

When in Rome: God's Righteousness Revealed

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 May 2026

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 0 0] Welcome here for this Sunday, May 24th. My name is Kent Dixon, and it's my joy to be the pastor here and to be back with you today. This morning we're continuing in our sermon series, When in Rome, and we're making our way through the book of Romans.

We're uncovering some of the timeless truths it holds that are as true and relevant today as when they were first written. You know, it's interesting, I was in a denominational Zoom call, so pastors from all over our region the other night for a couple of hours.

So if you want to have a real good time, be on Zoom for an hour and a half with a whole bunch of people in a business meeting. Fun. It's fun. But it's good. It's good for all of those people to gather together in that way.

And I found it interesting. A friend of mine who's the president of our denomination, he's also the pastor of Trinity Baptist in Sherwood Park. He was talking about, in his devotion, the book of Philippians.

So then I texted him while he was, you know, while I was supposed to be paying attention. And I said, we did Acts, and now we're in Romans. I said, isn't Paul awesome? And he said, Paul is indeed awesome.

[1 : 1 6] So as I said, when we studied Acts together, there will be times when we may skip ahead. We may jump ahead a bit as we study together. And that's not to suggest that anything that we skip over is somehow less important than the passages that we actually focus on.

Or that I'm in any way dodging something that might be challenging. That might be critical still for our understanding, for our journey with Jesus. But more so that I may pick and choose at times, just to keep us focused and continuing to move forward.

So, as I said when we studied Acts, I'll point out when we've jumped ahead, so that you can consider the passages that we've passed over on your own. And I'll also give you, I'll try as best I can to give you some context for why did he skip this?

So, for example, we're jumping over Romans 3, 1-20. So why? Well, here's a brief summary of that passage.

One commentary I read said that Romans 3, verses 1-20 concludes Paul's argument That passage also establishes that the law alone cannot justify anyone.

[2 : 3 8] But it serves instead to expose sin, making salvation by faith necessary. That passage confirms the universal depravity of humanity and God's absolute righteousness in judgment.

So why did we skip it? Or why are we skipping it? Because we covered lots of this topic just before, and we're going to cover more afterwards. So don't hesitate.

Please, in fact, I encourage it. Go to Romans 3, 1-20, and read it for yourself. Little accent there for you. So our passage this morning is Romans 3, 21-31.

So this picks up right after the passage that we just skipped over. So turn in your Bible, Romans 3, 21-31, or I will read it for us as well.

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

[3 : 4 4] There is no difference between Jew and Gentile. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance, he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.

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. Where then is boasting?

It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through the same faith.

[5 : 04] Do we then nullify the law by this faith? Not at all. Rather, we uphold the law, Paul says. Our sermon this morning is titled God's Righteousness Revealed.

And we're going to explore this relationship between God's law, which he gave to the people of Israel, the Jewish people, and how followers of Jesus then become justified before God. Does that make sense? Should be clear, I hope. What does the word justification mean? Anyone? Did you hear that? Calvin said, just as if I'd never done it. Sounds like he learned that in Sunday school, maybe. Justification. Any other thoughts?

Everyone's kind of looking at their toes, looking at the person next to them. You answer it. That's too seminary sounding for me. So it is a big theological word.

[6 : 07] However, what does it mean? Well, simply put, to justify is to declare righteous. That's all it means. Well, what the heck does that mean?

Right? Justification is an act of God. And it's an act whereby God pronounces a sinner to be righteous because of the sinner's faith in Christ.

You get the progression there? So this justification really is not possible at all through anything we can do, ever.

But only through Jesus Christ and his willing sacrifice, which covers us in his righteousness. So you may already know this, and we've talked about it briefly in past sermons in the series, but God's righteousness is a major theme in the book of Romans.

And in fact, we can see that theme on display in much of Paul's writing. Paul spoke about it often. And in fact, it's a major focus of Paul's thoughts in chapters 1 through 11 of the book of Romans.

[7 : 20] So that's featured pretty prominently. Do you remember what Paul says in Romans 1, 16, and 17? He said, and you know this, So I think it's important for us to consider how the concept of the phrase, the righteousness of God can be understood.

