

Paul has really let us have it. He has called us every name in the Book, and backed it up with Scripture. We have the testimony of creation and our conscience which we often violate (1:20, 2:15). When we examine our hearts we find his accusations ring true. As much as we would like to deny it, we have a mouth that reveals the depravity of our heart and a heart that often harbors animosity towards others. He has told us that God must be just in dealing with our sins. The wrath of God is what we deserve. He has made a special effort to speak to the religious who would justify themselves because they were descended from Abraham. He tells us that we are just as guilty if not more so, for we know God's righteous requirements. We have His word, and yet we disobey and do not fear His justice (3:18).

If you think all this does not apply to you, you have denied the Word of God, setting yourself up as the judge over God. Pride is one of the most abominable of sins, for every other sin flows from it (Psalm 10:4).

But finally we have come to the solution. The eleven verses that we will cover today are a summation of not only the gospel, but the entire message of the Bible. We had to see how bad we are to see how good God is. We had to understand the distance between us to understand the need for the cross and how great is His mercy.

21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it- Romans 3:21 (ESV) Paul is asserting that salvation has always been by faith and not by meeting the demands of the law. If no one has kept the demands of the law and there is not a single soul that is righteous through the law, how are we to ever have the righteousness that is required to live forever in God's presence? Paul is telling us there is another path to righteousness, a path other than the law, and the law confirms it exists.

In the next chapter he will use the example of Abraham to demonstrate that righteousness has always been received by faith. Paul also uses the example of David. In Psalm 32, David tells us that after his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, he was miserable (Psalm 32:3-4). It felt as though his bones were drying up. Every day he felt conviction. But when he confessed his sin to God, God forgave him (Psalm 32:5). In Psalm 51 he tells us that it wasn't a sacrifice that God wanted (Psalm 51:16). That is what the law prescribed. But David saw that it was a contrite heart that God accepted (Psalm 51:17). **If we look to God for His forgiveness and are truly repentant, the blood of Jesus covers our sin.**

Commented [notes1]: Romans 1:20 (ESV)

²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Commented [notes2]: Romans 2:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them

Commented [notes3]: Romans 3:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes. E

Commented [notes4]: Psalm 10:4 (ESV)

⁴ In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, "There is no God."

Commented [notes5]: Psalm 32:3-4 (ESV)

³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

Commented [notes6]: Psalm 32:5 (ESV)

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

Commented [notes7]: Psalm 51:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

Commented [notes8]: Psalm 51:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

David and Abraham did not understand that God would bear the punishment they deserved so that He could justify forgiving them and making them righteous. They did prophesy that that would happen (Psalm 22:26-27; Genesis 22:8), but they couldn't have understood it like we who have the New Testament revelation understand it. They looked to God by faith. They trusted Him to provide the perfect sacrifice. They obeyed by faith and were counted righteous (Genesis 15:6).

The righteousness that comes from God by faith is also seen in the many prophecies of the coming Messiah. Moses delivered them from Egypt, but predicted that a greater one would deliver them from the Egypt in their hearts (Deuteronomy 18:15). Isaiah predicted the coming suffering servant that would bear our iniquities and by whose stripes we would be healed. He is the One who will justify many (Isaiah 53:11) What Paul is teaching is the message of the Old Testament in all its fullness.

The Law and the Prophets bear witness to *²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* Romans 3:22-23 (ESV) The righteousness of God that is ours when we have faith in Jesus Christ is available to all who believe in Him. That is because we are all in the same boat. We are all sinners. There is not a soul that has lived up to the glory of God. Therefore we are all in need of the righteousness that comes through the law of faith. **The law of faith is that every person that looks to God to provide saving righteousness, regardless of their past history, will be saved,** just like Abraham and David. No one has a better chance than someone else. The Apostle Paul knew that. He said he was the chief of sinners (1Timothy 1:15). But when He accepted that Jesus had taken His punishment and was now Lord over all, He received a new heart. He was born again. He joined the ranks of those he once persecuted and counted them his true spiritual brothers and sisters, whether they were Jews or Gentiles (2Corinthians 2:13).

