

Romans 3:21-31 (NKJV)

21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

1

25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

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

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.

2

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

29 Or is He 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 faith.

31 Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

3

1:1-17 Paul is writing to BELIEVERS – both Jews and Gentiles

- The GOSPEL (vs. 16-17) is the good news that those BELIEVERS who are producing faith-filled works of righteousness are considered justified by God and will be rewarded with kingdom inheritance
- SALVATION in Romans is not initial salvation (regeneration) that results when one initially believes on Jesus; it is ongoing salvation (sanctification) for those who *continue to believe*, resulting in the saving of the soul

4

- His ultimate goal is to resolve the disunity and division in the church, caused by carnality and ethnic prejudices, with the goal being, as Paul wrote in Ephesians:

- Eph 4:13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

5

1:18-32 Paul rebukes both Jewish and Gentile believers for sinning and warns of God's wrath upon those who continue in sinfulness

- The Gentile believers are mainly guilty of committing outward sins, such as immorality and other forms of licentious living, that characterize the Greco-Roman culture
- The Jewish believers are guilty of observing the *letter* of the law *outwardly*, while ignoring the *spirit* of the law *inwardly*, by committing sins of the heart (e.g., bitterness, hatred, lust, pride, strife, etc.)

6

2:1-29 Paul admonishes the Jewish believers for clinging to the ritual aspects of the law, thinking their physical circumcision guarantees covenant acceptance, even though God is focused on circumcision of the heart

- He shocks the Jews by claiming God accepts even uncircumcised Gentiles who are living righteously

7

3:1-20 Paul teaches that the Jewish believers are just as sinful as the Gentile believers, and he emphasizes that mere deeds of the law do not sanctify or mean that one is living righteously

- The first section of Romans (1:1-3:20) ends with this conclusion:

Rom 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

8

- deeds of the law = a term Paul uses to refer to observing the ritual aspects of the law (e.g., circumcision, dietary laws, observing feast days and sabbaths) – and expecting those things to make one sanctified and righteous (which they do not!)
- He uses this term in contradistinction to another term – *the righteous requirements of the law* = fulfilling the moral law of God – which is truly righteous living

9

- Reminder: This has nothing to do with initial salvation; Paul is writing to believers about the saving of the soul, which is about living righteously and inheriting rewards at the JSC
- His point is that observing the Mosaic rituals cannot save the soul
- They merely highlight Israel's sinfulness and need to keep *the righteous requirements of the law*, which Jesus referred to as the weightier matters of the law – the moral law of God, summed up in the two great commandments:

10

- Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.
- The mentality of many Christians is that “keeping a list” and/or “holding to standards” makes them spiritual
- God forbids this mentality, and wants His children to obey the law of Christ, the law of love

11

Rom 3:21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;

- The righteousness of God (per 1:16-17) is God's salvation of His *faithful* children at the Judgment Seat of Christ, those who have lived righteously by fulfilling *the righteous requirements of the law*

12

- They will be rewarded and will become His bride and co-rulers in the Messianic kingdom, serving together with Him in New Jerusalem
- So the salvation mentioned in Rom. 1:16 and throughout the book is NOT initial salvation – the salvation of your spirit when you get saved (regenerated) –
- It is SOUL-salvation, which Jesus talked about in Matt. 16:24-27 – the saving of your soul at the Judgment Seat
- Title: Soul-Salvation by Grace Through Faith

13

- This is what Paul calls “the gospel of Christ” in Rom. 1:16 and “my gospel” in 16:25-26, which was hidden in OT times, but is now made manifest
- Rom 16:25-26 Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—

14

- The law and the prophets predicted the mystery of the gospel that Paul had been commissioned to share, and which he had since revealed to all nations – not merely to Jews, but to the Gentile world
- “*for obedience to the faith*” – This is not the gospel of initial salvation for sinners (unbelievers); it is the gospel of ongoing salvation (sanctification unto righteousness) for saints
- It is the good news that those Jews and Gentiles who believe this gospel and produce faith-filled works of righteous will experience the SALVATION of their souls at the JSC

