

Romans 3:21-31

“Made Right In God’s Sight”

It’s with a sense of excitement, and a sigh of relief that we prepare to plunge headlong into our text this morning. For the last several weeks we’ve been confronted *with*, backed into a corner *by*, and categorically condemned *in* the depravity of our own disposition as humanity. Drowning in the quicksand of our own sin, Paul has spent a significant portion of ch 1, all of ch 2 and a significant portion of ch 3 leaving all of humanity with out excuse, guilty before God and unable to do anything about it on our own. Any attempt being equivalent at best to groping around aimlessly in the dark, being lost, stumbling around, blinded by the blackness of sin and transgression. But like a beacon of light piercing through the blackness, finding us in our hopelessness and utter desperation vs 21 comes shining through, to show us the way of salvation.

Vs21-22

If you have a pen and like to etch in your bible, do yourself a favor and circle those 1st 2 words in vs 21 because they make for one of the most exciting transitions and pivotal points in all of the Word of God. Talk about big doors swinging on small hinges, those 2 words make for the monumental shift from judgment to justification before God. Perhaps you recall there in ch 1 as Paul took us to one of the summit peaks of scripture there in vs 16-17 with respect to the gospel of Christ, the power of God, God’s righteousness revealed through faith and all of that. That we thought, “Man it’d sure be nice to linger here for awhile, the view is pretty nice from up here.” But rather than explain it, expound *on* it, or talk *about* it, it’s like he scooped us up, turned around violently and plummeted off the cliff diving deeper and deeper into the depravity of man. But what comes to my mind, and what I’d want to liken it to would be like a spiritual bungee jump (only we didn’t know that there was a cord around his ankle). Here we were falling faster and faster, getting deeper and deeper into our lost and hopeless condition and right as we reached the bottom, finally giving up all hope and death is eminent, we’re ripped back up and placed on this summit peak again. and The entirety of that turn, that transition hinges on those 2 words that begin vs 21, “But now.”

You see you really can’t apply vs 21 solely with in the context of vs 20 (as powerful as that is), you have to gather up all the information from vs 18 of ch 1, through the culmination of vs 20 of ch 3 and place that in the light of vs 21-22 in order to gain the proper perspective, or feel the gravity and the impact of what’s just happened. Now we obviously don’t have the time to do that, grab the cds if you need to, but trust me when I tell you it hasn’t been pretty. All of humanity, in every class, every culture, each ethnic group, the full spectrum from out right immoral to conservatively religious condemned before God, whether they just don’t even care to make amends with God, or they think their good works will commend them to God, or perhaps their religious regimen will gain them a stand in the sight of God. None of that matters, because left to our own there are none that are righteous no, not one. Even our best attempts at righteousness are funneled through the filter of a sin nature, so our righteousness is as filthy rags before the Lord. So we (as mankind) find ourselves in a desperate situation.

The last couple of weeks the topic of the law has been the specific topic of discussion. But we're so twisted as humanity that we somehow thought that the law was given to make us righteous, when the reality is that it was given to make us aware of our *unrighteousness*. Look at vs 19-20 (read).

Because the law was never meant to govern the outward physical nature, but rather the inward spiritual nature. You remember Jesus said, "*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'* But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment." Matt 5:21-22 and Again, "*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.'* But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has *already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" Matt 5:27-29 and Really what He was doing was bringing proper perspective to the law, that the things that we do outwardly, physically, have their root in us inwardly, in the heart. That's where it all begins, in the mind, entertained in the heart, and then it spills out from there into the physical action. But long before it manifests itself outwardly, we're violators inwardly.

That was the point of the law, to make us acutely aware of our sin nature. It wasn't given to make us *great* in God's sight, or even *good* in God's sight, but rather that we might be made aware of our *guilt* in God's sight. It wasn't given to perfect us, but rather to *prepare* us, once we're aware of our utter depravity, once we see ourselves as sinners, once we realize there's nothing we can do to save ourselves, we're ready to hear about, and be open *to* a Savior. and That's what the Holy Spirit through Paul the apostle has been doing up to this point, taking us to the bottom of the barrel, and backing us into a corner with out an option for escape, we're all confined, and condemned under sin.

"But now" and the whole thing changes, a ray of light comes bursting in, now that the reality of our *unrighteousness* has been affirmed and made clear, the righteousness of God is made manifest. and It's not a legal righteousness, one that man can attain on his own via obedience to a divinely ordained moral code, or by the works of the law, but rather it's a righteousness that's *apart* from the law.

