

XX. Romans in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel of God
“The Righteousness of God: No Boasting – Part 2”
Romans 3:21–31
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August 15, 2021 • Sunday Morning Sermon

Our study is in Romans 3:21–26 but in order to understand the importance of this content in its context I want to read Romans 3:9–20 which says [9] *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, [10] as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; [11] no one understands; no one seeks for God. [12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” [13] “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” [14] “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” [15] “Their feet are swift to shed blood; [16] in their paths are ruin and misery, [17] and the way of peace they have not known.” [18] “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

[19] 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. [20] For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I’m always grateful for the hunger for God’s Word that so many of you evidence Lord’s Day after Lord’s Day. It’s a great privilege to preach God’s Word to you. I’m also grateful for pew patients and that is those who occupy the pew who patiently work through a text instead of just rush through it because of its importance and various reasons. I want to come back to the content from our last study and when you walk away from this study there will be three words of extraordinary gravitas of extraordinary life changing power that I want to make sure you embrace, hold fast to and understand.

There are a couple of pastoral reasons why I’m doing this. Number one is that we are obviously living in an age of theological downgrade. We are losing the integrity of Biblical, Gospel, preaching, teaching, confessing, not in the already apostate churches, but even in evangelical churches. We have a therapy gospel, a pragmatic gospel, prosperity gospel, moralistic gospel, legalistic gospel, libertine gospel and all kinds of false, adulterated versions of the Gospel. As much as I want to deal with this matter as I’m doing some in my series on progressive Christianity, the fact is, I can’t get around to all of them that are out there. Jesus told us at the end of His Olivet discourse that this would happen through false prophets and false teaching and not to be deceived. The Gospel is the foundation, the formation and the motivation of the Christian life and if Satan can get us off course or adulterate the Gospel then every other doctrine in the Word of God will be affected. So this text is a Gospel wrenched text of Scripture and I want to stay here because if we can grasp this then when all of this myriad of error filled gospel preaching comes no matter how wonderfully it’s packaged, you will be able to say ‘no, that’s not right’ and you will be able to understand and deal with it rightly.

Paul even told us this was coming for he told the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20:29–30, [29] *I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; [30] and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw*

away the disciples after them. So be on guard. Paul tells Timothy in I Timothy 4:16, *[16] Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.* Jude, Peter, James and all of the writers of the Scripture say it but think about how Jesus tells us so powerfully and pointedly that these false teachers will come so we need to be ready and test them. The best thing to do is to know the truth.

Pastorally, here is another reason. I sense I'm living in a era where so many things are sifting, shifting and sorting that even God's people are allowing unmet anxieties and fears to take hold of life. I understand there are concerns and I do a 10-minute program every day trying to address all that is going on today and to give a Christian world and life view as we talk about them. But these things ought not to control our lives or fill our hearts and souls. It is the joy of our salvation, the joy of the Lord, the triumph of Christ, the truth of His Word that ought to fill us to overflowing. We who know we're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, who know the glorious truth of the Gospel and what God has done in and through His Son, all of His promises and that He will work all things together for His glory, should not lead to a complacent life, but it does lead to a life where all the social, political, and cultural movements do not dictate our heart and soul. What dictates to our heart and soul is our God reigns. He has saved us and will not let us go. This is where we find our rest in Him.

This isn't new what is happening today for it has happened time and time again. Jesus warned us that it would come, does come and will come until He returns. Sometimes it has come with such veracity, such as it did in the 16th century and the state church, the professing church, had leadership that was utterly corrupt – ethically, sexually, power hungry. The clerical corruption was just heart breaking. The Gospel was shrouded. The people were manipulated. The truth wasn't being preached. Superstition reigned. False manipulative doctrine such as purgatory were being used, along with indulgences. There was no clear testimony of the Gospel being declared, but in the midst of all of that God raised up these Reformers who knew, understood, believed and proclaimed the Gospel. With the Gospel of grace as their foundation, formation and motivation they walked into the church of Jesus Christ to call her to the faithfulness of being on mission, on message and in ministry. Then from that church and out of that church was cut loose a movement that is still reverberating to this day that we are still being blessed by – the Reformation and all of its impact.

