

Romans 3:21-31

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Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0 : 00] Please join me if you would in your copy of God's Word in Romans chapter 3. Our text for today's study will be Romans chapter 3 verses 21 through 31.

We have spent quite a bit of time in our study of the book of Romans considering the guilt of all mankind. Paul begins making this case in chapter 1 and verse 18 where he states, For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

And he concludes his case at verse 20 of last week's text in chapter 3. He wants to be so clear that anyone, whether Jewish, of Jewish descent or otherwise, lives under the curse of sin.

He says in Romans chapter 2 and verse 12, For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law. And all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.

I stated last week that he is doing all of this because this is the reasonable starting point from which to prove his thesis, which we will look at thoroughly and repeatedly throughout the entirety of this letter, in which he states in chapter 1 verse 16 and 17, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

[1 : 36] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. He is going to unpack that across all these chapters of the book of Romans.

If you have been hearing anything that Paul is saying in these first three chapters, then you will understand that the unfortunate state of your soul, apart from the intervening work of Jesus Christ, is a desperate state because the wrath of God awaits you.

And this is a frightful thing. And this is the due penalty for our sin. It's good and proper that God would punish rebellious people. All of mankind has a huge problem that only finds its remedy in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

But praise be to God that we have reached the point in Paul's writing where he begins to unpack the good news of his thesis, now having spent such time on the bad news.

But we must know the bad news for the good news to be as good as it truly is. Martin Luther said of Romans chapter 3, verse 21 through 31, that it is the chief point and the very central place of the epistle and of the whole Bible.

[3 : 01] I do hope that you will engage with the text this morning to either, number one, believe for the first time in the gospel of Jesus Christ and find the remedy for your sinful state, or, number two, to be encouraged by the gospel of Jesus Christ and pressed into grateful service.

So let's read the text together. If you'll follow along with me before I read it, let me remind you, beloved, that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and our good, so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands.

Paul says, But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it. The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 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. 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.

[4 : 26] Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means. On the contrary, we uphold the law. Now, this is a lot of text.

And this morning I will divide the text into two halves, each with some additional divisions. We have quite a bit of ground to cover, so I'll move fairly quickly.

In fact, these 11 verses, I think could have warranted three sermons. It's kind of where my mind was settling in on it. But I'm going to take a sabbatical starting tomorrow and we'll be gone for a month.

[5 : 35] And I really want to finish chapter 3. I really want to talk about the entirety of the text. And it would be really disjointed, I think, to only do a bit of it and wait a whole month to pick back up on the rest of it.

And so I'm telling you all of this so that you'll buckle in and get ready because we're going to move fairly quickly through the text. So the two kind of simple divisions for the text, number one is doctrine.

This is a good old puritanical division here. Number one, doctrine, we find in verses 21 through 26. And number two, application, which we find in verses 27 through the end of the chapter.

So let's look first at the doctrine in the text. We see this phrase at the beginning of verse 21, the righteousness of God, which if you've been sitting in our teaching of Romans should sound familiar to you.

This exact phrasing, the righteousness of God. I hope that it sends off signals in your mind. Where have we heard it? Even just this morning, did we not hear it?

[6 : 47] In Romans chapter 1 and verse 17. Verse 16, Paul says he's not ashamed of the gospel or he's proud of the gospel because it's the power of God for salvation.

For, verse 17, in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, right? So he's come back to this idea, right?

He's continuing to explain what he means by the righteousness of God. Paul has been laboring to tell us why we cannot accomplish the righteousness required by God so that we will seek to understand that we need the righteousness of God.

If that word for you is new, think right living. Perfect right living would be a way perhaps to say it. I will tell you this week that my hands got pretty good at typing out the word righteousness. I got as many times as I had to correct it. It's a more complicated word than perhaps it needs to be, but it's a biblical word so we need to understand it.

[7 : 59] So think perfect right living. We can't do this on our own. We need a righteousness that comes from outside ourselves.

A righteousness that Luther called an alien righteousness, a foreign righteousness. But not just any. If we are to stand in the day of judgment, we will need a particular righteousness, the righteousness of God.

If we are to survive God's perfect judgment, then we must be perfect. And we will not accomplish this of our own effort. And, praise be to God, we don't have to.

For we have and would utterly fail to do so. This consideration of the righteousness of God is salve to a weary soul.

We all know that apart from the righteousness of God, we are all guilty before God. Look up just a couple of verses from today's text, verse 19 and 20.

[9 : 12] There Paul says, Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight since through the law comes knowledge of sin. We have littles sitting in our hearing right now, and perhaps many of them aren't really aware of their sinfulness.

But if you are not a little, if you understand the things that are coming out of my mouth right now, you are fully aware that you have done things that are wrong.

