

Romans 3:21—31 Justification Apart from the Law

Paul first builds the case that all men everywhere in all generations are sinners and have nothing good in them, whether Jew or Gentile, under the Law or outside of the Law, circumcised or uncircumcised. He then explains that the Law condemns those who trust in the Law for their righteousness for the Law only makes the sin worse. It has no power to help a person be obedient and therefore righteous. If left here, there would be absolutely no hope for anyone because our old nature only offers death. Fortunately, Paul continues by explaining that God has supplied to us righteousness outside the realm of the Law.

Verse 21

Paul begins this section with the words “But now.” This indicates a change from before this time. It acts as a border between two different time periods. This marks a change in how God deals with man. Before this time He was dealing with man according to the Law and the Prophets. The Gentile needed to come to the Jews in order to approach God. **But now** because of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection, and with the revelation of the Mystery to Paul, the Gentiles are now able to come directly to Jesus Christ outside the sphere of Judaism.

Ephesians 2:11—16 ¹¹Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands--
¹²remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new

It is outside of the Law that we find God’s righteousness being revealed. The Law was used to show the Jews that they could not become righteous by obeying the Law because no one was capable of fully complying with the Law. By breaking one small element of the Law you are found guilty of breaking the whole Law and therefore stand condemned. By having the Law make sin even more sinful, the need for righteousness outside of the Law was made apparent.

Romans 7:13b ...Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

It was apart from the Law that the righteousness of God is manifested. The righteousness of God did not begin with the doing away of the Law but was made visible or made clear. His righteousness is eternal being a part of His very essence. His righteousness was embodied in the person of Jesus at His incarnation (1 Corinthians 1:20) and was made available to all men at the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21). However, it was not clearly spelled out for all to understand until it was revealed through Paul. This righteousness was attested by the Law and the prophets meaning they showed that righteousness came from God and not the Law. We can see this principle in Abraham, Genesis 14:6; David, Psalm 32:1; Cornelius, Acts 10:43.

Verse 22

Verse 21 tells us that God’s righteousness has been extended to us, and verse 22 shows us how this righteousness has been extended to sinners. The truth of what this verse is saying is obscured by poor translations. This righteousness of God comes through the faith OF Jesus Christ not faith IN Him. The original says “πιστεωσ 'Ιησου” literally “faith Jesus.” We can’t tell if it is faith of Jesus, faithfulness of Jesus or faith in Jesus. The Greek is in the genitive case (or possessive case) that could indicate it is Jesus who is the possessor of the faith, and singular because it is referencing only one person. Whether it should be in or on needs to be translated from the context and it is often acceptable to translate it either way. We have seen this difference in Romans 1:17 where we find God’s righteousness is revealed from faith to faith. It is out of God’s faith (or faithfulness) that we can have faith in Him. I believe verse 22 dovetails perfectly with 1:17 making God the possessor of faith and the one who can give faith or the one who is faithful. In this case I believe God’s righteousness is the result of Jesus Christ’s faithfulness in being

obedient and going to the cross for our sins. Without His faithfulness we would not be able to have God's righteousness imputed.

2 Timothy 2:13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.

We know faith is a gift of God from Ephesians 2:8—9. We don't work to receive faith but because of God's faith we will believe. The word *believe* is the Greek word "πιστευοντασ" and is a form of the word used for faith. If I have faith then I believe. This word is an active voice form (instead of passive) meaning it is action done by the subject. In this case the individual is the one who is believing. However, this word is also plural meaning there are a number of individuals who are believing.

The idea that our faith in Christ comes out of Christ's faithfulness is found in Galatians 2:16:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith **of** Jesus Christ, even we have believed **in** Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith **of** Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (KJV)

Verses 23—24

Paul digresses a bit and reminds us that we are all sinners. This is a summary of what he wrote in 1:18—3:20. It only takes one sin from the best person in the world to make him a sinner. As sinners, we have all fallen short of God's glory whether we happen to be a Jew or Gentile and therefore we have all fallen short of God's standard.

As sinners, we lack the capacity to desire God the way God wants us to desire Him. We may try to approach God in the way we think He wants us to but it will be impossible for a sinner to do anything that pleases God. Since we lack the ability to come to God, God must come to us. He did this through the person of Jesus Christ and pulls us to Him by the work of the Holy Spirit. As we saw in the previous verses it is God who even gives us the faith to respond to Him. The unbeliever is unable to generate the faith to believe. God is the generator of man's faith that leads him to believing (See John 6:44, 65; Acts 13:48; Ephesians 2:8—9).

