

6. ROMANS SERIES: The Universal Need Met

Romans 3:21-31

'I greatly longed to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the righteousness of God", because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous... Night and day I pondered until... I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, He justifies us by faith. Thereupon I felt myself reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the "righteousness of God" had filled me with hate, now it came to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven.'

Martin Luther

We have seen in our previous studies that both Gentiles and Jews stand condemned before God, having no acceptable excuse for their sin and rebellion. There is no acceptance to be found with God on the basis of Law-keeping, ancestry or circumcision, since all men are Law-breakers. Will all men now suffer the eternal punishment of God for their sin? Is there any hope at all?

Please Read Romans 3:21-31

Things are clearly desperate for man, but it at this point that God intervenes and shows a way, the only way to acceptance with God for sinful man, for all other ways are shut to him.

Verse 21: The very God who condemns man is the very one who provides the way of deliverance for wicked man. He provides a righteousness, a way of acceptance without the need for perfect Law-keeping (3:28; 4:6-8; Gal 2:16,21; 3:10-13; Eph 2:9; Philip 3:9; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:5) on the part of man and this is proclaimed to all. The Old Testament has been a witness to this righteousness, with Old Testament saints already accepted because of it.

Verses 22,23: This righteousness of God is that which comes through the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 1:21; Jn 3:16; 14:6; Acts 4:12) to all who receive it through the instrumentality of faith. It is not earned. It is available to all who believe, to everyone for all need it, having fallen short of the ideal which God had in view when He brought man into being (Gen 3:8).

QUESTION: Are justified sinners made righteous or declared righteous?

Verse 24: God accepts sinful man as righteous, for the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us by faith alone. He accepts us in advance of the final judgment by grace, for in Christ we have made the grade (1 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:4) of perfect righteousness that we are unable to attain in ourselves (Gen 15:6; Ps 32:1,2; Is 53:4-6; Jer 23:6; Rom 5:18,19).

It is a deliverance by means of the payment of a ransom, from the guilt, punishment and power of sin (Lk 21:28; Rom 8:23; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:7,14; 4:30; Gal 1:14; Heb 9:15; 11:35). That payment was the price of Christ's blood. But yet it is without cost to the sinner.

NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE: Explain the meaning of 'propitiation' in 3:25?

Verses 25,26: God is the Author of the redemption accomplished through the Lord Jesus Christ. In His eternal plan, the Lord Jesus Christ was to be the bearer and appeaser, the diverter of God's wrath (1:18; 2:5; 3:5,9; 9:22; Eph 2:3; 5:6; Col 3:6; 1 Thess 1:10; 2:16; 5:19; Rev 6:16,17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15) away from sinners.

This appeasement, or propitiation was by Christ's shed blood (Is 53:4-8,12; Mt 20:28; 26:28; Mk 10:45; 14:24; Lk 22:20; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 10:16; 11:25; 2 Cor 5:20,21; Eph 1:7; 2:13; Col 1:20; 1 Tim 2:6; Heb 9:11,12,15,23-28; 1 Pet 1:18,19; 2:24; 1 Jn 1:7; 5:6; Rev 1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11; 13:8) and to be received, faith must be exercised in Christ (1:8,16,17; 3:22,26,28,30; 4:3; Eph 2:8).

God is righteous, always doing what is right. Because of this the guilty must be punished. In order to justify sinners and to remain just, the punishment fell on the Lord Jesus Christ. Old Testament justified sinners, as New Testament justified sinners, are justified on the basis of Christ's redeeming work (1 Jn 2:2). This satisfied Divine justice by being substitutionary, taking the punishment due others and paying it completely.

The penalty due to the believing sinner was transferred to Christ's account; the righteousness, that of Christ's right standing was transferred to the believing sinners account, satisfying both justice and love. This is so for all that believe.

QUESTION: Discuss how faith receives righteousness?

Verses 27,28: There is no place for boasting in this. We have done nothing to secure righteousness and the acceptance of God. All has become ours by faith, not works or Law-keeping (Eph 2:8,9; 1 Cor 1:31; 4:7).

Verses 29,30: The Jews are not saved by the works of the Law, as though God was their God only and giving them only a way of acceptance with Him. Since both Jews and Gentiles are condemned because of Law-breaking and sin, there is only one way of righteousness revealed for both (Gen 22:18; Is 45:22; Rom 4:9-12), all old distinctions are finished.

QUESTION: Is there any reason why Christians should be proud because God accepts them? Discuss.

Verse 31: Although they do not receive the righteousness that God gives to all believers for obedience to the Law, this does not mean that the Law has no purpose and has become useless.

God did not cast aside His Law when He gave the Lord Jesus Christ to die for sinners on the cross. Through His death, God maintained the standard that His Law required. God's holy Law demanded our death, so God sent the Lord Jesus Christ to take the punishment for us that the Law demands. The Law also insisted on perfect righteousness, so God covered us with His righteousness, which is the standard of the Law. Therefore God's Law is not dishonoured and useless through this way of righteousness provided by God in Christ.

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

How did Abraham believe God (4:3)?

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