You have been told that they are wrong, and you agree that they were wrong. This is the way that the law serves us, to help us to know that we are sinners, to make evident our guilt, and to point us

somewhere else, to take us outside of ourselves, to look elsewhere for righteousness. It points us to the righteousness of God, or we hope and pray that it does. In the first six verses of today's text, Paul tells us seven things about the righteousness of God.

[10:39] So, those of you who are more familiar with my outlines, here we actually go. Number one, and these will be brief. Number one, the righteousness of God is not found in the law.

First half of verse 21. Paul has repeated this quite a bit throughout the end of chapter 2, and now he's saying it again. Now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law. So, we have seen the righteousness of God, but it didn't come from the law. It came apart from the law. Now, this has been largely established over the past weeks and previous texts of Romans. We cannot be made righteous by the law because we cannot keep the law. It's not possible that we might have the righteousness of God because we inherited a nature. We are inclined to sin. And as I've said, we all have. Romans 3 and verse 10, there Paul says, none is righteous, no, not one.

[11:49] So, this righteousness of God is not found in keeping God's law. Second thing Paul tells us about the righteousness of God is that it is spoken of in the Old Testament.

And there's an inclination in me to spend an entire week on the last half of verse 21, but I won't. I'm reigning it in for you. But there he says, although the law and the prophets bear witness, to it. And if you're looking at an ESV, copy of God's Word, you will see law and prophets capitalized in the last half of verse 21, but law in lowercase in the first half.

Why might the translators have made this decision? The Greek certainly wasn't capitalized or not. They did so because Paul here is referring to the law as God's moral law in the first part of verse 21, but in the last part, he's talking about the Scripture in total.

It's a very common phrase to refer to the Bible of Paul's day as the law and the prophets. So the law doesn't serve our righteousness by keeping it, but it does, the law, the Bible itself, bears witness to it, to the righteousness of God.

[13:16] Specifically, it bears witness to the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ, this righteousness that's been manifested apart from the law.

The God-man, Jesus Christ, who lived the life that's required of us, that we might have his righteousness. This is who the law and prophets bear witness to.

Jesus is the snake crusher of Genesis chapter 3. He is the Passover lamb of Exodus 12. He is the defeater of our enemy in 1 Samuel 17.

He is the price paid for Gomer in Hosea chapter 3. He is the greater Moses and the greater David. The whole of the Bible, I want to give you a thousand more examples, is meant to press our minds to the coming, now arrived, and soon coming again King Jesus.

of great value. And the Jews of Paul's day loved the Scripture. They tried to orient their lives by it. They thought that in the Bible itself they might become righteous.

[14:30] And Paul's unraveling that for them. And I think in our day, a people who have much of the Bible access to it in many ways and forms.

It's just incredible the way you can access the Scripture. in our day. That we would think that in them we have righteousness when they are pointing us to Christ.

Jesus said to the Pharisees in John chapter 5 and verse 39, you search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.

And he's not condemning the search of the Scriptures. What a wonderful thing to do, to spend our lives in this text. But they thought the text itself was providing eternal life for them and their feeble attempts to obey it.

And he goes on to say, and it is they that bear witness about me. The law and the prophets bear witness, notice the phrasing is the same, to Christ himself, the righteousness of God.

[15:40] The third thing that Paul says about the righteousness of God is that it is granted through faith. You see this in the first part of verse 22. The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

I have stated and will state repeatedly that the theme of this letter is that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. It is by believing in the person and the work of Jesus.

Both who he is and the things that he accomplish that we have the record of our sins expunged and are granted the righteousness of God.

Our guilt record taken away, Jesus paid the penalty for that sin and he has given to us his perfect law keeping. This is that alien righteousness that we need to stand before God in the day of judgment.

You cannot merely believe whatever you may want despite what our pluralistic society may tell you. If you are to be saved from God's wrath and reconcile to him, you must do so on his terms.

[16:56] Jesus says in John chapter 14 and verse 6, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

What's he talking about there? Except by believing in who I am and what I have accomplished on behalf of all those who will believe.

So the righteousness of God is granted through faith. Fourthly, the righteousness of God is not partial.

You see this in verse 22, the last part, and into verse 23. There Paul says, for there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

So regardless of your ethnic identity or nationality, no matter your background, you are a son or daughter of Adam and therefore guilty of the sin of Adam and your own sin on top of that.

[18:04] But, regardless of your ethnic identity or nationality, no matter your background, you can be called a son or daughter of God by faith in a faithful older brother.

There's no distinction made by the free offer of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It does not matter from where you came. God created you and he calls you to himself to believe in the gospel of Jesus.

Fifthly, we see that the righteousness of God is acquired by grace. grace. It is acquired by grace. The first part of verse 24.

We are justified. There's that word I explained a moment ago. By his grace as a gift. And the word grace means this free gifting of something for our favor.

