

PM Romans 1:1-17 & 3:21-31 The Righteousness of God

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[0 : 00] Now let's read together in God's Word, in Paul's letter to the Romans. You'll find this on page 1131, Romans chapter 1, and we'll be reading verses 1 to 17.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his son who was descended from David according to the flesh, and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

For God is my witness whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

For I long to see you that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. That is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

[2 : 00] I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you, but thus far have been prevented, in order that I may reap some harvest among you, as well as among the rest of the Gentiles.

I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish, so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed, from faith for faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

Now let's turn once again to the book of Romans, this time in chapter 3. Romans chapter 3 on page 1133.

We'll be reading verses 21 to 31. Romans chapter 3, verse 21.

[3 : 12] But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law. Although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins. 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.

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. For we hold that one is justified by faith, apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles also? Yes, of the Gentiles also. Since God is one, who will justify the circumcised by faith, and the uncircumcised through faith?

[4 : 44] Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means. On the contrary, we uphold the law. So this is where we're going to be spending some time this evening, and we have just read

together perhaps one of the most significant passages in the New Testament, which deals with what Paul calls the gospel of grace, or the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now these words are of course densely packed with potent truth of what it means for a person to have peace with God. To have the very substance of the gospel, that is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, his death, and his resurrection.

Because Jesus is of course the very substance and sum of the gospel. So how is it that this work of Jesus dying for sinners is applied to sinners?

And so what I would like us to do this evening is unpack some of this teaching, as we're given by the Apostle Paul in this passage. And so we're simply just going to work through these verses.

Now when we approach a book in the Bible like the letter to the Romans, we can be very easily put off by its lofty language and theological concepts.

[6 : 08] You might even think that this book is a book that's only for ministers, or it's only for theologians. But what I would like us to consider this evening is that this book is a book for you.

Although it wasn't written to you directly, it was of course written to the Romans, to a particular church at a particular time. But when you go back to chapter 1 and verse 11, you can see that, verse 11, it says, For I long to see you, and that I may impart some spiritual gift to strengthen you. You can see that he has been trying to get to Rome. And in verse 15, it says that he is eager to preach the gospel to them who are in Rome. And since he cannot yet be with them, he sends this letter first.

And he does in the letter exactly what he wants to do. He preaches to them. And it wasn't written to a seminary or to a particular teacher of the church. It's actually written to the church.

It's written to ordinary folk. And so this is written to us. And it was written to encourage them. And this is a letter that is full of encouragement.

[7 : 22] And I'm sure that we all need encouragement from time to time. So another thing about this wonderful book is perhaps it's considered one of the most important books in the New Testament.

And that's why it's placed first after the Acts of the Apostles. Because it concerns issues of first importance, the very gospel of God. You'll know St. Augustine of Hippo, who is perhaps one of the greatest of the early church fathers.

You may know his testimony, how he was raised by a godly mother on the Bible. But in his teens and twenties, he wandered from the faith. Then he found himself indulging in various sinful practices and relationships.

And he became increasingly troubled. And he said that his life, he felt like it was as if his soul had ulcers. And he found that the things that he previously had pleasure in were no longer satisfying. He felt filthy. And that is when one day he was then in his garden and then he heard the words tolly, leggy, tolly, leggy, which means take and read.

[8 : 35] And he says this, he says that with an overwhelming torrent of tears, he quickly returned to his bench, snatched up the Apostles' book, and in silence read the paragraph on which his eyes fell.

Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lust thereof.

He says that I didn't need to read any further, for instantly as the sentence ended, there infused in my heart something light from light, full of certainty, and all of the gloom of doubt vanished away.

You see, this book has been tremendously effective in the history of the church to transform and to change individuals and to bring them into fellowship with Jesus Christ.

So this book is very effective in working on the heart. Now, our text this morning is in chapter 3, but this section really begins in verse, way back in chapter 1, verse 18.

[9 : 46] Sorry, verse 16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. And so Paul is wanting to declare this gospel, this gospel of grace to the whole world. He doesn't want to just stay in Judea, he doesn't want to just give it to the Jew, but he goes to the synagogues first, he goes to the Jews first, and then he goes to the Greek. And he preaches this gospel.

And he wants to tell it to the whole world because it is, after all, good news. Because Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners. And so this is when he begins this section in which he

delves into what the gospel really means.

