

Romans Part II, God's Solution, Romans 3:21-31, "Righteousness Revealed", 2/1/20

Today we go back into our study in the Book of Romans that we started in the Fall last year. But we haven't been back for a while so let's do a 2-minute recap. **"The Problem"**. Paul spent the better part of three chapters proving to us that none of us can do enough good things to earn righteousness before a holy and perfect God. Even the OT law is incapable saving us... and this is where we left off Romans 3:20 *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.* All the law can do is show us how messed up we really are. And so the bad news: we have a problem. We all are guilty before a holy God. And so we begin a massive transition in verse 21.

Romans 3:21

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known.

Now get ready to giggle...I don't know another way of saying it, this is the biggest BUT in the Bible.

This verse marks the transition from. Our Problem to **God's Provision**. Listen--and this is not hyperbole: This might be the most important passage in Romans. Some scholars say the most important in the whole Bible. **Martin Luther said this passage is "the chief point and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible."** In this passage, Martin Luther said, is the heart of the Reformation—the central truth he believed the Church had corrupted and that RCC and Protestants still disagree about today.

God's Provision in Three Big Words: Justification, Redemption, Propitiation

Justification: "The WHAT of God's Provision": This is the word that Luther said launched the Protestant Reformation. 9 times in 10 verses Paul uses this same term in different forms. The same word is translated righteous or righteousness, just or justified.

Romans 3:21-24

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

You see, the RCC in Luther's day taught that justification was a *process* started by faith in Jesus whereby God makes you into a righteous person by *infusing* his righteousness into you by means of the 7 sacraments--baptism, the eucharist, confirmation, last rites etc. Eventually, through observing the sacraments and confession and doing good, you would become a righteous enough person that God would accept you into heaven when you die. And if by the time you died, you weren't righteous enough, you'd go to purgatory where your sin would be

purged from you through fire and suffering. *Purge-atory*. This, they taught, was the process of justification.

But Luther and others in the reformation uncovered through studying this passage, that's not what the word "justified" means and what was being taught negates everything that Paul has been saying about how we obtain righteousness. Justification is a **legal declaration of righteousness that happens all at once through faith in Jesus**. Justification is a courtroom term. Justification is not a process whereby we become righteous. Justification is a pronouncement whereby we are declared righteous. Justification does not refer to that transformation of the heart (that is sanctification); *JUSTIFICATION* is a declaration of righteousness. In justification, **God's righteousness is not infused into us, it is imputed, credited to** our account. It would be like logging into your bank account and seeing that you owe the bank \$1M, and then the next minute logging in and seeing that you not only had your debt paid but now have a deposit of \$1M in your bank.

And this means more than I'm now forgiven. Forgiveness means that I am released from the sin I committed against God, God saying- you may go free...Justification says, you may come, you are welcome to all my love and presence. You are given a new status before God!

Two Things we need to understand about justification.

1- Through Faith IN Jesus Christ.

v.22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Faith has one saving object, that is Christ. A lot of people have faith...you gotta have faith and we love the word...But not all objects of faith are equal. A tragic, but not surprising accident killed **Mad Mike Hughes**, a flat earth-believing daredevil last weekend. He made a homemade steam rocket that he believed would launch him at least 5,000 feet in the air. Mike had an amazing faith in his rocket, so much so that he put his life on the line. But he put his faith in the wrong place. At the very same time, I may have just barely enough faith **to board a transatlantic flight** trembling nervously as I do. But the object of my faith is worthy and able to hold the weight of my trust, as meager as it is. It is not the amount of faith that saves, is not even faith in God, in general, that saves. It is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

2- APART from works

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known...²² There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace...

Apart from the Law- Every religion says, Obey our law...and you are in. "I obey...therefore I am righteous." Except for the Gospel of Jesus. It is apart from the law. The religious and irreligious, Jew and gentile are in the same boat. All your works fall short and we are justified freely. You bring nothing, he brings everything.

Redemption: "The HOW of God's Provision"

²⁴ *and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

Now this is a word we know...or at least we think we know. We love redemption stories don't we? It's the underdog, the comeback story...Just when you think there's no chance and they are all but done, and then they rise from the ashes...I always think of the **Shawshank Redemption**. Which is probably in my top 3 movies... The Matrix, Toy Story, Shawshank Redemption. But what is biblical use of this word? **Redemption: the paying of the price of one's slavery to give them freedom.** In 1st century, when you were in debt and you have no means by which to pay, you lost your freedom and became an indentured servant. You became the property of your master until the years of your debt were paid.