But Paul wants to be sure that we understand that it is a gift. We're justified by his grace as a gift. Justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

[19:19] This is not a thing that we muster up on our own. Belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ is a gift that is granted to us. Oh, that God would grant it to us all.

Paul tells elsewhere, Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 8, for by grace you have been saved through faith. And this, he's referring there to the faith, is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.

The gracious gift of God is the faith itself that we would believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The sixth thing that we learn from Paul about the righteousness of God is that it is bought with a price.

The last part of verse 24 says, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Now, the word for redemption was often used of paying a price to free a captive from his captors or to free a slave from his master.

Often, the person who carried that price was called a redeemer. You may have heard of Jesus being called the redeemer, and he is both the redeemer and he is the redemption price itself.

[20:44] We who once, or this morning perhaps are enslaved to sin, held captive by the ruler of this world, Jesus has paid the penalty, paid the price that we might be redeemed.

Paul writes in Colossians chapter 1 verse 13 and following, Jesus has delivered us from the domain of darkness, the ruling of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness righteousness, of sins.

Jesus paid the penalty for our sin with his own life, bearing on our behalf all of the wrath that was due to our sin.

The seventh thing that we learn, the righteousness of God is purchased by an atoning sacrifice. sacrifice. And we see this in verse 25 and 26.

Here Paul says that through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

[22:10] Propitiation, not an easy word to say and not often used, but I hope it's a word that will be loved by you. A propitiation.

The word propitiation carries with it the idea of appeasement or satisfaction of wrath. Wrath that was due us.

Wrath that all those who die and stand before the judgment of God, apart from Christ, will suffer eternal wrath for the appeasement of God.

God is just and he is right to punish sin. The Bible speaks much of this judgment and of the wrath of God.

We see it in Revelation chapter 14 verse 17 and following. John's vision, he says, then another angel came out of the temple in heaven and he too had a sharp sickle.

[23 : 10] And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle. Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.

So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the great harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. God, I think that should make all of us shudder.

The idea of us as grapes being placed in a winepress. Grapes do not stand up to the pressure of a winepress.

No grape has ever willed itself out of a winepress or pressed back against the smooshing of the grape. And then verse 20 says, and the winepress was trodden outside the city and blood flowed from the winepress.

John's vision turns off the metaphor to be very clear about what is meant by this judgment. Those who are not saved in Christ will be destroyed and will be destroyed forever, forever, continually, forever, to appease the wrath of God.

[24 : 35] But rather, in Christ, we have Christ as a propitiation, a satisfier of God's wrath for us. So that when we stand in the judgment, and we declare not a righteousness of our own, but a righteousness that is Christ that's granted to us, God doesn't punish our sin in us, because he already punished it in Christ.

See, Paul goes on to say, this, this putting forth of Christ as the propitiation, was to show God's righteousness, his right living, right keeping, because in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins.

What Paul is referring there is to people who were saved in Christ because they placed hope that somehow the sacrificial system, the slaying of lambs and bulls and goats, somehow was covering their sin.

They believed in future promise. Also, it was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just, that he might rightly punish sin, and the justifier, the one who declares righteous, of the one who has faith in Jesus.

And this is such an important thing to understand, that God does not merely dismiss our sin, right? He doesn't just overlook it and say, well, it's okay, because it's not okay.

[26 : 21] if God is to be a just judge, he must punish our sin. If we are to not be punished forever for our sin, somehow God has to punish our sin.

How does he do it? By putting forth Jesus Christ as a propitiation. The God man, Jesus Christ, bearing the wrath of God on our behalf on the cross.

All of God's wrath poured out on him that we might have our sins expunged and his righteousness given to us. I once heard this great analogy.

If you've been here long, you've heard it before. I hope it won't bother you much to hear it again. Of imagining God's wrath, his eternal wrath that is due our sin, by imagining that you're standing in a dry river bed at the bottom of a massive dam.

And this dam is holding back immense amounts of water. The dam is so tall that you can't see the height of it, and it's so wide to either direction that you can't see the end of it, and you know it holds back a crushing weight.

[27 : 41] And as you stand there and you peer up at this and you consider the weight of the water behind this dam, it begins to crack and suddenly it bursts forth. And all of that water comes bearing down on you.

You're not going to outrun this water. There's nothing that you're going to be able to do to escape from the crushing weight of this water. And just as it's about to crush you, you close your eyes, you're ready to take it on, a hole opens up in front of you, and all of that water goes rushing to your amazement into this massive hole in front of you.

It rushes in, it rushes in, it rushes in. And this is what Jesus did on the cross for you if you believe by faith that he did. He drinks to the very last drop the wrath of God that was due you, and when he was finished, he turned the cup over, he slammed it down and declared it is finished.

He accomplished that for you if you would just believe in him. William Reese wrote a wonderful hymn, maybe we'll sing it here someday, called Here is Love in 1876, and this is the second verse

of that song.

