

## Getting Right with God

Romans 3:21-31

Key Verse: 22a

*“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”*

In last week's passage we found out to our shock that before God none of us are righteous. When we played our game of last one standing we saw that everyone except little Orlando was knocked out in the first question and even he was knocked out with the second question. There are those who break the law out right and don't care that they've done it. There are those who obey the law and are proud of it. And then there are those who break the law and despair about it. What this shows us is that no matter how hard we try, whether it is by doing good deeds, or living morally, or doing what we're told, or following all the rules, there is nothing that we can do that makes us right with God because we're all unrighteous. And Almighty God, who is the righteous Judge, could have destroyed all mankind because of our sins for this is what the law demanded. But thankfully God didn't do that, instead in his great mercy, he gave us a righteousness apart from the law. Instead of punishing sinners, God sent Jesus to save us from our sins according to his promises.

We talk a lot about righteousness, what is it? Righteousness means to have a right relationship with God. We can see what this beautiful relationship looks like, through the life of Jesus. When Jesus was about to begin his public ministry, he was baptized by John in the Jordan River. It was an act of submission to God's will as Jesus took his place in God's history. As he was coming up out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove and God spoke to Jesus from heaven, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Lk 3:22). Thus, to be right with God means; to be accepted, recognized and loved by Him. And at the same time, it is to be submissive to God's will and obedient to his commands. When we have this kind of relationship with God, we are righteous; right with God. One who is right with God is joyful, thankful and delights in God's love and blessings because they have assurance of eternal life knowing they will spend it with God in his kingdom forever.

Look at verse 21. “But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.” Before Jesus, people thought that if you obeyed the law you were righteous. But this only bred pride as people became self-righteous. From the beginning God spoke of the righteousness that would come from him starting with Adam in Genesis 3. And then when God called Abraham, he promised to bless all peoples on earth through him. (Gen 12:3; 22:18) The prophet Jeremiah perceived that God would establish a new way of righteousness with a new covenant that would focus on man's heart. God told Jeremiah, “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people...For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” (Jer 31:33,34) This new covenant was commenced by Jesus during the Last Supper. Paul explains to the Galatians that this promise was fulfilled by Jesus Christ who brought the blessing of forgiveness of sins to all who believe in him. (Gal 3:8) And when realized this and went back to the scriptures they found God was proclaiming it everywhere for example the prophet Isaiah foretold the suffering, death and resurrection of the Christ. Although the way of righteousness

had been foretold by God through the Law and the Prophets, it was still a mystery until it was made known through Jesus.

So how do we get this righteousness? Look at verse 22a. “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” Simply speaking, we can have righteousness from God when we believe in Jesus Christ. When we look at ourselves honestly, we know that we’re not righteous. We’re full of sins, faults, and weaknesses. We don’t deserve being called God’s children. However, when we simply believe in Jesus, we are made right with God by faith. The thief who was crucified next to Jesus is a good example of this. Here was a man who had committed terrible crimes; was caught, convicted and sentenced to death. He was getting what his deeds deserved. Yet on the cross, he heard Jesus pray, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Lk 23:34a) While he was hanging there near death, he saw Jesus as God. And he saw how God loved even those who crucified his Son. Compelled by the love of God he said to Jesus, “Remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Amazingly Jesus responded, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk 23:42-43). He had no right to expect such a response because he was guilty, a convicted criminal, and yet when he simply believed in Jesus and trusted in him, he received salvation and eternal life was maybe the first one in paradise with Jesus. Through his faith in Christ, he was made right with God and became his precious child.

Look at verses 22b,23. “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....” According to God’s bottom line, there is no difference between people. All of us suffer from the same problem; sin. We like to think that we are different somehow but whether we’re religious or not; rich or poor; republican or democrat; architect or engineer, in the final analysis these distinctions are superficial and irrelevant for in the sight of God all people are sinners and haven’t measured up to his standards.

In verse 23, Paul says that because of sin, people fall short of the glory of God. Paul’s explanation of sin goes deeper than our understanding. Sin is not merely doing something wrong, like stealing a pen, or cheating on an exam, or gossiping about someone behind their back. Of course these are sins but God’s standard is much higher than just following a bunch of rules. What Paul means here by falling short of God’s glory, is he’s referring to an old time scale or balance, like the scales of justice. And on one side of the scale, God has set his standard of weight that every man is measured against but unfortunately none of us measure up to that standard. God made man to measure up to a standard that he defined. First of all, God made man in his own image. In other words, man’s character and nature should reflect God’s own attributes. But because of sin, the image of God in people was destroyed. Sin robbed man of the power to meet God’s standard and in the end we became his enemy. This is the real problem of all people.

How can God give righteousness to ugly sinners who fall short of the glory of God? Look at verse 24. “...and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” This verse says that God justifies sinners by his grace. In essence, God, who is the righteous Judge, declares sinners to be “not guilty.” God’s declaration vindicates sinners, freeing us from condemnation and punishment. Justification restores us and makes us right with God. This is done freely by God’s grace. We don’t deserve it. We cannot earn it. We cannot buy it.