15

- v. 21 says it is “*apart from the law*”
- James Dunn: “*apart from the law*” means apart from the law understood as a badge of Jewishness, understood as the chief identifying characteristic of covenant membership by those “*within the law.*” It is precisely this link between law and God’s righteousness which Paul ... seeks to sever; it is precisely this presumption, that works of the law ensure the Jew’s final vindication by God because they maintain his status and identity as a member of God’s people, that Paul seeks to destroy by his abrupt “*apart from the law.*”

16

- Rather, Paul says, it is “*through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.*” (3:22)
- Dunn: Expressed as an antithesis to “*works of the law*” (3:20), it is clearly intended to denote *the basis of a relationship which is not dependent on specific ritual acts, but is direct and immediate, a relying on the risen Christ rather than a resting on the law.*
- The verb BELIEVE (in v. 22 – “*on all who believe*”) is an active present participle and should read: “*on all who are believing*”

17

- Dunn: As with 1:16 the present tense of the verb (“*to all who believe*”) may well imply that Paul was thinking of this attitude of reliance on Christ not simply as the beginning of the relationship with God (experience of God’s righteousness) but also as the continuing (indeed lifelong) basis of that relationship.
- Young’s Literal Translation:
Rom 3:22 and the righteousness of God [is] through the faith of Jesus Christ to all, and upon all those believing.

18

- In other words, those believers who keep believing God to produce faith-filled works are the ones who are declared righteous by God
- It's not exclusive to Jews who do deeds of the law (i.e., keep the ritual aspects of the Mosaic law)
- This offer is TO all believers, but is only UPON all believers who are believing God
- And isn't that the point of Heb. 11? Those believers from olden times trusted God, by faith, to fulfill *the righteous requirements of the law*

19

- You cannot live righteously merely by having daily devotions and going to church
- You cannot live righteously merely by having separational "standards"
- You can only live righteously by trusting the Holy Spirit who lives within to enable you to obey God!
- That is the point of climax in Rom. 3:22
- Paul says there's "no difference" – in other words, this isn't only for Jews; it is for ALL believers, regardless of their ethnic heritage

20

Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

- While this *applies* to lost people, it does NOT refer to lost people in the context of Rom. 3, even though virtually everyone uses it in their gospel presentations, especially when using the Romans Road approach
- Paul is talking about believers, all of whom "have sinned" and "are missing out on the glory intended for them—the tenses denoting a continuing consequence of past sins." (Dunn)

21

- But there's good news – and it's Paul gospel – the gospel that was a mystery in OT times but is now revealed

Rom 3:24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

- "being justified" is God declaring that you are living righteously, qualifying for soul-salvation
- Notice that justification is a gift of God's grace – this wording caused the Reformers to think Paul was speaking of initial salvation, which IS by grace, through faith (Eph. 2:8-9)

22

- But that's not Paul's point here; he is saying that SOUL-SALVATION is also by God's grace, through faith

Dunn: It is this humbling recognition—that he has to depend entirely from start to finish on God's gracious power, that he can receive acquittal only as a gift—which lies at the heart of faith for Paul ... The indispensable starting point for any good that man does is his acceptance of God's embrace and his continual reliance on God's enabling to accomplish that good.

- Paul makes the same emphatic point in Gal. 3

23

Gal 3:2 This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

5-6 Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you ... does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? — just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

24

- Paul is talking about being sanctified by grace through faith, and he quotes the same passage from Genesis about Abraham as quoted in Romans 4:3
- As we shall see, it is NOT speaking of Abraham's initial belief in Jehovah, but his ongoing exercising of faith, that is, believing God for righteous living
- Thus, even in the OT we find: Soul-Salvation by Grace Through Faith

25

- Just like initial salvation of one's spirit, so the ongoing salvation of one's soul is ...
- Rom 3:24b-25a through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness,
- Christ's redemptive work on Calvary is both retroactive and proactive

26

Dunn: On the one hand it certainly denotes a historical action of Christ, the act of ransoming, the provision of a ransom payment ... But on the other hand, in Paul's mind there may well have been also the implication that this redemption is an offer still available "in Christ Jesus." If so, the two aspects would be held together in Paul's mind by his ... conviction that the believer is united with Christ not only in the here and now, but also with Christ in his dying and rising again.

