

GOD'S GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (Romans 3:21-31)

INTRODUCTION:

In Romans 3:20 the apostle Paul concludes that we all are convicted by God's law, that we are guilty of being unrighteous before a holy God.

The greatest thing a person has need of when standing before a holy God is righteousness. We need to be righteous, but we are not. How do we become righteous in God's sight? This is the theme of this next section of Romans. How to be righteous in God's sight.

Another term for talking about being righteous before God is talking about being justified. This section of Romans (3:21-5:21) is talking about being justified. Ten times the noun 'justification' or the verb 'justified' is used in chapters 3:21 through 5:21. Justification by faith has to do with standing before God as a righteous person.

The doctrine of justification by faith has not been given the central place it deserves according to Richard Lovelace in his book, The dynamics of Spiritual Life. He writes: "Only a fraction of the present body of professing Christians are solidly appropriating the justifying work of Christ in their lives. Many have so light an apprehension of God's holiness and of the extent and guilt of their sin that consciously they see little need for justification, although below the surface of their lives they are deeply guilt-ridden and insecure."

We are all guilty and we are all helpless before a holy God, but we are not hopeless. God holds forth hope for all of us. This hope is in the righteousness that He wants to give each of us. It has to do with Jesus Christ and his great love for us and what He accomplished for us when he walked on earth...

The righteousness we need is a gift and this section of Romans tells us about this special gift of righteousness. Let's see what God says about this gift of righteousness.

A REVEALED RIGHTEOUSNESS

First we see that it is a righteousness which God had to reveal to us. 3:21

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.

Just as the "wrath of God" is revealed from heaven (cf. 1:19), so is the righteousness of God revealed to us in a special way. It is revealed in Christ his Son and it is witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.

If Jesus had not come to earth we would never have known God's gift of righteousness. It is when Jesus appeared that God's gift of salvation and righteousness appeared.

The prophets spoke about it:

(Jer 23:5-6 NKJV) "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. {6} In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

And in Jeremiah 51 he writes:

(Jer 51:10 NKJV) The LORD has revealed our righteousness. Come and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God.

When Jesus was revealed to us God's gift of righteousness was revealed to us because Jesus is our Righteousness.

We are guilty before God's holiness, we are helpless but not hopeless because God has revealed hope to us when he revealed Christ to us as Our Righteousness. God has revealed how we can become righteous in his sight and it has to do with Jesus as our Righteousness. As the song we sing goes:

My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' Blood and righteousness,
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
but wholly lean on Jesus name.

The gift of God's righteousness had to be by revelation because our human reason could not and would not come up with this idea.

A DECLARED RIGHTEOUSNESS

God's righteousness that He has revealed to us and that He wants to give us is a "declared righteous, a legal righteousness, a judicial righteousness." It is the verdict of being righteous that a judge pronounces in a court of law.

What do I mean by this? As I said the gift of God's righteousness is what the theologians call "justification by faith." To justify someone is something a

judge does. A judge makes judicial declarations. The literal meaning of the Greek word (*dikaioo*) translated justify means "to acquit" or "to declare righteous."

A judge doesn't make a person righteous as such he declares the person to be righteous or justified because the person is not guilty.

This is clear from Deuteronomy 25:1

"If there is a dispute between men, and they come to court, that the judges may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked,

Another clear indication that justification means to declare a person righteous, not to make the person righteous is in Luke's gospel.

(Luke 7:29 NKJV) And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John.

They didn't make God righteous, they declared him righteous.

This is what God does for us. He declares us to be righteous, not in ourselves, but because of another. God declares us "Not guilty," but more than "not guilty." God declares us "innocence of all charges," but he does more than declare us innocent. He declares us to be just or RIGHTEOUS. This is by the grace of God. This is God's gift to us, his righteousness.

When Martin Luther discovered this righteousness was God's gift of righteousness he thought he had arrived in heaven. He writes in his book on Romans:

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. There upon I felt myself to be 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 became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven.

