

## Romans 3:21-31

### "Justified Freely"

We last left off under the heavy hand of a deadly diagnosis. Every individual on the planet has been diagnosed w/the deadly disease of sin & is guilty, having no hope being w/out God in the world. – We were brought under the examination of scripture through the pen of Paul the apostle & the outlook is worse than bleak, it's absolutely terminal! All have sinned *against* God; therefore all are guilty *before* God & are justly deserving of the judgment *of* God! By way of reminder, let's review our chart beginning back in Vs 10.

### Vs 10-18

As I mentioned last week, this is where (after establishing the principle of man's guilt before God) Paul broke out his Bible that he might undergird & solidify his point. It's almost like he's pre-empting the question, "You've said Jew & Gentile are the same before God. That we're on equal footing in the 'guilty' section. Where does the *Bible* say that?" So he grabs scripture from *this* section, *that* psalm, from *this* passage & *that* prophet. & He's developing the perfect unity, the total continuity of scripture concerning this undeniable, irrefutable truth!

Now, I could rehearse what we looked at last week concerning this section because it's certainly worthy of review. But there's another... I'll call it "undercurrent" here that we can learn from & that is this.

Paul has been imposing truth upon his reader. He's been taking us to school, teaching theology. 📖 What is "Theology"? It's the study of the nature of God. Who God is, what He does, why He does it... **Question. Where do you get your theology? Paul wasn't putting forth his point predicated upon what Rabbi "so & so" taught him. Or some other source material that he read, what he's giving us is what the word of God plainly says! So to w/you & so to w/me. Our theology should be based on what God has revealed of Himself in His world. Not on what this guy said, or that guy told me...**

Because if we simply receive what some individual says, then we're always looking at scripture through the lens of what we've learned rather than looking at what we've learned through the lens of scripture... (Make sense?) In other words, we'll feel compelled to *tweak scripture* to fit our perspective rather than *allow scripture* to tweak our *perspective*!

For instance, if you've been taught that God requires you to be baptized to be saved, now you're looking at all these scriptures & trying to fit them w/in the confines of that perspective. And suddenly baptism rises to the top of your priority list.

Now, you're having to wrestle w/simple passages like, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."<sup>1</sup> Or "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved,"<sup>2</sup> Or "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."<sup>3</sup> But if you recognize that salvation is a free gift, not predicated in any way upon what we do, but it all rests on the finished work of what He's done... it all becomes clear. & Baptism becomes obedience from the overflow of a loving relationship rather than a legal religious requirement...

It could be a position someone takes on communion, or the Holy Spirit. I was taught things on both of those subjects growing up that I trusted was true (I don't think anyone had any malicious or deceitful intent). But when I read the Bible for myself, there were things I had to "unlearn" so that I might come into alignment w/what the scriptures state.

So, don't get your theology from a man. I will always do my very best to teach you the balanced truth of the word of God. But never just "take my word" for it. I may miss something! This is why the Bible says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God (no one else can do it for you), a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."<sup>4\*</sup>

Ok, Paul's point (all mankind is confined & condemned under sin) is undeniably, (scripturally) irrefutably true. The law has condemned us all. God demands perfect righteousness; the law shows me I can never achieve perfect righteousness... I'm lost in sinfulness, how then can I be saved? ... & This (Ladies & Gentlemen) is where Paul brings us out of darkness & into glorious light. From our sad *situation* to a joyous cause for *celebration*. Let's look together.

## Vs 21-22

How we should give God praise for these 2 (some of the most pivotal) words in all of scripture, "But now"! Here we are, all of mankind headed down the hopelessly irreversible slippery slope of sin leading to *condemnation* in Ch 3 Vs 20 & suddenly God steps in, everything changes & we find ourselves staring at the summit peak of God's *justification* beginning Ch 3 Vs 21! I'm so glad that man's *impossibilities* are merely God's *opportunities*.

<sup>1</sup> The New King James Version (Jn 3:16), (1982), Thomas Nelson.

<sup>2</sup> The New King James Version (Ac 16:31), (1982), Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> The New King James Version (Eph 2:8-9), (1982), Thomas Nelson.

<sup>4</sup> The New King James Version (2 Ti 2:15), (1982), Thomas Nelson.

The words, “But now” are pointing us to the *new covenant* that God established in/through J.C. – Coming *out* of the covenant predicated upon law (what I *do*), & into the covenant predicated upon *grace* (what Christ has *done*).

