

## **“THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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### **Scripture Texts: Romans 3:21-26**

#### **Introduction.**

I have been praying over and over for you this year that God would fill you with a knowledge of His will and give you an increase in the knowledge of Him. It just struck me yesterday how our study of Romans is a huge way that prayer can be answered. This book is about God, it is saturated with God. It reveals the glory of God and the glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sink your teeth into this, work to get more out of it than just Sunday mornings. Give yourself to the Word of God and God will bless you. We will speak directly to that this evening.

If Romans is the most important book in the Bible, this paragraph may well be the most important verses in all the Bible.

Martin Luther called this text the center of the entire Bible, the epicenter, the most importance part of the most important book. It is filled with the deepest and most profound truths, the most life-changing, the most life-saving.

Remember my offer at the beginning of this series to give \$100 to anyone who memorizes the book of Romans. A member has offered to match my offer, so now there are \$200 to anyone who memorizes the entire book of Romans. It's a little over 7,000 words, about 15 pages.

If you don't memorize Romans, memorize this paragraph and build your life on these 130 words.

Paul now turns his attention to what he said in 1:16-17.

**Romans 1:16-17** 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.”

Four times Paul mentions the righteousness of God. Since this is his emphasis let's look at the text through these four statements, asking ourselves what this righteousness of God is.

#### **3:21, The righteousness of God apart from the works of the law.**

Up to now Paul has been talking about how the law of God reveals the standard for righteousness and there is no one who can meet that standard. There is none who is righteous, not even one. By the works of the law no one can justify themselves with God. All the law does is increase our knowledge of our sin.

But there is another righteousness, the righteousness of God that has been manifested and it is apart from the law. Manifested means it has been revealed, put on display for all to see.

This righteousness of God is revealed in the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh and through the Gospel.

Does this mean it wasn't revealed before? No, it was promised and pointed to in the OT.

*The Law and Prophets*, means all of OT. All of the OT witnesses to, points to the righteousness of God in Jesus, it shows importance and value and glory of Jesus.

When we get to Romans 4 Paul will give two illustrations of people in the OT who received the righteousness of God and were justified by faith. Abraham and David. Abraham from the law and David from the prophets. God credited righteousness to them apart from any works of the law. They don't know yet how God can be just while justifying sinners by faith, but they trust.

In Romans 1:17, Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4, "In [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous shall live by faith.'"

This righteousness is entirely apart from works, apart from earning, deserving, meriting. This is meant to utterly remove from all our minds any confidence in who we are or what we have or what we do. There is nothing about you that can make God like you or accept you. In us there is nothing but sin and rebellion and disobedience.

Whatever obedience or faithfulness we might be able to show toward the law, it has no part at all in securing our salvation or favor with God. Everything we do is corrupted and stained by our sin. My preaching is stained by sin, everything. If we could in any way achieve righteousness on our own, then Jesus died in vain.

**Galatians 2:21** I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

The miracle is that God has given the hope of righteousness when we had none from the law.

### **3:22, The righteousness of God through faith.**

There is a special righteousness apart from the law and apart from us, that can be ours by faith in Jesus. Faith is believing in God and trusting Him as the author of righteousness. Through faith it becomes ours.

God is the source and cause of righteousness. Jesus is the instrument by which it is secured, by His blood on the cross. Faith is the means by which it is received.

When we believe in Jesus, and become partakers of Him, then we receive His righteousness.

There is no other way, so stop trying to make another way, and stop trying to find another way. Stop thinking you can get it by trying harder to do better and be better. To do that is to rob God of His glory.

We are justified by faith, through faith, unto faith, on faith, under faith, and everything else a squirrel can do to a tree. Did you have a grammar teacher who taught you your prepositions by all the things a squirrel can do to a tree (up, down, over, under, by, through, around, in, out)? The righteousness of God is by faith, all faith, only faith, all the time, all the way down.

This is meant to break our pride, to break our self-righteousness. Our flesh hates this, rebels against this. We want to make a show of being good, being thought good, of showing off our goodness, our worthiness. We strut and boast, we brag and compare, we pull others down to lift ourselves up. We want to hang on to some vestige of pride, of self-worth, of self-righteousness, but we have none. Humble yourself before God, trust Him, put all your faith in Him alone.

### **3:23-24, the righteousness of God declared by God through the gift of grace.**

We all know this verse. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. It is the first verse of the famous Roman Road to salvation.

*All* is crucial. Remember how Paul spent chapter 1, 2 and half of 3 pounding this home to all Gentiles and all Jews, all have sinned, none are righteous, no one does good, no one seeks God, there is no fear of God in them.

No distinction, no country, no skin color, no race, no education, no status. All are under the same curse, all under the same wrath, all destined for the same destination.

This applies to all those good, noble, respectable, upright members of society, those with good morals, good education, good grades, good manners, useful members of the community, even those faithful in church and who have an outward zeal for God and spiritual things.

This applies to all who are immoral and reprobate in their lives, addicted to every sin and pleasures of the flesh, who make no pretense whatsoever of any knowledge of or love for God.

Everyone stands equally accountable before God and equally in need of God's righteousness. Remember when Paul said every mouth is stopped and everyone is accountable to God.

There is a threat hanging over the earth and over every soul on earth. As I have said before, the greatest threat facing our planet is not greenhouse gases or climate change or even woke politics. The greatest threat facing our planet is the just wrath of a holy God.