This is why I'm in this text. Calvin, from this Romans text says 'this is the lynch pin.' Luther, from this same text says 'this is the cardinal doctrine, how can man who is wrong with God be right with God and still be holy?' They built a whole Reformation from this paragraph in Romans 3. The Reformation was captured in these glorious truths – sola Scriptura (the Scripture alone is our only rule of faith and practice) – sola gratia (we're saved by grace alone) – sola fide (through faith alone) – sola Christus (in Christ alone) – sola Deo gloria (for the glory of God alone) – We're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. All of those truths are found in Romans 3:21–31. When the paragraph lays hold of your heart then the world and Satan cannot lay hold of your heart with his intimidation, infiltration and imitation, for you are filled with overflowing of who your God is and what your God has done to save you from your sins. Also, that God is both just and the Justifier in salvation.

Paul gave us a taste of this Gospel when he began this epistle of Romans in Romans 1:16–17 when he says *[16] 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. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."* Here he shows us this glorious Good News that the power of God has been arrayed to

save sinners from all of humanity and the righteousness of God has been displayed and revealed in order to secure those saved sinners and that they can never be lost. The holy God has satisfied that they are right with Him. That is all found in His Son Jesus Christ and it is brought to you by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then Paul takes three chapters to bring all of humanity to the Day of Christ's return – when He comes to bring judgment, the wrath of God against all sin. All men must appear before Him. Hebrews 9:27 says [27] *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.* God will render to every person according to their works on that Day so declares the Gospel. Paul has relentlessly dismantled every strategy and every excuse a person might have on that Day. At the end he gave the indictment and described the indicted. The indictment is that all (until God lays hold of you) are in this world as children of Adam under the law, sin, the wrath of God and helpless and hopeless. The indicted are displayed for there is none righteous, no not one. All have turned aside and none seek for God. There is not even the hint of the fear of God in their eyes – the way of peace they have not known. We are dead in our sins.

Paul gets to that point that in the courtroom where there is silence, for every mouth has been stopped and everyone is accountable. You can almost hear Paul's footsteps as he walks from the prosecuting table to the defense table and turning to look, not at the Judge, at us, saying 'But now...' As of right now, in this present time there is an answer and he describes it for us in Romans 3:21–26 so before I read this, I want you to hear this statement – the Good News of the Gospel for helpless and hopeless sinners that the power of God has provided a righteousness of God, in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, to the glory of God alone. Paul doesn't need to tell it to the Judge because the Judge is the One who has provided it. Paul is telling us the Good News and that he has something for us now.

Romans 3:21–26 says [21] *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested (appeared) 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.*

He starts out by showing the contrast of being under sin, under the law, under the wrath of God with no hope, no power or ability, being sinfully dead. In Romans 3:21 Paul is talking about Jesus and His appearing over 2000 years ago in space, time and history, as we see in Titus 2:11 which says [11] *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.* Christianity is not a theoretical concept or simply a wish list or a philosophical proposal for Christianity is the truth of God revealed in time and history but Paul tells us in this present time we now have the answer. The answer isn't in the law for by the law no works of the flesh will be justified. It's an answer apart from the law. The answer is Yeshua for He shall save His people from their sins. I Timothy 2:5–6 says [5] *For there is one God, and there is one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, [6] who gave Himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

This is something we have confidence in as Paul says in Philippians 1:6 which says [6] *And I am sure of this (confident), that He who began a good work in you will bring it to*

completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners. I John 3:8 says [8] *Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. **The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*** All of God's revelation before He came was pointing to His coming, but now He has come who is our Mediator, our Advocate, our sure Defense, our Righteousness, the power of God, to save dead sinners to bring us to God clothed with the righteousness of God. This is what Paul announces now.

The Law and the Prophets weren't given to save us for they have no power to save us but were given to show us that we need a Savior. They were given to give us the knowledge of sin and to tell us God has promised a Redeemer. This need was also going to be met by God Himself through His Son, our Savior and Lord. The purpose of the Law and the Prophets was that they bore witness to our salvation. Salvation is found in a righteousness of God through Jesus Christ for all who believe. It is not our righteousness. God's righteousness becomes yours when you by faith put your trust in Christ alone.

This Good News is not just for Israel but it is going to all the nations, even as He promised Abraham in Genesis 22:17–18 which says [17] *I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, [18] and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.* This One is now being proclaimed to all because all are in need of a Savior.

Paul gives a very euphemistic way of saying something unbelievably horrific – we are all sinners falling short of God's glory. What is God's glory? It is Him in eternity – a new heavens and a new earth and unless you are in Christ you won't be there. You will fall short of that and will be under the wrath of God instead of with the glory of God, but God has brought a way for you to be brought to Immanuel's land – to glory. That is in and through His Son Jesus Christ. How do you get this?