Because in some ways, maybe righteousness feels a bit like justification. Feels like a hard term that you can't necessarily wrap your head around. Well, let's break it down a bit here.

It obviously relates to God's own personal righteousness. And that is the core, one of the core elements of God's character. His justice. His righteousness.

But it also relates to God's intentional process for making human beings righteous in his eyes. The intention and process for forgiving humanity's sin.

Paul explores both of these concepts in Romans in detail, but especially God's plan for making humanity righteous. It's in there often. And in the first three chapters of Romans, Paul describes man's need for salvation.

[9 : 00] He's not making it as a suggestion. He's saying, folks, you need this. You need to be saved. And how both the Jews and the Gentiles were in need of salvation.

As we've also heard, Paul comes to the conclusion that the entire world is in fact guilty. Even Israel, who had received God's law.

So in our text for this morning, Paul explains how the righteousness of God has been revealed to us. In part by the law and the prophets. So let's look at that first.

What about the law and the prophets? How does God's righteousness revealed there? Well, Paul makes it clear right out of the gate that God's righteousness is available to humanity.

And it doesn't come from perfect obedience to the law. That's not the condition to receive God's righteousness. But then in recognizing this, Paul is also clear that God does not abandon the law altogether.

[10 : 05] In fact, Jesus himself often stated the importance of the law and obedience to it. Look at Jesus' teaching throughout the New Testament and you will see it there.

As one commentator I read said, it doesn't mean that God abandoned his law. Or that Jesus Christ did not regard the law. For, scripture tells us, he came to magnify it.

Or it also doesn't mean that sinners, after they're justified, should have no regard to the law. This commentator continued to say, but it means simply what the apostle Paul has been endeavoring to show.

That justification could not be accomplished by obedience, personal obedience, to any law, Jew or Gentile, and that it must be accomplished in some other way.

That's very interesting to me. So in other words, God's system of justification for humanity does not stem from obedience to the law. Is that clear?

[11 : 14] Silence. I hope silence is a good sign. It's also witnessed to by the law. God's righteousness is. So prior to Jesus' arrival and his identification as the Messiah, the law made it clear that God required animal sacrifices.

Right? We know that from the Old Testament. And that in itself declared that obedience to the law wasn't enough on its own. Well, how? Man's perfect obedience to the law just wasn't enough.

Even animal sacrifices weren't ultimately enough. I find this really interesting. To me, they're really merely a representation of the greater sacrifice that was required and was still to come.

But God's ultimate system of justification, making humanity righteous, was attested to and foretold through the law and the prophets, as we've looked at.

But ultimately, what was alluded to by the prophets and others would ultimately be even more boldly declared in the Gospels.

[12 : 25] and by the apostles themselves. So what do we get from them? Well, as we've recognized, God's way of making humanity righteous requires faith in Jesus Christ.

John 8.24 says, and this is Jesus speaking, I told you that you would die in your sins. If you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.

We must believe in Jesus, or we will die in our sins. John 20, verses 30 and 31 says, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book, the book of John.

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

If you want to have eternal life, if I want to have eternal life, we must believe in Jesus. belief in Jesus opens the way, the only way, to the forgiveness of our sins and the way of salvation.

[13 : 44] He is the only way. And really, the playing field is completely level. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, as Paul states.

And he says again, for all have sinned, all of us, and we fall short of the glory of God. So it's not just a general concept of faith.

I have faith in my church. I have faith in various things. But it's a specific kind of faith that's being spoken about here. Faith in Christ.

Because Christ died for our sins. And he is the only way to forgiveness and salvation. Here's that J word again.

God's righteousness involves justification. So God's righteousness is available to us through God's amazing grace. It is a free gift that God offers us.

[14 : 44] His unconditional love and compassion towards us and for us represent God's grace. God's righteousness to us was paid for, made possible by Jesus, when he offered himself as the only sacrifice that would appease the wrath of God towards sin, and in particular, our sin.