We need to feel the weight of this threat, the intensity of it and urgency of it.

All have sinned, no exceptions. Don't forget this when you see other people's sins, that you are just as big a sinner. Be humbled by this. And not just have we all sinned, but because of our sin, we have all fallen short of the glory of God.

What does that mean?

God created us, God made us, we are His, God made us in His image, God gave us souls and a conscience to know Him, to know right and wrong. He made us for Himself. He made us to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever and we have traded it away for a bowl of porridge, a pot of stew. We give God a little attention on Sunday morning before hurrying back to what we want to do on Sunday afternoon or Monday morning.

We have seen enough and heard enough and know enough that we ought to glorify God, we ought to love and obey God, but we don't. We love ourselves and do what we want. We have traded God for money, jobs, careers, family, sex, entertainment, video games, sports. We have exchanged the glory of God for what we glory in.

We are created and called and sustained by God to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. He has an absolute claim on us and selfishly go our own way, seek our own glory.

Can you imagine verse 23 without verse 24?

Every time I read this verse I am amazed at the punctuation at the end of verse 23. It should be a period, full stop, the end. We are guilty as charged, what should follow is the sentence of punishment.

### **3:24**

Verse 23 announced the universal problem and verse 24 the universal remedy/solution.

Having been justly cursed by God's just wrath against all sin, all we can say is that God Himself choose to freely justify us by the gift of His grace, through the redemption purchased by Jesus on the cross by His blood.

What does God do? Three things.

The first phrase is "being justified. . . ."

Second, "as a gift by his grace. . . ."

Third, "through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

### ***Being justified.***

Notice what we do and what God does. We do absolutely nothing. We can't do anything. All we can do is what Isaiah did, "I am a man of unclean lips, among a people of unclean lips." I am undone. I have trampled the glory of God under my feet, I have ignored and neglected it, I have cared more about everything else than the glory of God.

We do nothing because all that needs to be done is done outside of us, done without us, done only to us.

This is a passive verb, meaning not something we do, but something done to us. We are the ones being acted on.

Who knew grammar could be theological, and knowing grammar could save you from being a heretic, could save you from robbing God of His glory?

This is a declaration, not a transformation. We are not *made* just or righteous, we are declared to be by God. In this moment God justifies the ungodly, while we were yet sinners. God simply announces, justified, not guilty.

“Justification is not an act of God that makes us righteous. It is an act of God that declares us righteous. It is not a change of our nature or state, but a change of our standing before him. It is not the same as sanctification, which is done in us, and does change our character. Sanctification is the work of the Spirit of God gradually changing us into the image of his Son. Justification is the act of God, once for all declaring us just and righteous in his sight” (John Piper).

### ***A Gift of God's grace.***

A gift, given freely, without price. You can't buy it or pay for it. It is all gift, all grace. It is from God, by God.

It is all of God and nothing of ourselves. Paul says this over and over in different ways. Can he be more clear?

Why must he say it over and over? Because we are so proud, so resistant to being called hopeless, to being told we can do nothing, so resistant to admitting our spiritual poverty, even bankruptcy.

We want to contribute something, we want to earn some credit. We are so used to thinking we are independent, we don't like the idea of being completely dependent. Be honest with yourself, are you still trying to gain or earn God's approval? Ask God how you are doing that and repent.

God is not looking for employees, people who work for and earn what they get from Him. God is looking for welfare recipients. Maybe we shouldn't look down on or judge welfare recipients, since they show us that is what we all are.

If you want to work for a paycheck from God you are going to hell, because the wages of sin is death. Don't nullify God's grace with your cheap works.

If we don't pay for it, and we don't work for it, then what's the basis of it?

### *Through redemption in Christ Jesus.*

Redemption implies something belonging to God has been lost or stolen, taken away, and is in need of being bought back, redeemed, ransomed with a price.

We rebelled against God and brought on ourselves the condemnation for breaking the law. But God in His free grace put His Son in prison, put our guilt on Him, put our punishment on Him. God made Him take our death penalty, and suffer and die, the just for the unjust. His death and blood are the ransom, for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

**I Peter 1:18-19** ... you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

This is how the universal problem in verse 23 is solved.

“Christ gave His life as a ransom for many. He paid the price for our release from sin and guilt and condemnation. This is why God now, as a gift by his grace, justifies the ungodly. Everything is owing to the death of Christ. This is why you can’t pay for it and you can’t work for it. It’s all of Christ. The basis of your justification is not in yourself or anything you do; it is through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (John Piper).

### **Implications and application.**

**Isaiah 61:10** I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness.

At the great judgment people standing before the holy judge of the universe will either be clothed in the gifts of the righteous garments of Jesus, or they will be naked in their shame looking for a place to hide the way Adam hid in the garden.

Rejoice in the gift of your faith in Jesus that gives you His righteousness.

Glory to God that He has freely and graciously given “the greatest possible blessing to the least deserving creatures at the greatest imaginable cost to himself” (Sam Storms).

**II Corinthians 5:21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Prayer:** Holy and righteous Father, what can we say or do but glory in your righteousness and the gift of your righteousness given to such undeserving sinners. Without cost and according to your pure grace you have given us the boundless blessing of Jesus Christ who has redeemed us from sin and death and hell, and given us instead everything that belongs to Jesus, righteousness, life and heaven. We humbly bow and worship you and give you all the glory, praise and thanks due your name. In Jesus name, Amen.