Has discovering the gift of righteousness which God gives you through declaring you righteousness had that effect on you? Have you heard the voice of God in your heart declare you to be righteous?

IT IS CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Next we see that this gift of God's righteousness is not our righteousness. It is the righteousness of Christ given to us through faith. Verse 22:

(Rom 3:22 NKJV) even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;

“the righteousness...through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe...” There is no difference in the way we receive God's righteousness because there is no difference in our needs. We all have the same need -- to be righteous before God, because we are all fallen sinners before God.

There is no such thing as degrees of righteousness in God's sight. Either you are righteous or not. Since it is not based on my works I cannot say that I am more righteous than you are. No, God requires perfect righteousness and He offers perfect righteousness, the righteousness of Christ, to all and on all who believe.

A young woman was on her deathbed. Although her life had been exemplary, she was not a Christian. Because of her high ethical and moral standards, she saw no need of being born again. However, she knew her life was nearing its end, so she was willing to have a minister visit her. The pastor explained the way of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus. Emphasizing the fact that Christ died to make atonement for the sins of everyone in the world, including her, the pastor urged her to receive the Savior. The young woman responded, "Do you mean to tell me that if I'm going to be saved, I have to come to the Lord on exactly the same terms as anyone else--even the most wicked person in the world?" "That's right," the preacher said, "there's only one way." The young woman thought for a moment and declared, " Well, if that's the case, I want no part of it!" Because of her pride and her unwillingness to come to Christ as a sinner, she passed into eternity to face the judgment of God. She failed to recognize that even "good" people do not qualify to stand before a holy God.

There is only one type of righteousness acceptable to God to make us fit for heaven -- that is the righteousness of His Son Jesus Christ. And this righteousness is given to all who believe in Jesus.

A FREE RIGHTEOUSNESS

In verse 24 we see that this righteousness is a free righteousness; it is a gift. It is given to us by God's grace. The verse reads:

being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

God's gift of righteousness is free. If it were not free, it would not be a gift. But we have so much difficulty of accepting a free gift.

In EE we use the illustration of a gift by saying, " Suppose a good friend of yours gave you something very expensive that you really wanted. It wasn't your birthday or anything. It was just a gift. But if you tried to pay your friend a few dollars for it, it wouldn't be a gift any longer. It would just be a great deal. Plus it would offend your friend."

The gift of God's righteousness is free. It is a gift. Just receive it by faith freely.

A COSTLY RIGHTEOUSNESS

Although the gift of God's righteousness is free, it is not cheap, it is costly.
Verses 25:

whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God's gift of righteousness comes to us through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. What a costly sacrifice. What a costly salvation. I will speak more on this cost in my next message from Romans.

CONCLUSION:

Romans 3:21-31 is the beginning of the Good News section of Romans. The Good News is that God will give you the righteousness you need to stand in His judgment. He will give it to you as a gift.

This passage is critical to understand. I had a Bible teacher in college say that he would not vote to ordain any candidate for the ministry who couldn't exegete and explain this passage. The truth of justification by faith is critical to understand the good news of the Gospel. Without justification by faith all we have to face God's moral judgment is our own puny efforts and hope we are good enough. But Romans starts with declaring that no one is good enough. **"There is not one righteous, no not one."**

But God has a wonderful gift for each of us. It is the gift of His righteousness whereby we can stand before Him as holy and unblemished. It is freely given by His grace, but it cost the life of His dear Son. This gift of righteousness comes by way of revelation, not by human reason. It is a unique gift because it is the only way we can come to God.

Have you received the gift of God's righteousness and like Martin Luther have responded with such joy and change of life ? Has God's gift of righteousness been the gateway to heaven for you?

This is God's only way to overcome the guilt of our sins. It is for all, to all and upon all who believe in Jesus.

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Receive the gift of God's righteousness today!

Amen? Amen!