So when Paul uses this word he is saying this is what God does for us, not economically but spiritually and morally. He pays the price of our debt that enslaved us, paying the price of our sin that we were incapable of paying. It costs us nothing, it is free...but it cost Jesus his life. What does that mean to you and me? It means you are so precious to God, that God looked at your life and said you are worth all of the pain that I'm going to go through, the separation, the mocking, the agony of taking on sin of all mankind, and death. You're worth it. I'm willing to pay that price to get you with me forever. Why do we love the redemption story so much? Because we can relate to it. It speaks to the longing in all our hearts. We love the stories because they all point to the greatest redemption story ever told.

We know redemption but the third big word of God's Provision most of us don't know.

Propitiation: The "WHY of God's Provision"

Here we are asking the question, why did Jesus have to die to redeem us? Why couldn't God just overlook the sin of mankind? Kind of like when you are short a few dollars, and you say-close enough, we'll call it even. The answer is in this passage:

²⁵ *God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement (propitiation), through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.*

It's a word that means that **God's wrath (His righteous justice) is satisfied; his claim against your sin is settled.** God's wrath is turned away from us those who deserve it by the provision of one who takes it in our place. God himself, Jesus. Now what I just said is an incredibly unpopular doctrine today, "No, no... on the cross, Jesus wasn't paying for sin... because God is not a vengeful God who is angry at sin trying to exact punishment for it. If anything, on the cross, Jesus was just demonstrating the depth of God's love for us."

So what do we say about this? **4 Arguments for Propitiation:**

1) Propitiation explains what Christ accomplished on the cross.

God is absolutely demonstrating the depths of his love, but if Jesus wasn't actually paying for our sin, if he wasn't protecting us from something, how would the cross be a demonstration of his love? Imagine I'm walking along with my kids and I look down at them and say, "Do you know how much I love you guys?" "*How much, Daddy?*" And I throw myself into traffic... It was only love if it was accomplishing something, or protecting from a threat. If I was throwing myself in traffic to protect my kids from getting hit.

But you say, how can a loving God be angry and wrathful? **2) Propitiation explains the validity of God's just anger against evil.** When you love someone, you are angry at the things that destroy them. If you love the drug addict, you hate the addiction that destroys them. That's how God feels about our sin because it destroys his precious creation. His anger is not crankiness or unhinged... it is righteous justice, settled opposition to evil. And because of his great love, Jesus stepped into the path of God's wrath and turned it away.

3) Propitiation Explains the OT Sacrificial System.

²⁵ *He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.*

Slide- When the blood of a lamb or bull was sacrificed on the altar for the people, it temporarily turned away the wrath of God. But Paul says, the sins of all the OT people of God had never actually been paid for, they had only been passed over and unpunished. Why? The OT says that...The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin. A lamb was just the temporary symbol until the actual once for all LAMB would come. This is why John the Baptist, when he saw Jesus said, "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World." The propitiation, the turning away of God's wrath was ultimately deferred to Jesus.

On the cross God made him who knew no sin, to become sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God. **He became sin...** Jesus became the husband who has neglected or abused his family. He became the home-wrecker, He became the drug addict. The teenage girl lying to her parents. The hypocrite living a double-life. The proud, the selfish, apathetic, the greedy, the mocker, the gossip...All this destructive sin in us was laid on him and he took on the just anger of God once and for all.

4) Propitiation explains the justice and love of God.

²⁶ *he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

Slide- Unless your God is a God of both sacrificial love and justice against evil it will introduce distortions into your life. On the one hand if you object to the idea of a God with holy standards and who upholds those standards with justice...it would be like having parents who gave no limits, give no guidance, and never confront their children...and in so doing have children who are unable to thrive in the world and bring themselves to ruin. In what way is that loving?

On the other hand, a just God without love will never give you the motivation to live a pleasing life to God. Like a parent who is only a disciplinarian. You will feel crushed and despairing, or angry and defiant, and always be unloving, because fear cannot produce love. If you have a God only made of standards and judgment you'll never be able to live up to standards, always fleeing from him. Tim Keller says- **"The wonder of the cross is that in the very same stroke it satisfies both the love of God and the justice of God."**

God's Provision in three Big Words: Justification, Redemption, Propitiation.

And to all of this, Paul concludes this section: ²⁷ *Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded.* What leg do we have to stand on? A good example of what Paul means by this comes from Philippians 3:5-11 Paul tells us that before he came of Christian he had confidence in and boasted in "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, in regards to law a Pharisee, as for zeal persecuting the church, as for legalistic righteousness, faultless." And then he says "I consider it all trash so that I may gain Christ.

In this communion confession- would you lay aside all your reasons for self-justification, for redeeming yourself, for pleasing God?