Because one thing is for sure and that is that if man is to be saved, or be accepted in the sight of God, made right in God's sight, it can only be in righteousness, because God is righteous. But the problem is that man is utterly bereft of any righteousness whatsoever on his own. So there's this "Divine Dilemma" if you will, (not that it was ever a dilemma for God) whereby God sees every aspect and nuance of His righteousness and righteous standards met, yet simultaneously the guilty sinner can be justified before Him. and This remedy can't be in anyway at the expense of His righteous nature, it can't compromise His righteousness, but rather it has to *correlate* with His righteousness.

Now because we've already read vs 22 we know that this is speaking *of* and pointing specifically *to* the righteousness that comes by faith in the person of Jesus Christ. But one of the things Paul is wanting to make clear here is that this idea of righteousness through faith Jesus is in no way conflicting with the teaching of the law, we don't make void the law through faith, but rather we establish it (more on that in vs 31), but here in vs 21 he draws attention to the 2-fold witness of God's righteousness imputed to man apart from the law, by the witness of both the *law* and the *Prophets*. Remember the law taught that a thing should be established by the testimony of 2 or more witnesses, here Paul presents his witnesses to this concept of a righteousness from God imputed to man apart from the law. and What he's seeking to communicate is that "By faith" righteousness is in no way a foreign concept to the Scriptures. He says the law bore witness, or spoke of and pointed to righteousness by faith. Of course when we get to ch 4 he'll begin to speak of the righteousness that was given to Ab by faith, (so we'll pass over him for now). But he was basically the prototype for faith being accounted as righteousness on one's behalf. The 11th ch of book of Hebrews spends its time entirely on the "By faith" aspects of a right relationship with God.

Using for its example people out of the OT. But even as you move into the legal aspects of the law, the sacrificial system, was it possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin? No, nor was it ever alluded to that it did, those sacrifices were offered *by faith* on the behalf of the one offering, looking forward to the more excellent and perfect sacrifice to be found in Jesus Christ (the sacrificial Lamb of God). As you study the layout and various layers of the Tabernacle you find that in itself is the story and redeeming work of Jesus Christ on the behalf of sinful man. It spoke *of* and pointed to the work of Another on our behalf to be received by faith.

Of course the Prophets spoke of the fact that we'd find our righteousness not in ourselves but from the Lord. Isaiah is inundated with passages that make that real clear, here's just a couple, "*No weapon formed against you shall prosper, And every tongue which rises against you in judgment You shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, And their righteousness is (not from anything we do, but) from Me,' Says the LORD."* Isa 54:17 "*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness," Isa 61:10 Jer 33:16 "*In those days Judah will be saved, And Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."* and I'm keeping all of this sort of brief for the sake of time, but I just want you to see that both the law and the prophets spoke *of* and was no stranger *to* the fact that a righteous standing *before* God never came, (nor ever would come) in any other way than *from* God. Of course Isaiah 53 speaking of the fact that Messiah would be wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement for our peace laid upon Him, and by *His* stripes we are healed, we're made whole, made righteous before God. So both the law and the Prophets bore witness to this righteousness to be imputed to us apart from the law, or legal works.*

Vs22-23

Now there's a vs that doesn't need a whole lot of exposition, *all* have sinned, therefore *all* fall short of the glory of God. I don't think we need too much explanation regarding that fact. Anyone here believe that you've never erred in thought, emotion, will, or deed, and if not on all points at least one point? So we've all thought things we shouldn't, had emotional upheavals that we shouldn't, desired to do something that we shouldn't or just flat out did what we should've never done... Translation, we've all sinned, and since *all* have sinned, vs 22 tells us that the righteousness of God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ is available to *all* who believe. There where it says, "For there is no difference" he's speaking of the fact that whether you be Jew or Gentile, there's absolutely nothing that distinguishes us from one another in the fact of the sin nature of humanity.

Now there's a hair here that I believe is worth splitting and that is this, the righteousness of God is available *to* all, but we see here that it's only imputed *upon* all who *believe*, that is trust in Jesus Christ for the remission of their sin. But what I want you to see is that how this happens is *through* faith, it's not *by* faith, as though our faith some how *earns* us righteousness, it's *through* faith that we *receive* that righteousness from God. It's is not our faith that saves us, it's Jesus Christ who saves us, it's ez for us to teeter on the edge of having confidence in our faith, but our confidence is to be in Christ, faith isn't a way by which we *earn* righteousness, it's a vehicle through which we *receive* righteousness. and You need to distinguish that fact, or else you'll begin to think that it's about you again, your faith and all, it's not about you or some merit *in* you, it's about Jesus, and what He's done *for* you. and That's the good news, we've all sinned, we all fall short of God's glory, we owe a debt that we could never pay, so God justifies us *freely* by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, notice.