We need to understand that **in accepting Christ as our Savior we have the righteousness of God now.** Anything short of that would mean we have no chance of heaven. God is completely righteous. In Jesus, you are completely righteous. You may be stumbling along now, but when God looks at you He sees the righteousness of Jesus. Your past, present, and future sins are covered. But when you see Jesus face to face in glory, the work in you will be completed (1John 3:2), and there will be no future sins to be covered. You and I will walk in the righteousness of God. To the non-believer that sounds boring. To those in Christ it sounds wonderful. That is because our eyes are open and we see that real joy is found in the good and perfect will of God (Psalm 16:11).

Commented [notes9]: Psalm 22:26-27 (ESV)

²⁶ The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever!
²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.

Commented [notes10]: Genesis 22:8 (ESV)

⁸ Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

Commented [notes11]: Genesis 15:6 (ESV)

⁶ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Commented [notes12]: Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—

Commented [notes13]: Isaiah 53:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Commented [notes14]: 1 Timothy 1:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Commented [notes15]: 2 Corinthians 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

Commented [notes16]: 1 John 3:2 (ESV)

² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Commented [notes17]: Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
^{25a} whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

Romans 3:24-25a (ESV) We have a few terms here that we don't use in our everyday vocabulary. Justified means the record is clean. Some people use the expression, "Just as if I'd never sinned."

Grace is often described by the acronym of its letters, Gift Received At Christ's Expense. It is an undeserved gift. It is goodness that comes from a heart of generosity with no demand of anything in return or previous performance.

To **redeem** something is to exchange a thing for another. We redeem aluminum cans or glass bottles for a monetary value. Slaves could be redeemed by paying what they were valued.

Propitiation is harder to describe and the word is unique here in the New Testament (Hebrews 2:17 variation), though there is a word of similar meaning used by John (1John 2:2). Paul has chosen this word that to the Jew meant the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant. It was the place blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled to make man acceptable to God. To the Greeks it meant a sacrifice that assuaged the anger of the gods. So it had a rich meaning for the Jews but was also understood by the Greeks.

Now let me try to express what Paul is saying in a way we speak today. The laws God gave Moses could never make us as good as we need to be in a perfectly good God's presence. We are all too evil for that. Yet, God showed us underserved kindness by declaring us to be as good as He is. He did this through Jesus by freeing us from the penalty our sins deserve. Jesus' blood was the sacrifice that satisfied God's sense of justice, and God's goodness is ours if we simply believe and receive. (Acts 16:31) – repeat

Don't quote that. Quote the Scripture. I present that only to help us comprehend what is being said. The Scripture is richer and has many more nuances that add to the meaning.

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. Romans 3:25b How good God is! Everyone before Jesus could have been judged by the Law, but God held off and overlooked their sins until Jesus paid the penalty for them. You see, they looked forward to God providing in some way, and He did. But until He did they had no reason for Him to refrain from judging them for their sins. But of course God knew He would provide a means through His one and only Son (John 3:16). So He held off, which shows how perfectly good He is. That covers the past. Now Paul addresses the present and the future.

Commented [notes18]: Hebrews 2:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Commented [notes19]: 1 John 2:2 (ESV)

² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Commented [notes20]: Acts 16:31 (ESV)

³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

Commented [notes21]: John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Romans 3:26 (ESV) This provision of God out of His gracious and generous loving heart also shows how good He is right now and every day. Every day He is willing to make the sinner good in His eyes if they will simply place their faith in what Jesus did for them. It shows He is a God who demands justice, but who also provides that justice at His expense. He even helps us to have faith to receive this free gift.

A few decades back, we used to use the expression “righteous” to mean something was really good. It was the right idea, you just can’t apply it to anything but God and people. We would apply it to motorcycles and other inanimate objects. And we see how pathetic it was to use that term for things when we see it in this verse. God is righteous to justify us through faith in Jesus. He is so very good, so merciful, so just, which is to say so righteous.

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. Romans 3:27 (ESV) If righteousness is only ours by faith in what was done for us, then how can we boast? On the other hand, if it did come through obedience to the 613 laws of Moses, and if you could keep them, you could go around with your nose held high and scoff at all the weak willed people that just couldn’t do it. In fact, that is kind of what the Pharisees did. They wore special clothes to set them apart from others, prayed loudly so all could see, and loved to set themselves before others as an example of righteousness (Matthew 23:5-7). In reality their pride stunk to high heaven – literally!