& Though it’s a “new” covenant (in the sense that it replaced the previous covenant of law) it’s really nothing *new* in that it was witnessed *by* (think, spoken/written *of*) by the Law & the Prophets. (This term, “the Law & the Prophets” being a way to refer to the totality of the O.T. scriptures). The plan of God to supply righteousness & redemption apart from the law had been foreshadowed & foretold all throughout the O.T.

Or to understand that another way. The love story of God’s plan to send His Son to live *among* us & die *for* us, paying the penalty of sin on behalf *of* us that He might supply His righteousness *to* us is seen & shared all throughout the scriptures.

Notice, it’s the righteousness of God, “apart from the law”. It’s important that we understand what that means! It means that there’s no legal structure, no list of do’s & don’ts, no self-imposed standards, or no set of ceremonies, rules, rituals or regulations that can save us. – You can’t read your Bible enough, come to church enough, pray enough, serve enough, give enough or any other thing... The *law* (a legal standard) cannot save you. – Nor is this righteousness a “supplemental” righteousness. Something that takes up the slack where you fall short, it’s not in any way connected to our own efforts or own attempts at righteousness.

Ok. If God demands perfect righteousness (which He does), & I can’t do anything to achieve that (which I can’t), so He Himself accomplishes it on my behalf (which He has done), how do I get it? How is it communicated, imputed or imparted to me? – Underline it, Vs 22, “Through faith in Jesus Christ,” ... \* Now, family this is important, don’t miss it. – The righteousness of God is not ours *by* faith; it’s ours *through* faith. We don’t *earn* righteousness *by* our faith, we *receive* righteousness *through* our faith.

(You may think I’m splitting hairs here, but I believe it’s a hair worth splitting). If we’re not careful we’ll begin to think of faith as the *merit* & salvation as the resulting reward we earned, rather than faith as the *means* & salvation as a *free gift*. Think of it like this, faith is the conduit through which the saving grace of God flows into our lives.

If you live in a home that has plumbing (which I trust that you do), you receive water, *through* pipes, electricity *through* wires, they aren’t merits, they’re means through which you receive the benefit. So to, faith isn’t a merit leading *to* salvation, it’s a means through which we *receive* God’s gift of salvation.

To the Ephesians Paul put that like this, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”*<sup>5</sup>

The conduit through which the saving grace of God flows... He supplies to you from His end. The whole thing, from beginning to end is of Him.

& To whom does He give His righteousness? It goes, “to all & on all who believe. For there is no difference.” \*In other words, all have sinned just the same, all are saved just the same. (& I for one am so grateful that God has ordained one way to be saved, it makes my job so easy...). Imagine there being different ways for different people to be saved. The *African* is saved this way, but the *American* is saved that way, the *Asian* needs to do this, the *Australian* needs to do that. If you’re a *man*, this applies, if you’re a *woman*, that applies... Jews have one way, but *Gentiles* another... How confusing & complicated would that become? Here I am, I’m out there thinking I’m sharing the Asian gospel, but I accidentally shared the African Gospel, & inadvertently sprinkled some American requirements in there while I was at it... ☺ Ladies & Gentlemen, the righteousness of God is through faith in J.C. to all & on all who believe, for there is no difference!

#### Vs 23-24

Paul has spent considerable time “setting the stage” for a Savior. Now he’s speaking about how God brings this salvation to pass *through* His Son (our Savior) J.C.

& He’s setting before us 3 themes he wants us to understand. #1 **Justification**, “being *justified freely*” through His grace. #2 **Redemption**, “through the *redemption* that is in Christ Jesus”. & #3 (We’ll see in Vs 25) **Propitiation**, “whom God set forth as a *propitiation by His blood*,”. “Justification”, is a legal, court of law kind of term. – “Redemption” paints the image of a slave market & “propitiation” is a religious term, speaking of appeasing God through sacrifice... Justification solves the problem of man’s guilty before a righteous Judge. Redemption solves the problem of man’s slavery to sin, the world, and the devil. Propitiation solves the problem of offending our Creator...

Now, we’ve already seen how Paul has confined the entire human race under sin. In Vs 23 he says it succinctly, “All have sinned & fall short of the glory of God.” It’s a universal *statement* & it’s answered by a universal *offer* to all who believe (to be justified freely by God’s grace *through* the redemption that is in Christ Jesus).

Btw, what does it mean, “All have *sinned*?” \*What does it mean to “sin”?