But if God is truly righteous, though, why did he allow these seemingly inadequate sacrifices of animals to allow past sins to almost seem like they were passed over, for now?

Pun intended, maybe. Well, it's because the Father knew that Christ himself would one day bear the sin of the entire world. He was getting people accustomed to the fact that they needed a sacrifice, but they couldn't even begin to understand what that ultimate sacrifice would look like.

The Father knew that in and through Jesus, acting as the great justifier, humanity could be made righteous in God's eyes.

God's grace also makes redemption possible. Jesus' sacrifice makes forgiveness possible. But again, we need to remember that this justification that's available is only for those who believe in, trust, and put their faith in Jesus Christ.

[16 : 23] I love this. God's righteousness also eliminates boasting. When we recognize that only God's grace made forgiveness and redemption possible, that Jesus paid the only price that would ever cover humanity's sin, how can any of us ever possibly brag or take credit for any of it?

How can we brag about the good things that we do or the things that God has called us ultimately to do? It's only faith in Jesus that can save, not anything that we can do on our own.

We owed a great debt that we could never repay, but that bill was paid for us in full and for all time by Jesus.

I'm still waiting for the day that this happens to me or us so that I can tell an amazing story as a sermon illustration, but could you imagine sitting down to a really expensive dinner and you think, well, yeah, we can kind of afford this.

It'll be all right. And then you realize your bill has been paid in full, tip included, maybe parking. But that debt that you had, now this is such a small, ultimately pathetic analogy, but that debt that you were anticipating having to pay, having to account for, was wiped out.

[18:02] God still calls us, though, to be obedient to the law and to his calling on our lives. We're still called to love God and love others.

Our justification doesn't wipe that out. We're still called to repent and turn from sin and selfish choices. We'll talk a bit more about sin next week.

But one commentator I read said this, it doesn't mean that God abandoned his law or that Jesus Christ himself did not regard the law.

As we talked about a moment ago, he came to magnify it, to draw attention to the importance of the law. It also doesn't matter that, it also isn't that sinners, after they are justified, should have no regard for the law.

Once we see it's that personal salvation model. I've been saved, I'm good, and that's it. Well, what about what God called us to do?

[19:07] The go part we miss out on sometimes. So God's way of making humanity righteous through faithful obedience accomplishes some amazing things.

As we just talked about, it eliminates boasting in anything we can ever do ourselves. That's humbling. I've had lots of conversations with people over the years that they just say, I just don't measure up.

I don't deserve it. And I say, lovingly, you're right, you don't, but neither do I. And it's called grace. And it's because God loves you.

Not always easy to remember, right? We live in a world that always expects something in return. So that unbelievable grace that God gives us is breathtaking.

In ancient times, the mistake made by many Jews was believing that their obedience to the law and animal sacrifices, strict obedience to God's law, was all that they needed.

[20:11] The mistake I think many people make today is that believing faith alone is sufficient for salvation. Hold that thought because that is true, absolutely true.

But then believing afterwards or behaving like obedience to God's law for us is somehow unnecessary? Oh, we can forget about all of that.

I think I've told you before, I know someone well who is convinced that we have the New Testament, so we don't need the Old Testament, which was a struggle for me before I went to seminary to have that conversation, but there you go.

I didn't think it was a covenantal conversation we could really get into at that time, but eventually. So somehow saying that we've been justified, God has forgiven our sins, Jesus paid the price, so now we don't have to worry about the rest of it.

That's anemic gospel. That's anemic belief. When we're careful to note God's righteousness revealed, as we've done this morning, we'll hopefully have a better understanding that God saves those whose faith in Jesus then prompts them to also obey God's word.

[21:36] God saves those whose faith in Jesus then prompts them to also obey God's word. And I would take it a step further and say, live a life that reflects Jesus.

So while obedience doesn't necessarily earn or merit salvation, it's the means by which we show gratitude and acknowledge God's grace to us.

God who gave Jesus as the perfect sacrifice and the payment for our sins. I have a question for you.

Has your faith in Jesus led you to obey his word? Ask God to show you how you can understand and follow that better in your life day by day.

Amen.