A right relationship with God—a righteous God—is only made possible by the substitutionary death of Christ to pay for our sins.



What do we learn
About God?

Gracious
Patient



Act on it

Being wowed is only part of the response to the wonderful truths in this section.

There really ought to be a number of natural responses

¹⁵ Max Lucado, *In the Grip of Grace* (Word Publishing: Dallas, 1996) p. 55.

¹⁶ Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 299.

Worship

which should include

Obedience

The promises and covenants of God are intended to allow a holy God to have a relationship with sinful mankind.

But with the promise we're also given
the call to trust and obey
a call to loyal obedience by faith

The Purpose of God's promises and covenants
To allow fallen humanity the opportunity to know God in intimate relationship
To experience the result of blessing and hope for eternity

Sharing

These truths are too awesome to keep to ourselves

Defend

These truths are too critical to not think deeply on them and defend them.

Additional Exposition on Romans 3:21-26

What Does it Mean to be Justified? A Brief Exposition of Romans 3.21-26, Part 1

Daniel B. Wallace

I believe that Romans 3.21-26 stands as one of the most important passages in the entire Bible. Leon Morris calls this passage “possibly the single most important paragraph ever written.” Its shortness is *hardly* an indication of its value, any more than the brevity of the resurrection accounts in the Gospels truncate the importance of that truth!

In 1.18 through 3.20, Paul got us lost. He first showed that the gentiles were lost. Then he showed that the Jews were lost. “No one does good, not even one.” “No one seeks God, not even one.” All of us are dead because of sin. That is the devastating reality of our spiritual condition before God. Now Paul tells us the good news!

But before he can, he must wrestle with a dilemma: because we are utterly sinful and because God is utterly holy, how is it possible for us to get saved, for us to ever stand in God’s presence without being condemned? The answer to this question is the heart of Romans and is found in 3.21-26.

3.21—“ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (which is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed—”

To Paul, the cross is the central point in all of human history: everything up to the moment of Christ’s death pointed to it, and everything after that moment points back to it. Paul begins with “but now,” an adversative phrase that splits time into BC and AD.

When he speaks of the “righteousness of God” he repeats a phrase he used in 1.17. I take it that it is at least a righteousness *which comes from God*—that is, an imputed righteousness. If so, ‘apart from the law’ would most naturally belong with this: there is a righteousness which comes from God that cannot be obtained through the law. At the same time, this righteousness is attested by the law. The Greek here probably means something like, “the apart-from-the-law righteousness of God nevertheless is attested by the law.”

When Paul adds ‘and the prophets,’ he is showing that this righteousness in no way abandons or violates the Old Testament—it is even attested by the OT! (This is what ‘the law and the prophets’ means; it was a common way to indicate ‘the whole OT.’) Paul is saying that there is continuity between the OT and the NT. God’s righteousness is now disclosed in the cross, yet *this righteousness is not foreign to the OT though it was inaccessible through the law*. Paul is concerned that his readers understand that he is *not* preaching a gospel that contradicts the OT! His gospel *fulfills* it; it does not destroy it.

Paul concludes this verse by saying that this righteousness ‘has been disclosed.’ The verb used here is used only two other times in Romans (1.19; 16.26). In both places it carries some theological weight, related to God’s revelation. The earlier reference is 1.19: “because what can be known about God is plain to them, because God *has made it plain* to them.” There is a *general revelation* of God in nature, which is sufficient to condemn people. But there is a *special revelation* of God in the Bible, which points to salvation. Paul was speaking about general revelation in 1.19, about special revelation in 3.21.

In his opening volley about justification in just v 21, Paul gives us rich insights into how God’s justice works. It is attested by the Old Testament, though it cannot fully be found there. The OT prophets longed for the age of the Messiah, for a time when God’s righteousness would be amply manifested on earth. But they didn’t know that it would come through his own sacrificial death.

3.22—“namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction...”

Paul now defines this righteousness (‘namely’). He repeats the phrase ‘righteousness of God’ but this time qualifies it with a prepositional phrase.