It is in Romans 3:24–25 which says [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. This is what Calvin and Luther were referring to as the Truth for this is at ground zero for sinners to be saved. We are justified by His grace which is a gift we didn't earn, we didn't want and we thought we didn't need it. This is where you can hear that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone for the glory of God alone.

God has been patient to do this at the right time. Romans 5:8 says [8] *but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* He didn't bring the judgment upon us when He could have upon our sin, but He was patient and the patience of God is designed to bring us to repentance and faith in Christ. Romans 2:4 says [4] *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?* God has been patient up until this point and has provided the answer for us for Christ has been revealed.

As Romans 3:26 says [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.*** Justify – making innocent. Ultimately, if you don't have faith in Jesus you can't be right with God for, He is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). This is a scandal to the world. We do not want to be told that our lives are an offense to God for that's an offense to us. Then we don't want to be

told that we can't save ourselves if we are offensive to God. We also don't want to be told that our religion can't save us. We also don't want to be told that Jesus is the only Way to be saved.

Last Wednesday night I listened to a testimony of our first graduate from Jump Start. When Curtis was sharing, he said 'I went back and picked up my Bible and pastor, it made sense.' Up until then he had read his Bible but he said it was just 'mumbo, jumbo.' He said that night he couldn't put it down because God had given him eyes to see and ears to hear, by grace through faith in Christ. What a glorious tribute to the Gospel of the saving grace of Christ!

How can God be holy and just and justify the unjustifiable, clear the condemned, declare innocent those who are guilty? It is because of three great words. One is justification – that isn't just as I have never sinned but it's not simply a word of pardon that you are forgiven but it's a legal declaration and verdict of innocent. You are not under sin, you're under grace and you are innocent. The other two words are propitiation and redemption.

I want to share with you what Sinclair Ferguson says on this. He said Paul has just borrowed from the world of the courtroom (law room), from the temple and from the market. From the courtroom comes this word justification and it's in opposition to condemnation. Condemnation is guilty and condemned – justification is innocent and accepted. Now in Christ you are now under grace so you are no longer condemned but declared innocent. How did justification happen? Let's go to the next word – propitiation. Now we go to the temple and see the scape goat, having the sins placed upon him being sent outside the camp taking the sins away from the people – expiation. Then the priest lays his hand on the lamb and the lamb is sacrificed as a vicarious sacrifice as a way of propitiating the wrath of God – someone innocent dying in the place of those who were guilty. On the day of atonement all you would have seen was death and gore as the lambs were sacrificed.

God has His picture in front of you – the wages of sin is death. It's either God's wrath upon you for eternal death or upon Jesus who drank God's wrath to the bottom of the cup for you to remove your guilt, by taking your sins outside the camp and paying for them as He gives Himself for you. God's wrath has been satisfied through the love of God by sending the Son of God who takes our place – propitiation. The only way that can happen is for that One who takes your place to accomplish redemption. Because of redemption there is propitiation and because of redemption and propitiation there is justification. I'm declared innocent because Someone has satisfied the holiness of God and provided a righteousness that is acceptable to God. How did that Person do that? They took my place to redeem me, to buy me back from the curse of my sin and that's redemption.

I have longed searched for a way to try and understand this. When I was getting close to junior high age my mom would take me every Friday night to the A & P to buy groceries. I didn't go because my mother needed company but because I provided the muscle to carry the groceries out to the car and then when we got home, from the car I would carry them into the house to put on the kitchen table. Then I would sit at the end of the table to help with the green stamps which is why we went to the A & P. For things that you purchased you would get green stamps and we would then take these reams of green stamps and put them in a green stamp book. When you reached a certain amount of green stamps you could take your green stamp books to the S & H Green Stamp store to redeem them for certain items. There were these deals like 10,000 stamps were equivalent to getting a can opener. They would take the books of stamps away and then bring you the can opener. My job was to lick it and stick it as she called it, as I licked the stamps and stuck them to the green stamp books.

When I got married, I asked my wife if we were going to shop at the A & P and collect green stamps and she said ‘absolutely, that’s what we did also.’ So right after we got married, I ended up with the same job of putting the stamps in the green stamp books and my wife took one look at me licking those stamps and said ‘what are you doing?’ I said ‘this is called lick it and stick it, honey.’ She then gave me a bowl with water and sponge in it and wet the sponge, then slid it across the stamps and slapped the stamps in the book. I said ‘Are you kidding me? Do you know how much glue is in my stomach right now?’

