

# Ministry of Grace Church

## Romans 3:21-26 - Sermon Notes



### Background

We're continuing on today in the third chapter of the book of Romans where we'll be looking at verses 21 through 26. Previously, Paul said that no one is righteous before God by obeying a set of rules - period. In other words, no one can earn righteousness. This would have come as a major affront to any devout Jew whether they had become a Christian or not. To them, obeying the Law was how anyone became acceptable to God.

He is now going to introduce the doctrine of justification by faith, but he first has to show that justification can't come any other way. According to Paul, the only true righteousness has already been revealed. Not only has it been revealed, but it has been witnessed to by the Law and the Prophets. But how – and where?

He has already told these Jewish Christians that the Scriptures have testified against them and declared that they are all sinners. Also, he has told them that the Scriptures have testified about a true type of righteousness which only comes from God. But where does it say this?

For these answers we need to turn back to Genesis chapter 15. Abraham had just returned from rescuing his nephew, Lot, and the people of Sodom by defeating King Chedorlaomer and the armies with him. Abraham defeated these mighty armies with only the 318 servants of his own household and a couple of friends. The armies that they defeated were strong. These armies had just destroyed the Rephaim, a race of giants who lived throughout the area around them. But how could Abraham have defeated such a mighty, well-trained army? After the victory, God appeared to him in a vision and told him how,

... "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great." (Genesis 15:1)

Now we know why Abraham was able to defeat such a great army. Almighty God, the God of all creation was protecting him. God said that He had been a shield for Abraham. But let's not stop there – what comes next is a significant part. Abraham complained that God had previously promised him that he would become a great nation, and yet – he still had no children. So, God took him outside and said:

... “Now look toward the heavens, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.”  
And He said to him, “So shall your seed be.” (Genesis 15:5)

We’ve talked before about the word translated “number.” It also means “to recount,” that is, to tell a story about something. God wasn’t asking Abraham to count the number of the stars. He was asking Abraham to recount the story in the stars. The end of this story details the Messiah coming to save mankind, and God then told Abraham, “So shall your seed be,” referring to the Messiah. God was saying to Abraham, “not only will you have many descendants, just as I promised, but one of your descendants will be the Messiah, the Savior of mankind.

And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:6)  
[ESV]

That’s justification by faith!

Now, getting back to Romans -- In the next verse Paul is going to tell us this righteousness can **only** come by faith. He will also show that it’s not just any kind of faith and not faith in just anything.

Notice that Abraham was not declared righteous (justified) because of any works he did. He was declared righteous simply because he believed. This is the righteousness apart from the Law that Paul is now going to talk about.

### **Romans 3:21-22**

**But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;**

Paul says that the righteousness he is talking about, the righteousness that comes without the Law has been **manifested**. This is from the Greek word *phaneroō*, meaning “to show or to make apparent.” Paul says that this righteousness has already been revealed and testified to by the Law and the Prophets. He is referring to the verses we just talked about whereby Abraham was declared righteous, not by obedience – by faith!

The word translated “faith” is *pistis*. This is derived from the verb *peithō*, which means “to persuade” or “to win over.” The word *pistis* describes the result of having been won over or persuaded. In other words, it means “belief in a truth.”

The righteousness needed for any of us to stand guiltless before the Judge of the entire world cannot be obtained by obeying a set of rules, no matter how perfect those rules are and no matter how sincere we are or how hard we try. The Old Testament has declared that all of us are sinners. None of us is righteous, no, not even one of us; not me, not you, not your parents, not even the Apostle Paul. In fact, Isaiah said this about us, all of us:

For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; ... (Isaiah 64:6a)

To these Jewish Christians, this was a new concept, one that isn’t really new, for it was written about in the Old Testament. But it was new to them! Namely, it is possible to obtain the righteousness of God, but it is obtained totally apart from the Law. We can’t become

righteous by obeying all the rules no matter how many rules we follow or how many deeds we do.

This new doctrine of “justification by faith” is now plainly declared by Paul. There is righteousness apart from the Law, “**even the righteousness of God,**” but this righteousness comes “**through faith in Jesus Christ.**” That is to say, we can’t earn the righteousness necessary to meet God’s standard of behavior, but we can receive it from God by believing in Jesus Christ.

Paul also tells us that this righteousness by faith is granted to everyone who believes. You don’t have to be born into the right family. You don’t have to be a member of a church. You don’t have to take religion classes. You don’t have to be wealthy. You don’t have to follow a list of rules or perform any rituals. All you have to do is believe God’s message.