The word “justification” is essentially a legal term. But the transaction that it describes is more than just legal; it’s an act of God’s love and reveals his heart toward sinners. Through justification, God declares sinners to be his children and we become the object of his love. As amazing as it seems, to be justified is to be recognized and loved by God, just as Jesus was. When the prodigal son returned to his father, he brought only his repentance. He had sinned against heaven and against his father. He could not expect to be reinstated as a son; he only hoped to become one of his father’s hired men. But his father, upon seeing him coming in the distance, ran toward him, threw his arms around him and kissed him. Then the father said to his servants, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” (Lk 15:20-24) The prodigal son was accepted by his father with the full rights and privileges of a son. The prodigal son was accepted by his father with compassion and great affection. In the same way, God accepts sinners as his own precious children when they put their faith in Jesus.

But how can a righteous Judge simply declare sinners to be “not guilty” when they are obviously guilty? Acting like this is not justice, it looks more like favoritism. It looks like politics in Chicago. However look at verse 24 again. “...and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” God can justify sinners through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. What does “redemption” mean? The word “redemption” came from the slave markets. Some people who knew that slavery was a terrible injustice wanted to do something about it. So they would go to the slave market, buy a slave, and then set him free. They called this an act of “redemption.” In the same way, sinners need to be redeemed from the bondage of sin. Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” (Jn 8:34) Sometimes we take the power of sin lightly, like a person who, while eating chocolate cake says, “I can lose weight anytime I want to.” However it’s only when we really try to fight against sin that we realize how powerful it is. Honestly speaking, sin enslaves people and we are helpless before its power. But thank God who sent his one and only Son Jesus to redeem us from our bondage to sin.

How did God redeem us? Look at verse 25a. “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.” Although justification has been given to us freely by God’s grace, it was very expensive to God. God had to sacrifice his one and only Son Jesus Christ in order to pay the demand of sin. There was no other way; it was the only way for the wages of sin is death. God said, “...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” (Hebrews 9:22) “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.” (Leviticus 17:11) The price of sin is blood; nothing less. The Israelites had to sacrifice animals pay for their sins. However this sacrifice was only temporary. So they had to repeat it year after year after year. But when Jesus was sacrificed, he paid the price for all sin past, present and future. The power of Christ’s sacrifice is partially explained in Hebrews 9:26b. It says, “But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Christ’s sacrifice, once for all, has done away with sin. John the Baptist understood the deep meaning of Jesus’ coming when he said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” (Jn 1:29) Hebrews 9:13-14 say, “The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are

ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God.” The blood of Jesus has great power and can cleanse our consciences completely. No matter how sinful we may be, the blood of Jesus cleanses us so that we can be accepted by the holy God. Not only are we accepted by God it helps us to serve him while we are still living here on earth, As Luke 1:74,75 says, “...to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.” The blood of Jesus empowers us to live as holy children of God every day.

God accomplished his work of redemption without compromising his own righteous character. Look at 3:25b,26. “He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” God is not like Buddha and just “forget about” man’s sins that is not justice. Again that would be favoritism. So in order to make the way of righteousness for us, God punished every sin committed without missing one. And he did that when he punished Jesus on the cross.

Verse 25 contains the word “forbearance.” I remember after I graduated from college, the bank wanted me to pay back my loans but I didn’t have the money, so they gave me a forbearance which meant that they post-poned my payment date another year. It was the same with God. According to God’s just character, he should punish sinners when they commit their sins. But God didn’t. Instead, he restrained himself and waited for the moment of Jesus’ crucifixion. Then at the cross, he punished Jesus for the full measure of sin. That’s why Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In this way God remained the just and righteous God and also made a way to justify sinners.

Verse 27-31 tell us many things. But let’s remember two. First, boasting is excluded. We have nothing to boast about because God has done everything for us through Jesus. Second, righteousness that comes by faith does not nullify the law. This means that we can’t live anyway we want. We must love God and honor him as God and do our best to live a life that pleases him. The last few weeks we have been beaten up by the word of God telling us what wretched sinners we are. It showed that we are full of every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. We are full of envy, murder, deceit and malice. We are gossips, slanderers and God haters, who are insolent arrogant and boastful. We are senseless, faithless, heartless and ruthless. We even invent ways of doing evil. Whether we like to admit it or not, each of us, me included, fell into this category. But “blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.” <sup>2</sup> Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.” (Ps 32:1-2) I can only thank God for his amazing grace and love for us that he doesn’t count our sins against us when we believe in Jesus. It doesn’t matter what we’ve done as long as we have faith in Jesus. I had a friend that I shared the good news of Jesus with. But he would not accept Jesus because he felt that he had done too much evil, he had gone too far. But blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered by the righteousness that comes from God through faith in Jesus for all who believe.