“through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ”—This is the rendering of the NET Bible (taking the genitive as subjective). Almost all other modern English translations have ‘through faith *in* Jesus Christ’ (taking the genitive as objective). The KJV has ‘faith of Jesus Christ,’ which may be closer to the NET’s

rendering (or it may be an indecisive rendering because the translation committee was split!)¹⁷. At bottom, both sides would regard the object of our faith to be Christ. But those who consider ‘the faithfulness of Christ’ as the meaning here *also* see something else in this text: the focus here is on what Christ accomplished more than on what we must do to be saved. Further, if this verse refers to Christ’s faithfulness, then it implicitly affirms the fundamental point that Paul is articulating: God’s righteousness that is now revealed in no way contradicts or destroys the OT! Rather, it fulfills it in that Christ is the one who fulfills all the law’s requirements, rendering them no longer authoritative over our lives. We please God by a different standard altogether.

“for all who believe”—this line is plainly speaking of everyone who puts his or her faith *in Christ*. The force seems to be that such people have the faithfulness of Christ applied to their account. But our faith is only as good as the object of that faith. Since Christ is faithful, he is worthy of our faith. By treating the previous phrase as “the faithfulness of Christ,” we are seeing Paul’s emphasis as christocentric rather than anthropocentric. A major implication: it’s not *so much* how much you believe that gets you saved, but whom you trust in.

“for there is no distinction”—This is a great Pauline refrain. He uses it also in Rom 10.12 to show that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Basically, Paul is saying that the rules are the same for Jews and Gentiles alike: both groups are sinners and both gain access to heaven through faith in Jesus Christ.

3.23—“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Paul has just defined the “all” in v 22: “all who believe.” The same ‘all’ are most likely in view here too. Perhaps the reason that most interpreters see the groups as different is that Paul does not qualify the ‘all’ in v. 23, while he qualifies it in v. 22 (‘all who believe’). Thus, two different ‘alls’ seem to be in view. However, it is typical of Paul and of Greek in general not to define the ‘all’ in the second mention. Greek is a more economical language than English and as such it does not need to repeat words and phrases as much as English does. As for Paul, his style is often to establish the meaning of the group in the first sentence, then simply keep the discussion with the ‘all’ for the rest.

Verse 24 starts off with a participle in Greek; it is not a new sentence but is rather a subordinate clause to the preceding. The NET Bible makes it start a new sentence but only because of the length and complexity of the Greek.) The implication? Those who are justified freely (v. 24) are the ‘all’ of v. 23. *If the ‘all’ are all sinners, then everyone is justified. Salvation is universal, regardless of what one believes. But this view stands in direct contradiction with the testimony of the NT: ‘there is no other name under heaven by which people can be saved’; more specifically, Rom 3.22—‘the righteousness of God comes... to all who believe.’* When Paul prays for his fellow Jews in Rom 9, he wishes that he could be sent to hell if that would save but one of them! Why would this even be contemplated if everyone is saved?

Now, an important implication of all this is the following: although Paul is restricting the ‘all’ in v 23 to believers, this is certainly a verse that we can use when sharing the gospel. Why? Because Paul earlier declared that everyone was a sinner; here he declares that all believers are *still* sinners. If a person wants to get saved, he or she must first admit that they are sinners. So, in *significance*, this verse is applicable to all people, though in *meaning* it relates only to believers.

Paul then switches between the aorist (past) tense and the present tense: “for all *have sinned* and *fall short* of the glory of God.” This tense change is significant. It indicates that although all believers *have sinned*, we still fail to reach God through our own righteousness. *We are still totally depraved sinners!* ‘All have sinned and still continue to fall short.’ How is such a motley crew to be saved?

That topic we will take up next time. Suffice it to say here that Paul’s overarching purpose in Romans, I believe, is to vindicate God’s righteousness. He will deal with that issue in the following verses more explicitly. If we understand Paul’s intent on this, I think it will become easier for us to see what justification by faith is all about.

¹⁷ “The faith of Jesus Christ” really is a poor translation because it doesn’t communicate anything. Sometimes the ambiguity of the Greek *must* be translated or else the English is nonsensical.

What Does it Mean to be Justified? A Brief Exposition of Romans 3.21-26, Part 2

Daniel B. Wallace, Th.M., Ph.D.

Paul concluded the first half of this pericope by stating that we have all sinned and continue to fall short of God's glory. As I argued in Part 1, I believe that Paul is restricting his referent to believers in v. 23. The question we concluded with last time was, How are we—whose past lives are summarized by sin and whose present lives are still mired in it—to be saved? Paul answers this in v. 24.