Paul continues on -

### **Romans 3:23-24**

**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;**

Paul now tells us once again why it is necessary to obtain this “**righteousness of God.**” We need His righteousness because, as we just heard from Isaiah, all of our righteous actions are disgustingly unclean just like bloody rags. Now, there may have been a few people in the Roman church who were still proud of their numerous good deeds. So, Paul makes it very clear that none of us measure up to God’s standard of righteousness

He says that all have sinned. “**All,**” is translated from the word *pas*, which means “all, the totality, the whole.” It does not mean generically all (as in all kinds of people) but specifically all (as in every single one of us).

He now declares that God’s righteousness is only given through faith in Jesus Christ, and it is given to all who believe. It is this faith, believing whole heartedly in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross as a substitutionary payment for our sins, which causes God to declare us righteous.

In the previous verse Paul said, “**For there is no distinction.**” What does that mean? The Greek word that this is translated from means, “a distinct difference.” Remember, these Jewish Christians in Rome were still putting their hope in their righteousness obtained from obeying the Law. But Paul has shown them that there is no righteousness obtained by obeying the Law. The Law only produces sinfulness. He has shown that this sinfulness applies to all, both Jew and Gentile. All have gone out of God’s way and have become sinful by following their own path. Therefore, the conclusion is that there is no difference, no distinction, between the righteousness of Jews and the righteousness of Gentiles.

The reason that there is no distinction between the righteousness of Jews and Gentiles is because, “**all have sinned.**” In other words, every person on the earth (except for Jesus Christ) has committed sin and, therefore, is unrighteous. And, because each and every one of us has sinned, we fall short of God’s glory. That is, we don’t measure up to God’s reputation.

Recognizing this fact about ourselves is the first step to salvation. In order to be saved a person must first recognize their need for salvation and they need this salvation because they are a sinner deserving of death, which is God’s penalty for sin.

Now we get to the essential core truth of Paul's message. He says we are, "justified as a gift by His grace." The word "grace" is translated from *charis*, which refers to "a favor done without expectation of anything in return." Let me say that again. Grace is, "a favor done without expectation of anything in return."

The beauty of this action is that even though we are all sinners and have come short of God's glory, we can be declared righteous, that is, justified. And - he tells us here that we are declared righteous because we have been redeemed. So, what does this really mean?

The word "redemption" is translated from *apolutrōsis*, which is made up of *apo*, meaning "from or away from" and a form of *lutron*, which means "a ransom that is paid for someone." It denotes the rescuing of captives (such as sinners) from captivity (their sin) through the payment of a ransom. This may help explain a verse in Ephesians that has been puzzling to many of us for years. It talks about something Jesus did when He rose from the dead.

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men." (Ephesians 4:7-8)

The fact that Paul used *apolutrōsis* instead of simply *lutron* implies that not only was a ransom paid for us (the blood of Jesus Christ) but, having paid that ransom, He also took us away from the captor (sin). We have not simply been ransomed; we have been ransomed away from the penalty of our sin.

In other words, when we accepted Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior;

Because of this faith, because we believed in the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross, even though we are sinners, we are declared righteous by God without payment on our part, simply as a gift, as a favor done by God without expectation of anything from us in return. And we are justified through the ransom that was paid for us, that is, the blood of Jesus Christ, and we have been rescued from our bondage to sin.

Wow! Read that again!

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul said almost the same thing in a slightly different way:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Do you see that? "so that no one may boast." If we believe that we can be saved by following a set of rules, we want to boast and brag. But God doesn't want anyone to be able to brag about his or her salvation. In other words, it tends to make us proud that we've done something to earn our salvation. But if we believe that we are saved as a gift from God, it tends to make us humble and thankful.

### **Romans 3:25**

**whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith, for a demonstration of His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;**

Before we get into this verse, let's review a little bit of Jewish history. There were two calendar days of significant importance to the Jews which are Passover and the Day of Atonement. Their year started with the Passover celebration. When the Jews were finally released from Egypt, God instructed them to take the blood of a lamb. Not just any lamb, but one that was without spot or blemish – a perfect lamb. They were then to apply the blood of this lamb to the door posts and lintel of the doorway into their houses. As a result, when the “death angel” came throughout Egypt to kill all the first-born, if He saw the blood of the lamb, he would “pass over” the house and not kill anyone inside. You can read about this in Exodus chapter 12. Jesus was the perfect Lamb of God who was sacrificed on the Passover, as the Passover lamb without spot or blemish.

