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So far in the first two and a half chapters in Romans, the sobering news has been delivered to us. Everyone in the whole world is guilty before God because of sin. We cannot save ourselves from the penalty of sin – eternal death, punishment, and separation from God. If the message ended there, our condition would be helpless and hopeless despair.

But then in Romans 3:21-31, the very heart of the gospel is presented, which Paul will explain in further detail as the letter continues. It all begins with the righteousness of God.

The word “righteousness” in this case can be interpreted to mean the “right standing” which man has before God through faith, by God’s grace. It is not a righteousness that God demands in our behavior before He will save us. Rather, this is a righteousness apart from all works or deeds of man.

We can see the significant transition into this passage with the opening words in verse 21, “but now”. There is a similar statement in John 1:17, which says that “the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

The law is connected with works and demands that blessings be earned. It requires a righteousness that man himself cannot attain. But grace, in contrast to the law, is not about earning anything through works.

Grace is free gift - free indeed to us, but not to the Lord!
(GRACE = God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.)

Romans 3:23 (a good verse to memorize) summarizes the message that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” But, the cure for this problem is immediately provided in verses 24 and 25. They state some very important truths to know, but use terms unfamiliar to many people. The terms are not difficult to understand, they just need to be explained to people that don’t routinely use them.

The first word to know is justification (“we are *justified* freely by His grace”). So we see this justification is a free gift by God’s grace, but what is it? Justification is an act, not a process. It is a judicial act whereby God declares us to be righteous. As we continue our study, we’ll see how and why He can do this without compromising truth or justice.

The basic answer to the “how” question is immediately given: “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”. There are deeper aspects of redemption that we’ll delve into in time, but to be *redeemed* is to be bought with a price. We were not only made by God, we were purchased at the grandest price of all – the life and blood of His dear Son.

Christ’s life and blood were a *propitiation* to God (v. 25). This means that the demands of sin were fully satisfied so that God Himself could be justified in saving sinners who will accept this free gift. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) and “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22).

Christ paid the debt that He did not owe, because we owed a debt that we could not pay. He was sinless, so He owed nothing. But as we have already established, our own condition was helpless and hopeless to pay our sin debt. A perfect, sinless sacrifice was required.

With those terms explained, let’s further explore what the passage has to say about this act of justification.

1) It is apart from the law (v. 21). The law could only point to God’s righteousness, but it could not provide it for sinful man. In Paul’s letter to the Galatians, he makes the clear statement that, “if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Gal. 2:21).

2) It is through faith in Christ (v. 22). All people trust in something, but faith is only as good as its object. It is not just any faith that saves us. Christ says, “I am the way, the truth and the life. *No one comes to the Father but by Me.*” (John 14:6) Acts 4:12 says “there is salvation in *no one else* (but Christ)”.

People may say, “but I believe in God”. But it is only a personal, individual trusting faith in the person and saving work of Jesus Christ that saves and justifies the sinner. Even the demons from hell believe in God and tremble, yet this does not save them (James 2:19).

3) It is a gift for all people (v. 22-23). All are guilty and His offer is to the whole world (John 3:16).

4) It is by grace (v. 24). God in His mercy withholds the eternal banishment we earn (“the wages of sin”), and in His grace He grants us salvation we do not deserve. The Greek word translated “freely” is the same Greek word used in John 15:25 when Christ says He was hated “without a cause”. We are justified without a cause. There is no cause in us that merits salvation from God.

5) It meets with God’s perfect justice (v. 26). In His love He wants to forgive sinners, but His holiness must punish sin. Through the cross of Christ, God can be both “the just and the justifier”.

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Romans 3:21-31

God's Righteousness Through Faith

(continued from page 1)

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God apart has been revealed, to which the Law and the Prophets bear witness.

²² This righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. For there is no distinction.

²³ For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ but are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith.

This was to demonstrate God's righteousness, because in His forbearance He had passed over the sins that were previously committed.

²⁶ It was to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Boasting Excluded

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 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

²⁹ Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰ since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

³¹ Do we then nullify the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

6) It upholds the law (v. 27-31). It was important for his Jewish readers that Paul establish the relationship of the gospel to the law. Justification by faith does not break the law, it establishes it. God obeyed His own law in working out the plan of salvation. The Lord Jesus Christ completely fulfilled the demands of the law in His life and in His death.

If salvation were through the law, then men could boast. However, the principles of faith and grace make it ridiculous for men to boast. A man saved from drowning does not brag because he trusted the lifeguard. What else could he do? A believing sinner justified by faith can only boast of His wonderful Savior, not of himself.

Memory Verse for the Week

Galatians 2:21 – For if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.