

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

ROM. 3:21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God *which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:*

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth *to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;*

26 To declare, *I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

27 Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

29 *Is he* the God of the Jews only? *is he* not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:

30 Seeing *it is* one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

31 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

NOTES

Righteousness Through Faith

Lesson Text: Romans 3:21-31

Related Scriptures: Ephesians 1:7-14; 2:8-9; Hebrews 9:1-15

TIME: A.D. 56

PLACE: from Corinth

GOLDEN TEXT—"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets" (Romans 3:21).

Lesson Exposition

ALIENATED BY SIN—Rom. 3:21-23

God's righteousness (Rom. 3:21-22). The "righteousness of God" can refer to God's character and His just actions, or it can have in mind our relationship with Him, that is, our right standing before the Lord.

The purpose of the Law is to convict people of their sins so they will repent and turn to the Lord in faith (vs. 20). We are saved by placing our faith in Christ, and our approach to God is by grace, for in Christ we "are not under the law, but under grace" (6:14).

This approach to God through faith in Christ is not really new. There is ample testimony in "the law and the prophets" (3:21), which testify that God has always justified people by faith, beginning with Abraham (cf. Rom. 4:2). The Old Testament Scriptures also prophesied the Messiah's coming, establishing this "new and living way" (Heb. 10:20).

As already seen in lesson 2, Paul made it clear that the Gentile world was estranged from God because of their idolatry and perversion. For their part, the Jews had many advantages because of their privileged position

in God's plan, but that did not leave them guiltless. Whether Jew or Gentile, the gospel alone has the power to save (Rom. 1:16). Consequently, right standing with God is on the basis of faith and granted to "all them that believe" (3:22).

Man's sin (Rom. 3:23). Whatever differences exist among humans, there is one thing certain about all of us: we are sinners. This is the starting point for everyone in their journey to deliverance.

Since all of us have sinned, we are all in the same spiritual boat, so to speak—and it is a sinking ship! We all desperately fall short of God's perfectly just and glorious expectations. Even what we consider our righteous deeds are like filthy rags compared to His holy standard (Isa. 64:6).

ACCEPTED BY GRACE— Rom. 3:24-26

Redemption (Rom. 3:24). To be "justified" is to be declared "not guilty." In spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, God has declared us "not guilty"; He could only do this on the basis of Jesus' perfect sacrifice. This

He did “freely.” We neither earned it nor deserved it. Clearly, justification is based upon faith and is the source of our peace with God (5:1). While we must exercise faith, we are actually enabled to believe in Christ by God’s grace (cf. Eph. 2:8-9).

Our justification comes about by God’s grace. As Paul puts it in Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” By definition, grace is unmerited favor. While unmerited, it is not unconditional; we must respond to God’s grace by faith. Since salvation is “not of works” (vs. 9), we contribute nothing to our deliverance from sin. This, however, does not mean we are purely passive recipients of God’s grace—faith is a must!

Another important word in Romans 3:24 is “redemption.” Drawn from the ancient slave market, redemption had to do with paying the price for a slave to be set free. Though we were once slaves to sin, Christians can now enjoy the freedom to serve Christ out of love and gratitude. Such freedom does not grant permission for us to sin as we please, but rather encourages us to do as we should (cf. Gal. 5:1, 13).

Remission (Rom. 3:25-26). Justification and redemption are found “in Christ Jesus” (vs. 24), and in no one else in no other way. God “set forth” His Son for this purpose (vs. 25). Representing a single Greek word, “set forth” could also be translated “presented,” “appointed,” or even “foreordained.”

Christ is the “propitiation” for our sins (I John 2:1-2). This word is related to the Old Testament word for “covering,” and in the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) it was used of the “mercy seat” (Lev. 16:2; Heb. 9:5). The mercy seat was the solid gold lid of the ark of the covenant where the high priest sprinkled blood on the Day of Atonement. Hence, a propitiation is an aton-

ing sacrifice. In this case, Christ was the sacrifice. Propitiation especially means “to turn away wrath or appease anger.”

The “remission of sins that are past” (Rom. 3:25) refers to the sins that were committed under the old covenant. As elaborate and detailed as the Levitical code was, the sacrificial system did not actually have the ability to remove sin. It only anticipated the pardon that would occur as a result of Christ’s sacrifice (Heb. 9:15). “For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second” (8:7).

The word “remission” means to “pass over” and appears only here in the New Testament. It may allude to God passing over Israel but visiting judgment upon Egypt. The Lord said, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Ex. 12:13).

God did this to demonstrate His justice. Justice requires punishment for sin. That punishment was meted out at the cross, where God’s Son was offered to pay the price of sin through His blood. God therefore was both just toward sinners and the justifier of sinners simultaneously.

This should not be taken to mean that Christ’s sacrifice automatically justifies all sinners, since His atonement actually applies only to those who trust in Him as their Lord and Saviour.