The other most important day in the Jewish calendar is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It is the holiest day of the Jewish year. Leading up to and on that day, Jews traditionally ask for forgiveness for wrongdoings from God. This is the day in which the High Priest takes the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkles it on the Mercy Seat which is in the Holy of Holies. The High Priest is the only one who was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies, and this is the only day of the year that he is allowed to do so. The blood sprinkled on the mercy seat is to cover the sins of the people for the entire past year.

Now, getting back to the verses in Romans. These are some of the most power-packed verses in the New Testament. **Romans 3:25** starts off with “whom,” a reference to Jesus Christ. Paul says that He was put on public display as “a propitiation.” This word is translated from *hilastērion*, meaning “to make favorably inclined, to conciliate, or to appease.” The only other use of this word in the New Testament is in **Hebrews 9:5**, where it is rendered “mercy seat.” The use of this word in the Septuagint most often refers to the mercy seat as well. Since the mercy seat is a covering of the Ark, where the blood was sprinkled, it refers to a covering of our sins.

Let me say it again, the Mercy Seat was the covering of the Ark of the Covenant in the Jewish temple, in the Holy of Holies. The mercy seat is where the sacrificial blood was sprinkled once a year by the high priest to atone for (that is, to cover) the sins of the people. And this is where God was reconciled to His people on the Day of Atonement every year.

Jesus Christ has become our mercy seat, and His blood has atoned for (covered) our sins. Because our sins are covered by the blood of Christ, God is able to “pass-by” or “pass-over” our sins without having to judge them, just like He passed-over the homes of the Jews in Egypt.

Paul is now telling us that it is through our faith in the blood of Christ that this covering of our sins occurs. The purpose of the atonement, the covering of our sins, is to declare the righteousness of God because He passes by our sins. When He passes by these sins, He does not take them into account because they are covered by the blood of Christ.

So, this verse is telling us that it is our faith in the blood of Christ shed at the cross that will allow God to pass by our sins, demonstrating His righteousness, which He then credits to our account.

## **Romans 3:26**

**for the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**

Now, Paul tells us how God will be glorified in the plan of salvation. He just told us that God can “pass-by” our sins because they will be “covered” by the blood of Christ.

You see, God cannot ignore sin, he must judge it and exact payment for it. The blood of Christ is the payment for our sins and is sprinkled as a covering over our sins. Because this payment is made, God can pass-by our sins and still be doing what is right. It means He is righteous in forgiving our sins.

Now, here’s the best part of this verse, “and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” Do you see what that says? Not only is God proven to be righteous by his plan of salvation and the “passing-by” of our sins covered by the blood of Christ, but in doing so He actually is “justifying” us. That is, at the time that we placed our faith in Christ, God declared that we are righteous (just like He is). This means that in His record book we are credited with having kept the law and never having committed a single sin. We are declared to be righteous!

Remember what Paul said back in verse 20? “because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.” We cannot become righteous by keeping the law, but we can be declared righteous by believing in the blood of Jesus Christ. God’s plan of salvation for us is a perfect plan because it provides a way for Him to judge sin and forgive the sinner. Wow! Praise be to God!

## **So What?**

Do you want to stand before Almighty God as a righteous person – completely sinless? Paul has shown us that there is no way we could earn the righteousness that we need to stand before Him. The only way we can be righteous in God’s record book is for Him to declare us to be righteous. He will only do that if we believe the truth about Jesus Christ; He is the sinless Son of God and He died on the cross to pay for your sins and mine. We don’t have to earn this righteousness, and we certainly don’t deserve it. Nonetheless, we can have this righteousness, through faith in Jesus Christ.

According to the Apostle Paul you are a sinner, not “were a sinner” but “are a sinner.” Because of this fact you don’t measure up to God’s standard or God’s reputation; you are unrighteous. But - you can be declared righteous and measure up, through faith in Jesus Christ. You may be a sinner, but you can obtain that righteousness for free, simply by believing in the blood of Christ.

If that doesn’t drive us to our knees in praise and adoration, nothing will!

The whole purpose of the plan of salvation is to glorify God. So let us do just that. Let’s give Him the praise and the glory for it all, with thanksgiving! He is worthy.

Let’s pray.