27

- This past and present application of Christ's blood redemption is also seen in Eph. 1:7
- Eph 1:7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.
- All of our PAST sins were forgiven when He saved us initially, but all of our PRESENT sins are forgiven only when we confess them on the basis of 1 Jn. 1:9

28

- Young's Literal Translation for Rom. 3:25 translates the word "propitiation" as "mercy seat," for the Greek word used was what the Septuagint translators used to convey the idea of mercy seat in the OT
- The mercy seat was where the high priest of Israel applied the blood of the lamb on the annual Day of Atonement, when atoning for the sins of the nation
- The OT sacrifices, including those on the Day of Atonement, were for a redeemed people to confess their ongoing sins to God

29

- This is pictured for NT believers in the "cleansing" of 1 Jn. 1:9 – God forgives and CLEANSSES us from ALL unrighteousness
 - Only the Passover signified the initial application of blood, as pictured in initial salvation
 - 1 Jn. 1:7 gives a beautiful picture of what happens in the heavenlies when children of God keep their sins confessed
- 1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

30

- The point is that being considered justified (righteous) at the Bema Seat of Christ for living righteously is made possible because of Christ's redemptive work on Calvary, so, in that sense, His justification of believers who live righteously is also given as an act of His grace
- The thrust of Romans 2-3 is that the Jewish believers were putting their confidence in their rituals, including circumcision, depending on that to sanctify them and justify them before God, rather than Christ's redemption and resurrection

31

- What about faith-filled OT saints? Paul includes them in v. 25b
- Rom 3:25b because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,
- Dunn: Former sins were passed over, either because Jesus' death demonstrates the sacrificial system to be effective (at least so far as inadvertent sins were concerned), or because Jesus' death as the death of sinful man is effective for the persons of faith who came before him as well as for those who come after.

32

- Thus, people like Noah and Job—and multitudes of others who lived righteously—were also justified by faith in ancient times, long before Christ had come
 - Having talked about the past, Paul returns to the present in v. 26
- Rom 3:26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

33

- Dunn: Christ's death deals with the believer's sins and destroys the power of sin for the one "in Christ" ... restoring to communion with God the one who identifies himself with the dead and risen Christ in trustful commitment.
 - The key is "trustful commitment" – those who *are believing*, according v. 22
- Rom 3:27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.

34

Paul essentially says to these first century Jewish believers:

- "Don't brag about the fact that you are Jewish and have the mark of circumcision and keep the sabbaths and feast days and hold to a kosher diet. Those things do not make you righteous!"
- By way of application, Paul says to 21st century Christians: "You cannot boast about 'keeping your list' or holding to your 'separational standards'"

35

Paul says to these first century Jewish believers:

- "Living righteously and pleasing God does not come by these things, but by depending on Jesus to enable you to live righteously, so stop thinking you are more spiritual than others because you hold to certain rituals"
 - God is looking for those who will keep on believing Him
- Rom 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

36

- Believers are considered righteous by God only to the extent that they are living by faith, producing faith-filled works of righteousness, not by merely carrying out religious rituals of some sort
- Those who continue to think this is talking about initial salvation have ignored the context!
- This is practical theology for you and me and for Christians everywhere

37

- To his Jewish audience, Paul asks:
Rom 3:29-30 Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.
- “there is one God” – this is the same phrase used in James 2:19
- The Jews were monotheistic, believing in Jehovah, the one true God