<sup>5</sup> The New King James Version (Eph 2:8-9). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

It simply means, “To miss the mark”. It’s an old archery term. Here we are in an archery contest, you draw, back let your arrow fly, it misses the bullseye. & I say, “Ha! You sinned there, didn’t ya!?” You aimed at the mark, but you missed it, couldn’t hit the objective. Then I draw back, let *my* arrow fly, & I miss the target altogether! & You say, “Man, you *really sinned!*” Now, you may’ve gotten closer, you may not have sinned as bad as I have, but we both sinned just the same.

& This is the condition of man. Some sin really bad, some sin not as bad, but we all sin, we all miss the mark of God’s perfection, God’s glory. As Solomon said, “*For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.*”<sup>6</sup> We fall short, we don’t attain to the perfection of God... in what we do, how we think, the way we speak, there’s not a single dimension to our lives in which we don’t fall short... Even when we seek to *give God glory*, it *falls short of what He’s worthy*... We all fall short of the glory, the perfect holiness, the perfect righteousness, the perfect everything of God. Now as for how short, perhaps I’m in the deepest mineshaft, you’re on top of Mt. Everest, but neither one of us are reaching the stars... All have sinned & fall short of the glory of God... Aren’t you glad it doesn’t end there? \*

## Vs 24

Sometimes (as a pastor) the most difficult part of a passage is in figuring out what *not* to say. There’s so much contained in this single Vs, we could undoubtedly spend our entire time right here.

\*There was only one way that you & I (being in such a sinful state) were ever going to be justified in the sight of God & that was to be *freely* justified. There was nothing we could do to *earn* our justification, no way we could hope to *purchase* our justification... if it wasn’t made free, we couldn’t have it at all! (Btw. What does it mean to be “justified”? Essentially it means to be made right in the sight of God. “Just as if I’d never sinned”.) & God gives us this standing before Him *freely* by His grace (through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus).

Now, we love this word, “Freely”. It’s the Greek Word “Dorean” (Doh-ray-on), more literally translated, “without a cause”. It’s the same word Jesus used in Jn 15:25 in speaking of the world’s hatred for Him. He was doing good, healing & helping people, speaking truth, they hated him. & He said, “*But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, ‘They hated Me* (Dorean) *without a cause.’”*<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version* (Ec 7:20). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

<sup>7</sup> *The New King James Version* (Jn 15:25). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

There was nothing in Him that justified nor called for their hatred of Him. There was just no reason for it... He used this word in Matt 10:8 when He said, *"Freely you have received, freely give."*<sup>8</sup> Don't impose some sort of standard upon people before you're willing to minister to them. There doesn't need to be a reason, they don't need to "really deserve" it. Just give them the gospel.

But back to Jn 15:25. Even as there was nothing in Jesus deserving of man's hatred, there's nothing in us deserving of justification. The reasons for which God justifies us aren't *in us*, they're in *Him*. "Being justified, w/out a cause by His grace (meaning by no merit in us He gives us what we don't deserve [mercy/grace]) through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Somebody give God praise! 😊 \*

This word "Redemption" speaks of the payment of a ransom (think the payment for the release of a prisoner of war). It also extends to the idea of the freedom of a slave obtained through the payment of another. Freedom is the end result, but it came at a price. Now as for you, *"you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."*<sup>9</sup>

Vs 25-26

This is a lot to unpack in a little bit of time so let's get to it. 1<sup>st</sup> off, we want to recognize & "fact check" this common misnomer that throughout the O.T. God was this angry, ready to smite everyone kind of Deity, but then Jesus came along & appeased a reluctant Father so He would hold back His wrath... Ladies & Gentlemen, it was "God" who "set forth", who was the "Sole Architect" of salvation, who initiated the *propitiation* set forth!

The word, "propitiation" is a fancy Bible word that essentially means, "Satisfactory Substitutional Sacrifice". It points us back to the Mercy Seat, which was the lid of the Ark of the Covenant that was kept behind the veil in the Holy of Holies... Inside that Ark was evidence of man's sin against God. The tablets of the law (10 commandments), a jar of manna (the ingratitude of man toward God's provision), & Aaron's rod that budded (man's rejection of God's leadership). Fashioned over the Ark (upon the mercy seat) were two gold cherubim w/their wings outstretched. (Pic, Ark) & The glory of God would "hover" above the mercy seat, between the 2 cherubim & that's where God would meet w/Moses (or the high priest).

<sup>8</sup> *The New King James Version* (Mt 10:8). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

<sup>9</sup> *The New King James Version* (1 Pe 1:18-20). (1982). Thomas Nelson.