3.24—"being freely justified by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

James Edwards, in his commentary on Romans in the New International Biblical Commentary, sums up the significance of this text: "In all Scripture there is probably no verse which captures the essence of Christianity better than this one.... Everything in verse 23 was due to humanity; everything in verse 24 depends on God."¹

The first two words in Greek are best translated, 'being freely justified' or 'although they are freely justified.' The most natural way to read this text is to see the 'all' of v. 23 as the all who are justified. But this means either that the 'all' are everyone, leading to universal salvation, or the 'all' are believers, and v. 24 is already pre-restricted in its application. Most exegetes prefer the former view, but I suspect that this is largely due to a lack of wrestling with the force of *all* and how it relates to v. 22 (see comments in Part 1 of this exposition).

What does it mean to be justified? Roman Catholics and Protestants are divided over this issue. Catholicism generally regards justification to mean *imparted righteousness* while Protestants generally take it to mean *imputed righteousness*. The difference is important: if imparted, then God *makes* us righteous. If imputed, then God *declares* us to be righteous. If imparted, then there is no assurance of salvation since God does not make us righteous immediately. If imputed, there is indeed assurance of salvation since the legal declaration of our righteousness is the divine statement about our *status*, not about our *practice*. Lest we think, however, that the Reformed view is automatically correct, we would do well to pause and wrestle with the history of interpretation of this passage. As far as I am aware, it was not until the Reformation that anyone in church history—from the second century on—viewed justification as imputed righteousness. Even Augustine, whom Protestants look to almost as a Luther before Luther, did not hold to this forensic view of justification.

At the same time, I align myself strongly with the Reformed Protestant tradition on this. If our exegesis up to this point is correct, then to 'justify' almost surely means 'to declare righteous.' Here's why: The 'all who believe' (22) are also the all who have sinned and continue to fall short of the glory of God (23). And those who fall short are also those who are justified—*while they are falling short!* This can only mean that God *declares* us righteous before him. If it meant that he makes us righteous, Paul surely would not have used the *present tense* to say that we are falling short. The present tense in v. 23 ('fall short') indicates that we are sinning *simultaneously* with being justified.

The language of v. 24 also indicates this: 'freely,' 'by his grace,' and 'redemption.' Now although 'freely' and 'by his grace' could refer to God changing us, making us better, by his grace, 'redemption' cannot. That is a word that comes from the slave market: when a person was redeemed, he was *set free* from his slavery. *If I set a slave free, I don't change his character. I change his status.* The language of v. 24 speaks eloquently of this fact! *If Paul had meant that God makes us righteous, he surely would have said something like 'being justified... through the energizing of God in your lives.'*

This is one of the most precious truths in all of scripture. When we are saved, God first and foremost changes our *status*. He looks at the shed blood of Christ and regards his death as the perfect work, the perfect sacrifice, that covered all of our sins—past, present, and future. We are justified—to use Paul's language—even while we are sinners, even while we are continually falling short of God's glory. In other words, our salvation does not depend on our works. There is no work we can do to get ourselves saved and no work we can do to keep ourselves saved. We are declared righteous before God our judge because Christ has paid the price for our sin. It's that simple.

I would regard [Rom 3.24](#) as a great clarification on what the gospel means in terms of God's justice. Much of the New Testament speaks of our *organic* connection to Christ. Paul, in fact, coined the key phrase that expresses this: 'in Christ.' That is how salvation is almost exclusively viewed by many: we are in Christ and he is in us. It is certainly a true and good picture of salvation, but it's not the only picture. The problem, of course, is that some branches of the Christian faith (namely, Catholics and Orthodox) put such a focus on the organic that they forget about the forensic. The difficulty this creates is that *how* one gets 'in' is often a bit muddled. On the other hand, Protestants historically have put such an emphasis on the forensic that they forget about the organic. Thus, our communion with Christ is often neglected. This is especially seen in how Protestants observe the Lord's Table

(namely, infrequently!). And only within Protestantism is there the notion that the Eucharist is just a memorial, devoid of bringing real grace to the individual.

Paul focuses in chapters 3 and 4 on the forensic side of salvation. In chapter 5, he will begin to switch to the organic. When he gets into sanctification full steam, our organic connection to Christ is what drives his theology. It is a tragic thing that today the body of Christ is fractured over this very issue. But for Paul, forensics and organics, though distinct, were inseparable.