38

- That being the case, if God is One, wouldn't He treat all people the same, especially seeing He is impartial (2:11)?
- He treats Jewish believers who are circumcised the same as Gentile believers who are uncircumcised
- All believers who live righteously, BY FAITH, are considered “circumcised in heart” (2:26)

39

- Rom 3:31 Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.
- Does living by faith negate the Mosaic law?
- Absolutely not! The moral law of God transcends time and ethnicity
- God expects all of His children – Jewish AND Gentile believers – to fulfill *the righteous requirements of the law* by depending on the risen Christ

40

- Faith-living results in righteousness of life, obeying the weightier matters of the law, which pleases God
- Only the Jewish *rituals* have been nullified, for they do not make one righteous – they merely accentuate man's sinfulness
- But now that Christ has come, we depend on His righteous provision within to enable us to obey God

41

- Romans is written to both Jewish and Gentile believers who are living carnally
- Paul dealt with the Gentile carnality in ch. 1
- Their situation is not nearly as complicated as the Jewish one, for the Gentiles never had the Mosaic law
- So they need to simply stop their sinning, and now they have Christ to enable them
- But Paul's focus in ch. 2-3 has predominantly been the Jewish believers, who are trapped in a web of Mosaic rituals, thinking that *deeds of the law* make them righteous

42

- Paul is now going to use as illustrations two OT Jewish believers, revered by all the Jews: Abraham and King David
- Both of these men were accepted by God – but why? Was it because they kept the Jewish *rituals*?
- NO! It was because they simply believed God to fulfill *the righteous requirements of the law*

43

Rom 4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?

2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”

- In v. 3 Paul quotes Gen. 15:6
- The evangelical Christian world largely interprets this as Abraham’s *initial* salvation, because they interpret Rom. 3-4 as referring to *initial* salvation

44

- But that is not a valid interpretation, because Paul is NOT talking to *unbelievers* about matters of *initial* salvation
- He is talking to *believers* about matters of *ongoing* salvation, what we call sanctification and living righteously – that is overwhelmingly clear from the context
- It’s difficult for some Christians to accept that, because they have been so indoctrinated with theology that has been passed down from the Reformation

45

Arlen Chitwood, *The Acts Period*:

This event is looked upon by some individuals as the point in Abraham’s life where he was saved. But that CANNOT possibly be correct. The context of the statement in Gen. 15:6 has to do with that which God had previously revealed about Abraham and his progeny realizing an inheritance in another land (cf. Gen. 13:14-17; 15:2-21), which is the contextual setting of the statement in Romans as well (4:1-22). And it was in THIS realm that Abraham exercised faith, believed God.

46

Arlen Chitwood, *The Acts Period*:

Abraham had believed God relative to this same issue prior to the events of Genesis chapter fifteen, while still in Ur (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Heb. 11:8). And his belief concerning this issue, once in the land, is simply a continuing belief in God’s fulfillment of that which He had previously promised ... Eternal salvation is NOT in view anywhere in this passage.

47

- By the time we reach Gen. 15, Abraham is a man who has believed God for many years and has followed the Lord from Ur (a chic, pagan city of his day) to Canaan land
- In the early verses of Gen. 15, Abraham asks God if Eliezer, his servant, will become his heir
- God tells Abraham “no,” then assures him that his heir will come from his own body and become as the stars of heaven

48

Gen 15:5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

Gen 15:6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

- v. 6 is quoted by Paul in Rom. 4:3 and Gal. 3:6
- In both cases, Paul is talking about matters of ongoing sanctification by faith, not initial salvation (regeneration) by faith

49

Rom 4:4 Now to him who works, the wages are [KJV: *reward is*] not counted as grace but as debt.