But only the high priest could go behind the veil & it only happened 1 day a year, on the Day of Atonement. & There were a number things he would have to do that day, but the short of it is that after he (the high priest) had made atonement for himself, he would take the blood of the sacrifice for the sin offering of the people, bring it in behind the veil & sprinkle it on the mercy seat (between the sins of the people [we might say] & the presence of God). & God would forgive their sins. – There would be another goat that he would lay his hands on its head, confess over all the sins of the children of Israel & then they would send the goat off into the wilderness. The picture was that blood had been shed, the price of death had been paid by a substitutional sacrifice & their sins had been carried away...

I trust you can see how that *foreshadowed* what would be fulfilled in Christ, whom God set forth (not behind the veil, but in the open for all to see) as a *propitiation* (a substitutional sacrifice, hilasterion/hil-as-tay-ree-on) for the sins of the world. Jesus is our “Mercy Seat” standing between guilty sinners & the holiness of God. He was judged in our place, God demonstrating His righteous judgment against sin, simultaneously sparing the sinner who deserved the judgment.

& This is what the tax collector was speaking about in Luke 18... When you became a tax collector in ancient Israel you were bound from the temple. There would be no sacrifice for you. So, when he bows his head & beats his chest saying, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!”<sup>10</sup> Guess what the word is? “Hilaskomai” (hil-as-kom-ahee), “Merciful”, “Propitious” “Make propitiation for me, a sinner!” “I can’t do it! I can never achieve it! God I need You to make atonement on my behalf, be merciful to me, a sinner!” To which Jesus responded, “I tell you, this man went down to his house (what’s our word) *justified...*”

Listen, forgiveness doesn’t come just because God loves you. Forgiveness is there because someone *paid a price* for you... Jesus shed His blood, laid down His life openly for you... & for me.

Now, prior to the cross, God “passed over” the sins of the people. Meaning, they looked forward to the cross by faith, we look back to the cross by faith. But since it hadn’t happened yet, God “passed over” their sins. At the cross, their sins were no longer passed over, they were *paid for*. Their sins were “covered” through the sacrificial system, they were “cleansed” by the blood of Christ.

<sup>10</sup> *The New King James Version* (Lk 18:13). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

& Through the cross God demonstrates that He is both *just* & the *justifier* of the one who has faith in Jesus. He is just in that He exacted justice; the penalty of sin had been paid. & Because the penalty had been paid, He can *justify* the one who has faith in Jesus.

### Vs 27

What a glorious Vs... If there were room for boasting we'd spend all our time in heaven hearing each other tell the self-congratulatory tales of what we did to get there. But because we're justified w/out a cause, by no merit of our own, boasting is excluded... & This is why the natural man wrestles w/the gospel of grace. We love to make *possible* mission *impossible*. We love the accolades of accomplishment, of achievement. The Olympics just took place, it's all about celebrating the achievements & accomplishments of man... But there's no "rise & grind" righteousness... We all have to humble ourselves & receive the free gift of salvation the same way or we can't be saved... Grace absolutely *refuses* to recognize man's (imagined) merits and gives no place to his pride whatsoever. *We're not even going to be able to boast in our faith, it's not a merit, it's a means (& it's a means that God gives us, remember Eph 2:8). Salvation is a gift only to be humbly received, not a reward to be achieved.*

### Vs 28-31

**Close** The idea is this, "If it's all about faith, then I guess faith cancels out the law." Paul says, "No way, we don't inactivate the law through faith, we establish it!"

Some say that this means that the law was meant to show us our sin, when it does that, it's served its purpose & is established. Others will say the purpose of the law was to show us how sinful we are & lead us to faith in Christ. So when we believe in Jesus we've established its purpose in our lives. Both are true.

*Either way, the point of the passage is that we need righteousness apart from the law because there is no righteousness by the law. & That righteousness is found only by God's grace through faith in J.C. who was God's Satisfactory Sacrifice for the sins of the world... He's the way, the truth & the life & no one comes to the Father except through Him.*

### Prayer Points:

God we thank You for the precious gift of righteousness found only by faith in J.C. & We thank you that there is no difference but it's available to all who will believe. Father we make our boast in the cross of J.C. to whom be blessing & honor & glory forever & ever...

Maybe you've been trying to work things about between you & God, stop doing this, start doing that. It's not about what you do, it's about receiving what He's done for you. Believe on Jesus today & be saved.