ASSURED BY FAITH—Rom. 3:27-31

One plan (Rom. 3:27-28). If salvation were something humans achieved through personal goodness, meritorious deeds, religious rites, it could be viewed with pride. We could boast in the salvation we had earned. But thankfully it is “not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:9).

Such boasting is excluded because salvation is through faith, not by works. “Paul does not mean that such works

need not be performed, but that, even when they are performed tolerably well, one is not thereby justified in God's sight. He is cutting the ground from under the feet of those who say, 'I always do the best I can . . . I try to live a decent life . . . I pay my lawful dues, and what more can God expect of me?'" (Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, Eerdmans).

Paul's conclusion: "a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). This statement would be very relevant to his fellow Jews, who tended to depend upon outward conformity to the law as a means of gauging their acceptance with God. Moreover, Paul was viewing this from an insider perspective, as he no doubt felt the same way prior to his conversion.

One God (Rom. 3:29-30). The God revealed in Scripture is the God of all (Acts 10:34-35). In spite of a privileged position, Jews could not claim God as their exclusive deity. "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (10:12).

"Circumcision" in 3:30 means Jews, and "uncircumcision" means Gentiles. While the outward rite of circumcision had special significance for the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 17:10-11), it became insignificant under the new covenant (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 6:15). Salvation is by faith in Christ, not by conformity to the law. There are not two means of being saved, one for Jews and another for Gentiles. "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

One way (Rom. 3:31). In presenting these arguments, which are difficult at times to follow, Paul was not trying to eliminate the value of the law. He was actually upholding the law, for he saw that the true purpose of the law

was to pave the way for the promised Messiah (Gal. 3:24). As Christ Himself stated: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matt. 5:17).

"The insistence of the apostle is that any works in performance of any such commandment are of no avail in justification. The question is then: does this abrogate the law of commandment and make it irrelevant and inoperative in every respect? Paul . . . recoils with abhorrence from the suggestion and says: 'God forbid.'" (Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Eerdmans). We are to submit to God's law as a response of thankfulness. God provided salvation on His merit, and in response, we are called to worship in obedience.

—John Alva Owston.

QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by the "righteousness of God" (Rom. 3:21)?
2. How can a person experience the righteousness of God (vs. 22)?
3. In what way are all people alike?
4. What does the word "grace" mean?
5. What is the image behind the word "redemption"?
6. What does the word "propitiation" mean?
7. How can God be both just and the justifier of sinners at the same time?
8. Why do saved people have no cause for boasting about it?
9. Is there a Jewish God and a Gentile God? Explain.
10. In what way was Paul upholding the law?

—John Alva Owston.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The law still reflects God's standard of righteousness (Rom. 3:21).
2. All mankind has sinned. Only Jesus, who is sinless, can save us (vss. 22-26).
3. There is no room for boasting within the body of Christ (vs. 27).
4. Our good deeds cannot earn our salvation. It is a gift from God (vs. 28).
5. God's righteousness is available for all peoples of the world (vs. 29).
6. Many people claim to keep the law, but God requires the righteousness of Christ (vss. 30-31).

—Valante M. Grant.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. All humans are subject to the same God. Discuss strategies to break down divisions in the church in an effort to better reflect this reality.
2. Explain the significance of faith in Jesus Christ as it relates to forgiveness of sin (Rom. 3:24-25).
3. What is the role of good deeds in the Christian life? Are good deeds necessary to please God?
4. Since we know that we serve one God and share one faith, how should we treat believers from diverse cultures? Discuss specific issues and situations you have experienced.
5. What is the value of civil laws in the Christian life? Does God care if we break civil laws?

—Valante M. Grant.

Golden Text Illuminated

“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets” (Romans 3:21).

We are always fighting a battle against our human nature. Acting in righteousness is not something that comes naturally to people. Because we are fallen, sinful beings, our native tendency is sinful (cf. Eph. 2:3).

God knows this. Even though He created mankind perfect, the first man, Adam, fell into sin. All humanity inherited his fallen, sinful nature (Rom. 5:12).

Later, through Moses, God gave the nation of Israel His law. The Law was meant to restrain sin and to reveal to the people how far short they fell of meeting God's standards. The Jewish people could not keep the Law.

God knew people need to be shown their unrighteousness. This is what the Law did. The Law of Moses, then, served as a tutor to lead people to Christ so that they could be justified, or declared righteous, through faith in Him (Gal. 3:24). It pointed people to the righteousness that comes through Jesus, as did all the Old Testament, which Paul summarized under the expression “the law and the prophets.”

God's plan had always been to provide salvation through Jesus, but He had to wait for the right time. Jesus brought us His new covenant of love, which superseded the Law (John 1:17). His death lifted the curse that we were under (Gal. 3:10-13). When we choose to believe in Jesus, we take on His righteousness (Phil. 3:9). We are covered in it, as if it were our clothing.

—Jennifer Francis.