- The Christian life is all about doing – as 2:7 says, "doing good" – as 2:13 says, "doers of the law" – i.e., *the righteous requirements of the law*
- To live righteously and do good one must behave in a certain manner and that involves works of sorts

50

- But Paul has been speaking to Jews throughout the context of ch. 2-3 about the futility of doing mere *works of the law* (keeping the *rituals*) – that is the context
- So in v. 4 Paul essentially says to those Jewish believers who are focused on doing the Mosaic *rituals*, "You have the mentality that God *owes* you for doing deeds of the law."
- Paul has already made the point that doing *works of the law* does NOT justify; those deeds don't make you righteous – they only bring knowledge of sin and guilt (3:19-20)

51

Thus, Paul implies:

- "Expecting God to repay you for doing mere *deeds of the law* is foolish, because you are lawbreakers when it comes to the weightier matters of the law – your reward will be negative."
- "God rewards those who fulfill *the righteous requirements of the law* BY FAITH – while trusting Him to graciously reward as He sees fit."

52

Isn't that the point made by Jesus in the parable of the workers in Matt. 20?

Matt 20:1 For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

- The *kingdom of heaven* is New Jerusalem, the realm of reward in the coming Messianic kingdom – that's what Jesus was teaching about in this parable
- He tells of a landowner needing to hire laborers to harvest the crop in his vineyard

53

- The first round of workers hired early in the morning want to negotiate a fair wage for their labor
- They represent the Jews who cling to mere *deeds of the law* and have an entitlement mentality – "God owes us for keeping the Mosaic rituals!"
- More workers are hired later in the day – some at the 3rd hr., some at the 6th, some at the 9th, and some at the 11th
- They see no need to negotiate; they simply trust the landowner to pay them fairly

54

- They represent Jews who keep *the righteous requirements of the law* by faith and trust God to reward as He sees fit
- At the end of the workday, the landowner pays all the workers a full day's wage, even those who did not work a full day
- When those hired *first* get their agreed-upon wage, which is the same as given to everyone else, they complain:
- "But we worked all day! Those hired later only worked part of the day. We should get more money!"

55

- The landowner tells them they have been paid according to their agreement; they have no business telling him what he can and cannot pay the others
 - How do we understand this?
- Rom 4:4 Now to him who works, the wages are [KJV: *reward is*] not counted as grace but as debt.
- In light of Christ's parable and the context of Rom. 2-3, the application is now clear

56

- Those believers who have an entitlement mentality will NOT receive eternal rewards; they will get only what they bargained for: bragging rights for doing *deeds of the law*
 - Their debt has been repaid here on Earth
 - On the other hand:
- Rom 4:5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

57

- These believers are not merely focused on keeping the *Mosaic rituals* with an entitlement mentality
- They are focused on believing God to fulfill *the righteous requirements of the law*
- Consequently, God justifies them; they will be rewarded when they meet Him in judgment
- This also applied in ancient times – consider Abraham and King David who lived in this manner and with this attitude

58

Rom 4:6-8 just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

- This is a quote from Ps. 32
- David wrote this psalm after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, and after he had sought forgiveness, cleansing and restoration from God

59

- David's purpose is to share with others how graciously God deals with those who confess their sins and the glorious blessedness of forgiveness
- Does this have anything to do with initial salvation? Of course not!
- This is about sanctification and cleansing, going forward living righteously, even after sinning and confessing those sins

60

- ***Impute*** = to take inventory and conclude
- This does NOT mean we are credited with Christ's righteousness when we are saved
- It simply means that when a believer confesses sins and moves on living righteously, God no longer reckons His child to be sinful, but righteous
- King David did not have to work his way back into fellowship with God, nor do you when you confess your sins – God instantly pardons and cleanses and considers you as one of His righteous ones

61

Do you have an *entitlement mentality*, expecting God to reward you for keeping your list and holding to your standards?

Or do you have a spirit of righteousness through faith? – obeying God by trusting Him for help?

62

Rom 3:23-24 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

- **Don't fall short of God's glory by continued sinning**
- **Confess your sins, as the psalmist did, and go on living righteously by the grace of God, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ!**

63