In verse 18 it tells us, in chapter 1, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[10:52] So men are naturally suppressing the truth of God in unrighteousness. He goes on to detail how the Gentile world is in pursuit of idolatry and worldly lusts.

You can see that he gives them up, God gives them up to impurity. In verse 28, they did not see it fit to acknowledge God. God gave them up to a debased mind.

It says that they were filled with all manner of unrighteousness. And he does this list of vices. They are evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness.

They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

They know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die. They not only do them, but give approval to those who practice them. So he gives these lists of characterizing the natural heart of man.

[12:05] And then when we read on into chapter 2, he says, Perhaps when I was reading that list, you were thinking, oh, how terrible the world is.

How terrible other people are. But Paul is saying here, he's challenging, he's saying, do you see yourself in this? Do you see envy?

Do you see strife in your heart? The question is, does this list condemn you? Now he does this in a way that he says, it's not only the Gentiles, but also the Jews.

They have fallen short of God's glory. He says in chapter 2, verse 25, it says, For circumcision is of value if you obey the law.

But if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So he's saying that, not only the Gentile world, but the Jewish world, even those who are circumcised, who are God's own people, they break the law.

[13:17] And so we come to chapter 3, we read in verse 10, where he quotes, None is righteous, No, not one.

No one understands. No one seeks for God. You see, it's utterly devastating, isn't it? Sin isn't simply disobedience, it's falling short of God's glory, falling short of his righteousness.

Then there's our text for this evening, which concerns the righteousness of God. And then in chapter 4, he gives an illustration of the gospel in the life of Abraham.

And it concludes this section with chapter 5, verse 1, where he says, Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And so when we're thinking about this passage, we should be seeing this conclusion through all of the text.

It says, that we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God. Everything about this is about how to have peace with God. Because there is, of course, sin, and there is sin which separates us from God.

[14:33] This list of vices which reflects the natural heart, which separates us, we are naturally not at peace with God. And yet this passage tells us how we are to have peace with God.

This is something that is of first importance. And so this is the context of our text. And so let's go and delve into this text. So in verse 21, But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it.

Now the righteousness of God, this is a very troubling phrase, the righteousness of God. Paul has just got through telling us that no one is righteous.

And that we are guilty of sin. And it's not just that other people commit sins, that we can look at them and wag our fingers at them, but we are personally guilty of sin.

God is holy and glorious and righteous. And so how is it that we can be made right with him? Now this phrase, the righteousness of God, is something that of course the famous eccentric Augustine monk, Martin Luther, struggled with.

[15:56] He began a series of lectures on Psalms, Romans and Galatians. And he came across this phrase, which first occurs in chapter 1, verse 17. And he reflected on what it meant. And he says this, he says, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners.

Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Because what he thought was that if God is righteous, and that righteousness is the standard, that in order to be right with God, we have to be made righteous.

That is that we are to be truly repentant. That we are to become humble and poor in spirit. That we are to do good works and we are to do it with sincerity of heart.

But what Luther discovered was that the more he pursued this attempt to be made righteous, was that it was too great a burden to bear.

It was too high a standard to attain. And he says, what kind of God gives this standard and expects us to reach out and embrace it?

[17 : 04] And then Luther had the realization that Jesus has already accomplished righteousness for us. And it is not by being made righteous that we have peace with God.

But it is by being declared righteous. Listen to what Luther says. There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift from God.

Namely, by faith. Luther is saying it is not something that we attain, but God by his grace gives it to us as a gift.

And he says this. He says, I felt I was altogether born again. And he says, it was as if I had entered paradise itself through open gates.

So no longer was the righteousness of God something active to achieve, but it was something passive to receive. The accomplishment of what Jesus had already done could be received by faith alone.

[18 : 15] So when we read this verse where it says the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, we are to see that this is the righteousness of God which is given to us not by our acts of obedience to the law, even though the law is a witness to this righteousness, but that the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

That is verse 22. The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. You see this, the righteousness of God, it's objective, it's sure, it's certain, and it's the complete work of Jesus Christ on the cross who died for sinners.

The sinless Son of God. His righteousness is gifted and given to who? All who believe. All who believe.