Vs 24

Now this is where the love, grace, and beauty of God begins to be magnified all the more. We already realize that we were hopelessly lost, and since there was nothing we could do to earn a righteous standing before God, God imputes to us a righteousness of His own through faith towards, or reliance *upon* Christ. and To make matters even sweeter He requires nothing of us before we can receive it, all we have to do is *believe* Him for it. Man is all the time wanting to work for it, remember Nicodemus wanted to know what he needed to do to be saved, Jesus told him to *believe* upon the only begotten Son of God, the rich young ruler wanted to know what he needed *to do* to inherit age abiding life, John ch 6 after Jesus fed the 5,000 they were wanting to know what they needed to do that they might work the works of God. and Jesus said to them, "*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.*" John 6:29 In other words, it's not about what you *do* for God, it's about what God has *done* for you in the person of His Son and you just trusting Him for that. We're justified "freely" by His grace.

There's a mouth full right there that we could spend considerable time on, this word "justified" is a legal term meaning to be "Declared innocent." and It's in the present tense meaning that it has an ongoing ever present effect, you're continually innocent in the sight of God through faith in Christ. We often break down the word "Justified" like this, "Just as if I'd never sinned." That's how God sees you in Christ, that's the standing He imputes to you in Christ.

Now we should take a quick moment to distinguish the difference between "Justification" and "Sanctification." Justification is *imputed* instantly, sanctification is *imparted* gradually as we are able, in other words, you're positionally completely justified and that happens the moment you trust Christ to forgive your sin. However practically we're still being sanctified day by day as we grow and mature in Christ. So positionally you're perfect, completely innocent in Christ, practically you're still growing and maturing, being transformed from glory to glory day by day into the image of Christ. Positionally justified, practically being sanctified.

The next word we want to consider here is the word, "Freely." Now don't be confused it doesn't mean, "Cheaply." There's nothing cheap about God's salvation, it cost Him greatly that He might offer it to you freely. But this word, "Freely" is sort of interesting, and it's translated a couple of different ways in the NT, one of them being what we're seeing here, "Freely." Rev 22:17 "*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*" But in John 15:25 this same Greek word is translated as, "with out a cause." Where we read, "*But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause.'*" John 15:25 What that is saying is that there was nothing in Jesus that gave them a cause for hating Him, they hated Him *freely* with out a cause, now hear me. What this is saying to you and me is that God justifies you and me *with out a cause* by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. In other words, there's nothing in you, or in me that would give Him cause to justify us, no merit, nothing that He looks at in us and says, "They deserve my justification," He justifies us *freely*, that is, with out a cause.

"Through the *redemption* that is in Christ Jesus." and That word "redemption" speaks of a ransom, a price paid for something. It was used in the paying of a ransom for a prisoner of war, of course sin has taken us hostage and Jesus has paid the ransom note to set us free. Remember this vs, "...*the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*" Matt 20:28 It spoke of the purchasing a slave, but not for the purpose of *selling* him again, but for the express purpose of *setting* him free. Of course Jesus has freed us from the chains of sin.

He did so at a price, the price of His broken body, and His shed blood, the idea is communicated well in 1 Cor 6:20 which says, "...*you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*" In Christ you've been redeemed, paid for, ransomed, set free.

Vs25-26

Back in vs 25 we see another big theological word that might frighten you off if you're not careful, it's the word "Propitiation." But don't let it scare you, it's not a difficult concept, the idea behind propitiation is that of *atonement* or having *at-one-ment* with God by sacrifice. Sacrificial appeasement if you will. God has set Jesus forth as the sacrificial appeasement by His blood. Now this word, "Propitiation" is interesting as well, it's the same word translated in Heb 9:5 as, "Mercy Seat." You say, "Mercy Seat" what does that mean? Perhaps you recall that one day a year in the OT known as the Day of Atonement whereby the high priest would enter into the holy of holies with the blood of the sacrifice and as he approached the Ark of the Covenant he would take that blood and sprinkle it on the lid of the ark, that lid was called the mercy seat. It was the go between between the law which man had broken (which was in the ark) and the holy presence of God which resided above the ark. and It was there that the blood of the sacrifice was poured out and God's wrath was averted and mercy was poured forth in its stead. and What this is telling us is that Jesus is our mercy seat, He's the go between between a holy God, and sinful man, it's the blood that He's shed that averts God's wrath on our behalf and invokes God's mercy in it's stead, and it's there (God said in Ex 25:22) there above the Mercy Seat that I will meet *with* you and speak *to* you. and It's in Jesus, *our* mercy seat that God meets with us and speaks to us, pouring out mercy *upon* us.