Remember, the author of this passage was once a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). He’s speaking from personal experience. By faith he received the righteousness of God that comes through Jesus Christ. He once boasted about his obedience to the law, but not now. Now his boasting is in what Jesus has done for us. In his letter to the Galatians he wrote, *¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.* Galatians 6:14 (ESV)

²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Romans 3:28-30 (ESV) Paul frequently uses logic. If we are justified by the law, then only the orthodox Jew might have a chance. Then God would be the God of the Jews alone. The Scriptures tell us over and over that God is the God of all mankind (2Samuel 22:50; Isaiah 11:10; Psalm 22:27). So then what is the way of salvation? How is it possible for both Jew and Gentile to be saved? It is by faith alone. It is the same for all mankind.

Commented [notes22]: Matthew 23:5-7 (ESV)

⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, ⁶ and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues ⁷ and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.

Commented [notes23]: Acts 23:6 (ESV)

⁶ Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.”

Commented [notes24]: 2 Samuel 22:50 (ESV)

⁵⁰ “For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to your name.

Commented [notes25]: Isaiah 11:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

Commented [notes26]: Psalm 22:27 (ESV)

²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.

The faith that saved Abraham and David is the same kind of faith that saves us today. We recognize we are sinners. We know we can never be good enough for God. We know God is gracious and merciful, and so we repent and throw ourselves on His mercy. Jesus made the way for God to be just in forgiving all who come to Him by faith, for Jesus took on Himself the punishment we deserve (1Peter 2:24).

31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. Romans 3:31 (ESV) So if it is all a matter of faith in what Jesus did for us, are we throwing out the laws of Moses? By no means! The law is shows us the great need for salvation by faith. The law lets us know we could never be good enough for God. It isn't just on a whim that Paul has spent the most part of three chapters to let us know how evil we are. That is what the law was to do, in addition to pointing to faith and the Messiah who was coming to make salvation possible. It is not as if God had one plan that didn't work so He went with option B. Two of the favorite words of Old Testament authors are steadfast love and mercy (Psalm 25:6). You'd think that should be in the New Testament, but that is because we have the false idea that the God of the Old Testament is harsh and demanding and the God of the New is love and grace. It is the same God, and He never changes (Malachi 3:6).

He is harsh on evil and His nature demands justice. His nature is also love and grace, and it all came together on the cross. There His justice was met, His wrath upon sin, His love for mankind was demonstrated, His grace and mercy freely offered. It is for all to receive by faith. There is no other way, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Some liberal seminaries today say this idea of God pouring out His wrath upon His only Son who bore our sin is barbaric. They say it is a holdover from the ancient idea of appeasing angry gods. I would say it is the unique and wonderful plan of the God who is so holy and yet so gracious and loving. Man would never come up with such a God in his wildest imaginings. Nor would man want to dream up a God who expects you to be holy and loving toward others (1Peter 1:16), for that is more demanding than anyone would dream. If it weren't for the wonder of His indwelling presence by the Holy Spirit we would say it was an impossible faith (Philippians 2:13).

Man has come up with so many excuses to dismiss the powerful call of this message, but the call still goes out around the world, and it calls to us today in our rebellious, self-seeking, culture of denial. The humble, all-powerful Jesus who died so you might live still graciously calls, "Come, follow me!" (Matthew 4:19)

Questions

1 What precedes our passage?

Commented [notes27]: 1 Peter 2:24 (ESV)

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

Commented [notes28]: Psalm 25:6 (ESV)

⁶ Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

Commented [notes29]: Malachi 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

Commented [notes30]: 1 Peter 1:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Commented [notes31]: Philippians 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Commented [notes32]: Matthew 4:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

- 2 What does the Old Testament teach?
- 3 Is salvation different for Jews?
- 4 What is propitiation?
- 5 Review the meaning of verses 24-25.
- 6 What about the people before Jesus?
- 7 How does God show His righteousness today?
- 8 What can we boast about?
- 9 What was Paul's logical argument?
- 10 Is Paul nullifying the law?
- 11 Describe God's attributes as seen on the cross.