Man was created in the image of God. When he sinned, the image of God suffered. We were to be a reflection of God's glory but after sin we have fallen far short of that glory. However, by God's grace we who are believers are justified through the redemption found in Jesus Christ.

Justification is often defined as "Just as if I've never sinned." This is a gross simplification for the sake of an easily remembered mnemonic. Justification is the act of declaring the sinner righteous and therefore free from the penalty of sin and God's wrath. We are still sinners who are declared righteous because our sins were paid for. This is a work of God on the sinner through the work of Jesus Christ. There is nothing we can do to get God to justify us other than to respond to His faith by faith.

Grace is the source of our justification. It is because of God's grace that He put into motion the events necessary for us to be justified.

Romans 3:24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

The blood of Christ is the basis of our justification. In order for God to justify the sinner it was necessary for someone to pay our penalty. Jesus Christ's shed blood was the only payment that God would accept for our justification.

Romans 5:9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

Faith is the means of our justification.

Romans 3:28, 30 ²⁸For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. ³⁰since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

It is clear from verse 24 that Christ is the only means of our justification. Nothing else is able to justify a person. Those who try to please God in their own way are defining their own rules about what God would like. If we add to Christ's work we nullify His work. Our redemption rests in Jesus Christ alone.

Verses 25—26

Even though the term “displayed publicly” could be used to translate the Greek word “προεθετο” “previously purposed” could also have been used (Used in Romans 1:13 when Paul says he had previously purposed to visit the saints in Rome). This translation does not violate any other Scripture and it seems to fit in with verse 26 where He is showing His righteousness in this present time. This whole plan was conceived before the world began (Acts 2:23; Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20) and was brought to fruition with Christ’s death, burial and resurrection and finally announced through Paul. In between the planning and execution of the plan there were many who died with unresolved sin held to their account. God, in His patience and longsuffering passed over these sins until Jesus Christ could pay the debt of those sins. His death took care of all sins in the past and in the future. God is not bound by time. Our future is His past.

Propitiation is a satisfaction or an appeasement. It is the idea of turning aside wrath through a sacrifice. In this case it is Christ who was the sacrifice who turned God’s wrath away from believers. This word is also synonymous with the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant (Hebrews 9:5).

Christ’s death was a display of His righteousness. Through this act of love He showed Himself to be just (fair and equitable) and able or qualified to justify sinners. This was all done by the faith OF Jesus not faith IN Jesus and is probably best understood as the faithfulness of Jesus. It is through the faithfulness of Jesus that leads the sinner to have faith in Him.

Verse 27

Since all of these things are God acting upon the believer, Paul asks the questions: “How can you boast about your salvation?” There is nothing gained through the Law or through works but it all comes through the law of faith. This law of faith is a spiritual principle set up by God to bring the unbeliever to Him. This saving faith is not supplied by the believer but by God. If it were the faith of the future believer then there would be room for boasting. Since this verse precludes any room for boasting, this faith would need to come from God.

Verse 28

Our justification is completely apart from the Law. There is nothing we can do to help in this justification process because God, through Jesus Christ, has done it all. If we believe, we show our faith and that’s all we need to do to be counted as a believer. Since this work comes all from God, we can rest assured that we will be just as saved tomorrow as we are today. If salvation were even a little bit of our own work then we would always fear a loss of our salvation.

Verse 29—30

Paul assures the mixed group of Jews and Gentiles in the Roman church that God is the God of both who will justify anyone regardless of their national background and it is all through faith.

Notice the Jews are justified BY faith (or out of faith) and the Gentiles are justified THROUGH faith. It’s possible that the Jews who were much closer to God than the Gentiles and had all the opportunities to be close to God that the Gentiles did not that they were then justified out of their faith. The Gentiles, in the other hand, were far from the advantages held by the Jews and needed to come directly to God through faith, having come out of paganism and not being privy to opportunities of being close to God as the Jews were.

Verse 31

Since we are now saved strictly by faith outside of the Law Paul asks the next logical question: “Is the Law now nullified?”

The answer is absolutely not. The Law is still good even though it points out the sinfulness of the Jews. Through the Law came the knowledge of sin and the need for a Savior. If there was no Law, man would not be aware of how much God expects of us. The Law should point us to Christ.

Originally taught at Bethesda Sunday School November 15, 2009

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