We read here that God passed over the sins previously committed, that He might demonstrate His righteousness at the present time. The idea being that since atonement is found only in Christ why then didn't God smoke all those who came before Christ? and What Paul is saying is that those who had faith in God prior to Christ were saved as it were *on credit*, He passed over their sins *previously* looking forward to the time that He would deal with them in Christ *personally*. Which then allowed Him to be both Just, and the Justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

This is the answer to the Divine Dilemma we spoke of earlier, how can God be just and not deal with the sin issue? He can't, but how can justify the sinner with out compromising His righteousness? and Again this is the beauty, it's all in Him and has nothing to do with us, God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ and Being fully man He qualified to stand in the gap on behalf of man (and we'll speak more in ch 5 of how that since through one man, namely Adam, sin entered the world, even so through one Man, namely Christ, the sin of the world can be atoned for.) But being God He was fully righteous and with out sin, now the bible teaches that the soul that sins shall surely die, the wages of sin is death. and It's impossible that sinful man can atone for sinful man, that's like using mud to cover up a dirt stain, it can't happen, the carpet needs fully extracted, not more dirt rubbed on top.

So since there is none righteous not even one, God became a man, lived a righteous life in complete accordance with the law both inwardly and outwardly, was in all ways tempted as you and I are tempted yet with out sin. But then willingly laid down His life upon the altar of the cross as a vicarious/substitute sacrifice for you and me, the sinless paying the price or standing in the stead of the *sinful*. God placing the sin of the world, your sin and mine upon Him, and Him paying the wage that's due you and me, the bible puts is like this. "*For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*" 2 Cor 5:21

So God's justice being vindicated in that He poured out His wrath in full unrelenting force for the sin of the world upon the sacrificial Lamb of Jesus Christ He dealt with the sin issue in full, and now that the sin issue has been dealt with *by* Christ, God is able fully justify those who place their faith *in* Jesus Christ The fact that God accepted the sacrifice being demonstrated in the resurrection. So God is both just, and able to justify those who believe in Jesus, what does it have to do with you? Nothing, what does it have to do with Jesus? Everything.

Vs27-30

Or to understand all that another way, this principle is universal in its application, the Jews came to a point where they didn't think so much that they alone belonged to God, but that God belonged to them alone. He was *their* God and no one else could have Him, but Paul tells them frankly, "Hey, how many God's are there?" "Well only one" remember, "Hear o Israel, the Lord our God, the LORD is One!" So if in fact there's only one God, which the scriptures clearly teach, than He must be the God of the Gentiles as well, and justification by faith is applied *apart* from the law regardless of who you are, or where you're from, or what you've done.

Vs31

How? You remember what Jesus said? He said, "*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.*" Matt 5:17 In Christ every righteous requirement of the Law is perfectly fulfilled, absolutely established, so, far from voiding the law, in Christ it's established as originally intended.

Another way the law is established through faith is that the purpose of the law is to lead us to Christ. Gal tells us, "...*the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*" Gal 3:24 This is what we were talking about earlier, how that the law was given not to make us great, but to show us our guilt, not to perfect us, but to prepare us, to show us in our sin that we might be open to a Savior. So that once we've been led to Christ, being aware of our sin and need for Him to save us, the law has accomplished its agenda, its purpose has been established.

So be it in being led *to* Christ, or being as it were found *in* Christ, either way the law isn't made void through faith, but rather its purpose is fulfilled as we come to faith in Christ. and That (my friends) is how we're made right, in the sight of God, through faith in Jesus Christ

Prayer Points:

Lord we're so thankful that You've provided Your righteousness for us, that we can be made right in the Father's sight, through faith in You. and Lord help us not to twist even that in thinking that our faith has something to do with it thereby taking glory from you and placing some form of credit on us, but rather Lord let us sober minded, wholly persuaded, fully given over to You, knowing that it's all about You, and none about us. We thank You for the free gift of Justification, for being the propitiation, though there's not a cause *in* us, You've given Yourself *for* us, may we love You all the more.

Listen if you're here and you're at a place whereby you need to be made right in the sight of God. Perhaps you've wondered what it is that you need to do that you might be right with God. This is the work of God, that you would *believe* on Him whom God has sent, you can be justified freely right here, right now by His grace, through the redemption, through the price paid, by Jesus Christ Trusting in the shedding of His blood, His life poured out, that you might have life everlasting. It's a simple matter of opening your heart, and trusting Jesus Christ just asking Him into your heart and into your life.