He writes, on the mount of crucifixion fountains opened deep and wide. Through the floodgates of your mercy flowed a vast and gracious tide.

[29 : 12] Here is love, like mighty rivers poured unceasing from above, heaven's peace and perfect justice kissed a guilty world in love.

The righteousness of God is a thing that each of us desperately needs and does not deserve, and yet God has loved his creation enough to make a way that we might have it.

So there's the doctrine. Second big point. I just did three. Second big point. Application. It must be time for a sabbatical if I hold up three fingers and say secondly.

Application. So a few things to pull out of the rest of the text. So beginning in verse 27, the righteousness of God excludes boasting in ourselves.

Paul says that very frankly here in verse 27, then what becomes of our boasting? It's excluded. It cannot exist. By what kind of law?

[30 : 19] By a law of works? One that we couldn't keep? No. By a law of faith. We have believed that someone else did the work for us, and this excludes our boasting.

Beloved, we ought to be the most humble people on the planet. Really understanding who we once were and what has been accomplished for us should make us incredibly humble.

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. We did not accomplish it. We could not accomplish it. We never would have.

If Christ wasn't holding me fast now, I would certainly leave. I read previously Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 8, which says, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.

Paul goes on in verse 9 to say, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Our salvation is monergistic.

[31 : 26] God does it, and he does it because he deserves all the glory for doing it. I don't get a shred of the glory. God made the way possible, and he did all the things, and then I got on board.

I get none of it. God says in Isaiah chapter 48, my glory I will not give to another. Paul says in Galatians 6 verse 14, far be it for me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There he says, there's a thing to boast in, what God has done on our behalf. So we ought to be humble, and I'm not saying that we don't stand for the truth, but we stand on it because it is God's truth, not because it is ours.

Secondly, the righteousness of God promotes ethnic harmony and missions to the ends of the earth. I know some of you would like to be way deep into this one today, and I'm not going to.

Here Paul says, is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also. Categorically dividing people into two ethnic groups, Jews and everyone else.

[32 : 49] And he's saying that God doesn't show favor in granting righteousness just to one ethnic group, but to all ethnic groups.

Because God is one, verse 30, and he will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. If you're to come to God, you will come by faith.

There's one way that it will be accomplished. This is why Christians should be eager to share the gospel with all peoples everywhere, that we would not shy away from such a thing because our God is a God who saves.

Matthew 28, verse 19, just says, go therefore and make disciples of all nations. All ethnos, and there's a lot of disagreement about what that means exactly, but we know it can mean that we're going to share the gospel with people who aren't just like us.

We're going to go, and we're going to share. This is a beautiful vision of heaven, again from John, Revelation chapter 7, verse 9 and 10, where he says, I looked and behold a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.

[34 : 22] That'll be the great desire of every Christian, that God will be praised amongst all peoples everywhere. This is why Paul says, right, 1 and verse 16, I am not ashamed of the gospel.

I've been saying to you in the positive, I am proud of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to everyone else.

We, like Paul, should be proud of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation. And third application, the righteousness of God changes our hearts.

So, to be clear, we are not justified, made righteous by the law. We cannot be. It is not sufficient for the task.

We need an alien righteousness. We need the righteousness of Christ granted to us. But if we have it, if we have it, then our hearts have been changed.

[35 : 33] And this is going to work itself out in our lives. Look at verse 31. Paul says, do we then overthrow the law by this faith?

He's saying, do we disregard it altogether? The moral commands of God, do we just toss them aside? And he says, by no means. Me genoito.

It's very, very strong. It's an expletive Greek phrase. It's a strong phrase. Absolutely not. On the contrary, we uphold.

Have been made righteous in Christ, we uphold the law. In Ezekiel chapter 11, verse 19, their God says, I will give them one heart and a new spirit I will put within them.

I remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people and I will be their God.

[36 : 42] And later in Ezekiel 36, in verse 27, he says, I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

God rules over us by his word and it's a good word. These are not burdensome commandments, they're good commandments that we ought to keep. By faith in his son, we're given the spirit that we would both know and desire and be empowered to keep his commands.

Jesus says in John 14 and verse 15, if you love me, if your passion has been turned toward me and away from this world, you will keep my commandments.

It becomes the outflow of grateful hearts, changed lives. we were oriented in a different direction that we might be a people for the praise of our God.

The righteousness of God changes our hearts. So may we be a people who believe the gospel of Jesus Christ so that we will possess the righteousness of God and stand in the judgment so that we will be humble and boast only in the cross of Christ.

[38 : 04] So we will be a people who are not ashamed of the gospel and carry this good news across ethnic boundaries and oceans and so that we will be a people of changed heart who desire to walk in God's good commands.

Let's pray together. Thank you.