Isn't that a wonderful truth? A perfect righteousness from the Son of God given to you if you but believe on Him. And then you are in this, you have this new identity, this new status.

You stand before God righteous, declared perfect, holy, a righteous in His sight. You'll never be any more righteous than you are because it is only the righteousness of Jesus that counts.

[19 : 51] It's only His righteousness that counts. So that's this first part. If we move on to verse 23 it says, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And now this is a difficult point to argue against. Paul has laid this groundwork. Well, when we've worked our way through this all have sinned, Jew and Gentile, men and women, young and old. It is the universal state of mankind since the fall.

Yet not only have we sinned, we fall short of God's glory. You know, human beings were created with this privileged position in creation in which we were made in God's own image.

We were given a mind, we were given an intellect, we were a living soul, and then man sinned and man fell short of the glory of God.

He made us with a purpose to fulfil his glory and we fail to meet that standard. And sin isn't just missing the mark, it's not just violating God's law, it is falling short of God's glory, failing to live up to what we were made to be.

[21 : 01] Perhaps we can illustrate this with King David who is described as a man after God's own heart. Of course he won a victory for Israel when he slew Goliath.

But you remember his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and how he then had her husband killed so that he could take her as his own wife. One of the things that Nathan the prophet said to him, you may remember, he says this, you have despised the word of the Lord.

He tells him that he despised God with his action because sin despises God. When the sinner sins willfully, he does it despising God.

He hates him and therefore he is absolutely guilty. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But we read on and it says this, and are justified by his grace.

That is, all who believe are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. All who believe are justified.

[22 : 18] So no longer are they counted guilty, but God counts them as not guilty. And God goes even further than saying not guilty. He says, you are righteous. righteous. And on what basis does

he do this?

He says this, whom God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

Jesus is the one who has paid for our sins. it's a propitiation which is a complex theological term, but it means there was a sacrifice given that Jesus was put forward to shed his own blood to take away sin.

And he was put forward to satisfy this righteous, just, and holy wrath of God against sin. And so that is what propitiation means.

It is this satisfying of the wrath of God. Justification is the application of this sacrifice. It is the application of the sacrifice of Jesus to your sin.

[23 : 31] And God gives you by faith this gift of salvation, this gift of righteousness. Now Jesus was obedient to God's law and Jesus loved the Father perfectly and Jesus sacrificed his life.

And on the basis of that legal declaration your sins are forgiven. So that whatever you have done in your life, whatever sin you have committed, you can be redeemed through Jesus Christ.

You've been redeemed, you've been liberated, you have been set free from bondage to sin because you have been united to Jesus by faith. If there was no sacrifice, no propitiation, there could be no forgiveness.

Because if God were to forgive merely out of his mercy, without any penalty, then where would his justice be? There would be no hope for justice in the world.

We cry out for justice. We know intrinsically that justice is required. Justice against criminals, justice against the greedy. But no one really cries out for justice for their own sin.

[24 : 41] Everyone wants mercy for their own sin. But in Jesus there is both mercy and justice. There is perfect harmony in the two. And Paul raises this point if we read on.

This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. So someone, if you were to say, well, what happened before Christ died?

When someone was to look at the time before the sacrifice of Jesus, then where was God's justice? David was an adulterer and also a killer and he was called a man after God's own heart.

God forgives him out of mercy. Where is the justice? How can God be just and pass over these sins? And he tells us right here, he tells us that the sacrifice of Jesus is applicable not only to us after the fact but also to the Old Testament saints and they were delivered in the same way as you or I.

It was by the blood of Jesus because they are righteous because of their faith and that is exactly what is spoken of in the next chapter in chapter 4 where Abraham is justified by faith because Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

[26 : 09] And how can this be? That is the question. How can it be? It hadn't even happened yet and the answer is so clear. God had a plan and God works all of history for his own glory.

And you see the sacrificial death of Jesus was so completely certain that even though it hadn't yet happened you could be forgiven on the basis of it if you just believed and trusted God.

The sacrifice of Jesus was so completely certain. There was never any doubt that it was ever going to happen. Jesus was on a mission to save the world and nothing would stand in his path and he was victorious over sin.

The death of Jesus was sure. It was certain and it was so certain that even Old Testament saints could be justified by faith before those events even took place.

Verse 26. So God passes over the former sins and 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.