3.25—“God publicly displayed him at his death as the mercy seat accessible through faith. This was to demonstrate his righteousness, because God in his forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed” (NET).

The word translated ‘mercy seat’ is *ἱλαστήριον* (*hilasterion*). Most versions render it ‘propitiation’ or ‘expiation.’ ‘Propitiation’ would mean ‘an act of placating God’s wrath,’ while ‘expiation’ would soften the notion of God’s wrath but would still refer to an act of atonement. The NET Bible has been influenced by a doctoral thesis done at Cambridge University by Daniel P. Bailey (1999: “Jesus as the Mercy Seat: The Semantics and Theology of Paul’s Use of *Hilasterion* in [Romans 3:25](#)”). The author argued that both ‘propitiation’ and ‘expiation’ are improper translations here. Bailey notes that “a *ἱλαστήριον* is always a thing—never an idea or an action or an animal.”² The language is metaphorical, but it moves in one direction: Christ is not the literal mercy seat of course, but represents it. And the mercy seat was where man met God once a year, on the Day of Atonement. Bailey convincingly argued that *hilasterion* here means *mercy seat* rather than ‘propitiation.’

Why was this *publicly* displayed? The imagery says what the Gospels say: the temple curtain was torn from top to bottom, revealing that access to God is now available to all (cf. [Mark 15.38](#)). In Christ all have free access to God. And since all of us come to the mercy seat directly, there is no longer any need for priests.

“for a demonstration of his righteousness.” Paul is still concerned about God’s righteousness throughout this whole section. Here he is indicating that the death of Christ is the fulfillment, in type, of the Old Testament. He is the perfect sacrifice that Yom Kippur looked forward to.

“because of the overlooking of sins previously committed.” Rather than the cross and Paul’s gospel being a lowering of the holiness of God, it establishes it! In the Old Testament, sins were overlooked or deliberately disregarded. It is, in fact, only in the cross where God fully satisfies his own righteous anger against sin, and thus demonstrates his righteousness. We must never think that the cross is a lowering of God’s standards; rather, it establishes his holiness like nothing in the sacrificial system ever could.

3.26—“This was also to demonstrate his righteousness in the present time, so that he would be just and the justifier of the one who lives because of Jesus’ faithfulness.”

Literally, “toward a demonstration of his righteousness in the present time.” This phrase looks back to ‘for a demonstration of his righteousness’ in v. 25: God’s righteousness is not at risk because of the cross.

“so that he would be just and the justifier....” *Justifier* is a participle in Greek and can function either adjectivally (essentially like a noun) or adverbially. If adjectival, the force would be “and the justifier.” If adverbial, the idea may be “even while justifying.” The adverbial notion presents a very satisfying theological sense: Christ’s death is so final that Paul can now declare that God ‘is just even while justifying’ the one who lives because of Jesus’ faithfulness. This may be Paul’s meaning, but the grammatical structure is better taken with an adjectival force.

“the one who lives because of Jesus’ faithfulness”—the translation of this phrase depends on how it was taken in 3.22. Most translations have “the one who [lives] *by faith in* Jesus.” But if the genitive is subjective, as the NET Bible has it, then the idea is “the one who [lives] because of Jesus’ faithfulness.”

The point either way is that *God’s righteousness is intact even while he accepts sinners into his presence*. But we see the principle that all the Old Testament sacrifices point to and Jesus fulfills: death of an innocent victim is required as a substitute if sinners are to have life with God. In other words, *there is no life without death*. And all the Old Testament sacrifices only *pointed* to Christ; with his death comes the final sacrifice. There can be no more because he fulfilled them all!

In terms of application, one thing we must recognize from this passage: God is *not* angry with his children. The payment for our sins has been paid, once for all, in the death of his Son. May he grant us the grace to quit playing games with him—of trying to impress him or hide from him our sins. We must never forget that the *basis* of our relationship with God is the cross. May God grant us grace to pour contempt on all our pride and to embrace the cross as the only route to his loving presence.

¹James R. Edwards, *Romans*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992) 102.

²Quoted in Bailey’s summary of his dissertation in *Tyndale Bulletin* 51 (2000) 155.