I love my mother and those experiences but I love to look at that now over 2000 years ago on that day now, Jesus went to the cross. II Corinthians 5:21 says *[21] For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.* My sins were laid on Him and He paid for them. In other words, He put Himself on the counter of God’s justice paying for all the sins of all of His people for all of eternity. Then He gives us from the cross His perfect righteousness. I say this reverently – God cannot send me to hell for my sins for Jesus has already taken all of God’s judgment for my sins. God will by no means leave the guilty unpunished (Nahum 1:3) but you don’t have to be punished twice. There is no double jeopardy for He paid it all.

If He were to say ‘you can’t let him in’ I would be able to say (which I’m only trying to make a point here) ‘that God cannot keep me out of heaven for I belong there as much as Jesus because I have His righteousness.’ I’m cleansed by His blood, clothed with His righteousness and Christ is my sure Defense.

Here is the takeaway. There is only one place for the helpless and hopeless to go to be saved from their sins. It’s not the temple. It’s not the church. It’s not the preacher. It’s not the baptismal. The only place to go for salvation is Jesus. This same Jesus is coming back and on that Day He will come to bring judgment upon the guilty and the condemned, but because He has already come over 2000 years ago, not to bring judgment, but came to bear the judgment of condemned and guilty sinners. There is only one pathway to Jesus and that’s grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.

I’m not going to heaven because I preach sermons or even preach Biblical sermons or prayed with people who gave their life to Christ for the only way I go to heaven is to go to that one place of salvation and that’s Jesus – what He did on the cross, whereby He takes away our sin and gives us His righteousness. Have you come to Him by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone?

Do you remember when Abraham was negotiating with the three angels about Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18? One of those angels was Jesus – the angel of the Lord. It was a Christophany, a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ in the Old Testament. He tells Abraham He is going to bring judgment but Abraham’s nephew is there and so he begins to bargain with Him.

Genesis 18:22–33 says *[22] So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the LORD. [23] Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? [24] Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? [25] Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” [26] And the LORD said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”*

[27] Abraham answered and said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. [28] Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?" And he said, "I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there." [29] Again he spoke to him and said, "Suppose forty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of forty I will not do it." [30] Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there." He answered, "I will not do it, if I find thirty there." [31] He said, "Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there." He answered, "For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it." [32] Then he said, "Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there." He answered, "For the sake of ten I will not destroy it." [33] And the LORD went His way, when He had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

Basically, Jesus tells Abraham that on the account of the righteous, He will spare Sodom and Gomorrah and then He quits. Why did He quit? There are two reasons. Number one, He quit because there is none righteous, no not one. Secondly, He quit, while there is no one righteous, for He did find a way through the holiness of God unto salvation and that way for sinners to be saved is for a Righteous One to take their place and the One Abraham is negotiating with is the One who will come to Bethlehem, to Egypt, to Nazareth, the temple, Calvary, the tomb, to take our place. With His righteousness we now go to the place He has prepared for us. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Perhaps you have not yet come to that Christ so know that I will pray for you and I also want to give you an invitation to this Savior. I want you to know that if you call us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 we would be happy to pray with you about your commitment to Christ and help you. Perhaps you are reading this today and during these chaotic times you are facing some challenging things and you just want someone to pray with you, please call us as well for we want to pray with you too. If you have not come to Christ, don't go try to buy it for it's by grace alone and it's already been bought. Don't try to work it for you receive it by faith alone. You will do works but those works are for your Savior, not for your salvation. The place to come is Christ – who He is, the Son of God who became a Man, for the Word became flesh (John 1:14). God so loved the world that He gave His Son (John 3:16) and He went to the cross and from the cross He gives you His righteousness even as He takes away your sin and pays for it. You can hear from Him, 'innocent, justified.' God is just and found a way to justify those who by faith and repentance receive Him. You come to Him. Jesus, thank You for this Lord's Day and thank You for the Gospel so fill us up with it so the world has no foothold in our life. Let us walk, not in the triumph of self, but in the triumph of Christ who bears us up when we falter and who will bring us home with His righteousness, for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

BUT NOW

The Good News of the Gospel for helpless and hopeless sinners is the power of God that has provided a righteousness of God in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, to the glory of God alone.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD

Justification

Propitiation

Redemption

LIFE TAKEAWAY

There is only one place for the Helpless and the Hopeless to be saved from their sins...IN CHRIST ALONE.

There is only one pathway to Christ alone...BY GRACE ALONE-THROUGH FAITH ALONE.