[27 : 24] And here we see this term again justifier justification that God who is righteous declared the one who was once guilty he declares them righteous.

And he didn't do this without a cost. He didn't pardon our sins without a cost. It is the cross that we see the justice of God and this is the very heart of the gospel so that the sins which were at one time passed over are paid for.

So the sins committed by you or I can be wiped clean. And the wrath of God that was rightfully ours to receive was taken by Jesus.

God is both just and justifier. He was both righteous and the one who declares righteous.

Now if Paul puts this another way I think it's always helpful to go to other books in the New

Testament which speak on the same subject which help to shed light on other verses it says that in

Ephesians chapter 1 verse 7 in him we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ.

[28 : 56] See it was a mystery on how God was going to accomplish this. How was it that God was going to be able to forgive sin? There it is it's in Christ. That is how sin would be dealt with once and for all.

Defeated, crushed by Jesus. Then he raised him from the dead and he seated him at his right hand in heavenly places far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named.

It all happened according to God's plan. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus willingly went to the cross and then he was exalted by his Father to this glorious position which he now has.

He is the just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Now let's just think of three points of application.

The first is that this truth is the foundation of your confidence in Jesus Christ that your sins are forgiven. How can you be confident that your sins are forgiven?

[30 : 00] Well you can look to the cross and see that only at the cross is where the wrath of God is satisfied. Are you one who struggles with guilt? Are you struggling with assurance?

Well then you can look to Jesus as the one who was truly righteous because only by the application of his life to yours, the work that he has done, it's through faith in him that you can have to possess, to have this righteousness yourself so that you can be declared not guilty and righteous.

So this is the foundation of your confidence. You know and we think of those verses again in chapter 5 verse 1 where it says, therefore since we have been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The confidence that we have peace with God, are you at peace with God? Or are you still at war with him as you try to work your way to him with your own righteousness?

You see here that the only way that we can have peace with him is not through our own efforts but through faith in Jesus. So first it's the foundation of our confidence, secondly it's the foundation of our joy.

[31 : 20] You know what a moment that Luther realized that this burden that he was carrying his whole life, that he was trying to be made righteous, that was lifted from his back, so that no longer was he standing based on his own personal righteousness, which he then looked back on and said is like dung.

Rather before God, God looked down on him and saw the perfect righteousness of Jesus. Don't you want to be known as someone by God when he looks at you, he sees the perfect righteousness of Jesus?

Jesus. And that happens right at the moment when you believe. And it liberates us from the bondage of the law and it frees us to live in the joy of Jesus Christ, to live a life of gratitude, of thankfulness, no longer in this hamster wheel of good works but the good that we do is from the gratitude of what God has done for us.

Secondly, that's the foundation of the joy. And thirdly, it's the foundation of your walk. So some might say, well if it's true that my sins are paid for and salvation is this free gift, then I can just continue in my sin, I just need to believe and then continue.

Now I'm not going to give a full answer to that if that was your attitude, you just have to read chapter 5 and chapter 6 where Paul explicitly deals with that argument.

[32 : 46] But what I will say is this, that in Adam we are all counted sinners, in Adam we are all guilty, we are all in bondage to sin, but when we trust in Jesus, we are now in Christ.

No longer are we in Adam, but we are in Christ. We are dead to sin. We have become a new life in Jesus and it's not a life of bondage to works, but the good that we do is done through the power of Jesus Christ.

Christ. And it's not, when you do this good, it's not to try and make God think better of you, but you are freed to walk a new life because you know that you are loved by God, not because of what you do, but because of who you are in Jesus Christ.

Christ. You cannot be proud of your good works in that sense. We see that when it says in verse 27, then what becomes of our boasting is excluded.

So you see that if you were to add your works, then you can boast. But Paul says here then, it's obvious that we cannot boast anymore because Christ has done it all.

[34 : 00] The only status that we have is that which is in Jesus Christ. And so we cannot boast about being a good neighbour, we cannot boast on going to church every Sunday, we cannot boast because we do our devotionals, all of these things are wonderful and good things, but what we can boast in, what we should be boasting in, is Jesus Christ and what he has done for us.

Because when God looks at you, what do you want him to see? Do you want him to see your good works? Or do you want him to see the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ?

Where the penalty for your sin was paid in full by his death? So what do you want him to see?
Amen.