

# Romans – Justified through faith

## Week 8 – Romans 3:21-31 (God’s righteousness revealed)

### Introduction

Paul’s writing about the human predicament from 1:18 to 3:20 provides no ray of light, no flicker of hope and no prospect of rescue; “but now” (v21), Paul suddenly breaks in, God himself has intervened.

The ‘now’ can have three meanings, the logical (the developing argument), the chronological (the present time) and the eschatological (the new age has arrived).

Paul begins by portraying the revelation of God’s righteousness in Christ’s cross and lays the foundations of the gospel of justification. He then defends this gospel against Jewish critics.

Next week Paul illustrates this in the life of Abraham, the spiritual father of all who believe.

“Possibly the most important single paragraph ever written.”  
- Dr. Leon Morris, referring to Rom 3:21-26

“Grace is God loving, God stooping, God coming to the rescue, God giving himself generously in and through Jesus Christ.”  
- John R. W. Stott

### **1. God’s righteousness revealed in Christ’s Cross. (v21-26)**

The opposite of justification is condemnation – both are pronouncements of a judge.

“...justification is not merely to remit that punishment, but to declare that punishment cannot be justly inflicted... Pardon and Justification therefore are essentially distinct. The one is the remission of punishment, the other is a declaration that no ground for the infliction of punishment exists.” – C. H. Hodge

To justify is to pronounce righteous not *make* righteous, sanctification is to *make* righteous.

Paul has three truths about justification.

- a. Source – where does it come from?
- b. Grounds – what does it rest on?
- c. Means – how is it received?

- a. The source of our justification is: God and His grace

Fundamental to the gospel of salvation is the truth that the saving initiative from beginning to end belongs to God the Father. Our justification is *freely by his grace*, his absolutely free and utterly undeserved favour.

- b. The grounds of our justification is: Christ and His cross

If God justifies sinners freely by his grace, on what grounds does he do so? How is it possible for the righteous God to declare the unrighteous to be righteous without either compromising his righteousness or condoning their unrighteousness? The answer is the cross.

The only reason God ‘justifies the wicked’ is that ‘Christ dies for the wicked’. Because he shed his blood in a sacrificial death for us sinners, God is able justly to justify the unjust.

Associated with the cross, therefore, there is a redemption of sinners, an atonement of God’s wrath and a demonstration of his justice.

- i. Redemption (v24) – a word borrowed from the marketplace. Used in the Old Testament of slaves who were purchased to be set free, also used of Israel when they were redeemed from captivity in Egypt. Jesus redeemed us with his blood.
  - ii. Atonement (v25) the Greek is better translated as ‘Propitiation’ (*def*: to conciliate an offended power; to appease). – It would be hard to exaggerate the differences between the pagan and Christian views of propitiation! Pagans view humans as trying to placate the bad-tempered deities with their paltry offerings. For Christians God’s own great love propitiated his own holy wrath through the gift of his own dear Son, who took our place, bore our sins and died our death. Thus God gave himself to save us from himself.
  - iii. Demonstration (v25) – The cross was a demonstration or public revelation as well as an achievement. The cross should be enough to break the hardest heart, and melt the iciest.
- c. The means of our justification is: Faith  
 The value of faith is not to be found in itself, but entirely and exclusively in it’s object, namely Jesus Christ. Faith is the eye that looks to him, the hand that receives his free gift, the mouth that drinks the living water. Faith’s only function is to receive what grace offers.

**2. God’s righteousness defended against criticism (v27-31)**

Paul now re-opens his ‘diatribe’ as he anticipates a fresh set of Jewish questions.

- i. Where then is boasting? (v27-28)  
 All human being are inveterate boasters, not just the Jews. It’s the language of fallen self-centredness. It’s excluded – except for boasting in Christ.
- ii. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of gentiles too? (v29-30)  
 What the Jews forgot was that their privileges were not intended for the exclusion of the Gentiles, but for their ultimate inclusion when through Abraham’s posterity ‘all peoples on earth’ would be blessed (see Gen 12:2)
- iii. Do we nullify the law by this faith? (v31)  
 ‘Not at all’ – justified believers who live according to the Spirit fulfil the righteous requirements of the law.

“God, because in his mercy he willed to forgive sinful men, and being truly merciful, willed to forgive them righteously, that is, without in any way condoning their sin, purposed to direct against his very Self in the person of his Son the full weight of that righteous wrath which they deserved.”  
 - Charles Cranfield

“If the gospel of justification by faith alone excludes all boasting it excludes all elitism and discrimination also.”  
 - John R. W. Stott

Q1. Do we still try to earn our salvation? If so how?

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Q2. How can we consistently preach a gospel of grace and not works?

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**Memory Verse: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” – Romans 3: 23**