

ROMANS 3: 21-31

In Romans Chapters 1 to 3, God gave His final diagnosis of mankind, and the Holy Spirit recorded it as a testimony to man's true condition.

Basically, God's examination dealt with three groups of people:

The immoral Gentiles, although they refuse to admit it, have always held "**the truth in unrighteousness**," the truth being the fact that there is a Creator to Whom they are responsible.

Romans 1:19-20 "**Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.**

²⁰ **For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are**

clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

And then He turned His attention to the moral Gentiles.

Certainly, we would expect some improvement here, but, unfortunately, the very sins that had manifested themselves so openly in the other group have found a home in their hearts.

Romans 2:1 **"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things."**

Finally, God examines His own Chosen People.

They have enjoyed "**the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law,**" but it had only served to highlight their sins. Well, that completes the list, and the results are not encouraging.

Romans 3:10-12 "**As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:**

¹¹ **There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.**

¹² **They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."**

Well, that certainly was bad news, but it wasn't exactly new news.

No, God had arrived at this very same conclusion many years before.

Psalms 14:2-3 "**The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see**

if there were any that did understand,
and seek God.

3: They are all gone aside, they are
all together become filthy: there is
none that doeth good, no, not one."

No, nothing had changed.

If man was to be rescued, God would have to
do it Himself.

Yes, "**With men this is impossible; but with
God all things are possible.**"

Possible --- yes, but not easy.

His righteous law had been violated time
after time, and a tremendous debt had
accumulated, a debt that must be paid
in full before a single man could be
saved.

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Let's take a few moments to look at the
subject of law.

In this case, we will be considering man's law.

By that, I mean the whole system of law and government that protects society.

A few years ago, there was a case in Texas that aptly illustrates the righteous judgment of the law.

Remember, we're not talking about mercy here. We're talking about pure law.

A woman by the name of Karlafaith Tucker was executed for the brutal murder of two innocent people.

Sometime before her execution, she was interviewed on the Larry King show.

I happened to see it, and it was quite obvious to me that this woman was now a radiant Christian.

No doubt some faithful soul in the prison system had led her to Christ.

Yes, a wonderful work of grace had been done in her heart, and had she been allowed to live, I'm sure she would have led many to her Saviour.

Could she be acquitted on that basis?

Well, no, she couldn't, and she wasn't.

The law of Texas requires capital punishment for the crime of murder, and, by the way, so does God's Law.

Genesis 9:5-6 **"And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.**

⁶ **Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."**

As the interview continued, it became quite apparent that this woman had been deprived of a normal childhood.

When she was eight years old, her mother had given her drugs.

When she was 15, she started her out on a life of prostitution.

So, in a very real sense, she was as much a victim as the ones she had murdered while under the influence drugs.

Nevertheless, the State of Texas required the death penalty.

There was a debt to be paid to society.

There was a debt to be paid to the relatives left behind.

And, finally, there was a debt to be paid to those whom she had brutally murdered.

That's the law, and it had been put there to protect the innocent.

Also, there was a debt to be paid to God ---

"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."

However, unlike the State of Texas, God was able to pardon her.

Today, I have no doubt that she is enjoying the glories of heaven.

How could He do that?

Well, that's what we're about to find out.

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The fact of the matter is, God could no more ignore His law than the State of Texas could ignore theirs.

His law is just, and not subject to revision.

Also, the Judge of all the earth is righteous, and cannot pass over sin.

No, the very righteousness of God would have signed her death warrant.

And, by the way, even though we might not be murderers, the very righteousness of God spells our doom also.

Yes, man must be judged according to his works.

And there's a Judgment Day coming.

It is graphically described in Revelation 20:12 **"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works."**

And, certainly, man will receive a fair trial, for God is just.

But there's not much comfort in that when we consider the fact that **"there is none that doeth good, no, not one."**

No, righteousness earned is a lost cause.

So, what about righteousness bestowed, you know, like an honorary degree bestowed on someone of distinction by a university?

In a way, it seems a little unfair to simply bestow such an honour on someone when others have worked hard and studied diligently to obtain such an honour.

Hopefully, the personal attributes of the recipient make this acknowledgment appropriate.

But, in God's case, there's no such reason to simply bestow righteousness.

As the hymn writer has observed, "we do not merit the least of His favour."

No, simply bestowing righteousness on an undeserving individual could only be construed as favouritism.

And God doesn't play favourites.

As Romans 2:11 clearly points out "--- **there is no respect of persons with God.**"

And that's exactly how it should be.

If God turned a blind eye to the sins of certain individuals while condemning others, He would be unjust.

And as Abraham pointed out when pleading for the righteous in Sodom and Gomorrah, that would be unthinkable.

Genesis 18:25 **"That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"**

Well, yes, He certainly should, and He does.
And that's exactly the dilemma that faces
us.

The sinfulness of man rules out any
possibility of righteousness earned,
while the righteousness of God rules
out any possibility of righteousness
bestowed.

God cannot lower His standards, and man
cannot improve his.

So, is there no other way?

Well, yes, there is, and it's our only hope.
It is righteousness imputed, and it can
justify the vilest sinner without
violating God's righteous law.

We can read all about it in Romans 3:21-26

**"But now the righteousness of God
without the law is manifested, being
witnessed by the law and the prophets;**

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

There is a great deal to consider here, and we will have to take it slowly and carefully.

First of all, let's go back to V 21 and the little word "**But.**"

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested."

This is one of the great but's of the Bible. And just as a great door can swing on very small hinges, so this little word often opens the way to great and marvellous truths.

And, certainly, that is the case here.

The main subject of these verses is perfect righteousness, and perfect righteousness is absolutely essential.

We can't expect God to lower His standards to accommodate our performance.

But, what is righteousness imputed?

Well, first of all, let me say righteousness imputed is as different from righteousness bestowed as day is from night.

Let me explain.

Unlike righteousness bestowed, righteousness imputed completely satisfies the just requirements of God's perfect law.

The word imputed means to credit to someone's account.

It's sort of a bookkeeping term.

Supposing I had a friend who owed the bank \$1000.

He had drawn out that amount from his borrowing account, and now he couldn't pay.

And now he has lost his job.

So not only was he unable to settle his debt, but he has now lost his ability to do so.

Again, let us suppose I approached the bank manager and said --- *Look here, this is a good friend of mine. I would appreciate it if you would cancel his debt.*

Would he do it?

I don't think so.

First of all, it would be illegal, and, secondly, it would set up a bad precedent.

If he simply cancelled one man's debt, you might say on a whim, while requiring full payment from all others, it would be quite unfair.

But, what if I changed my request?

What if I said, *I have a bank account with your establishment, and I will write out a cheque for \$1000 in favour of my friend. Please apply it to his account.*

Now there would be no problem, would there? My request to impute (or count) \$1000 to my friend's account, while debiting mine, would be perfectly legal.

The books would be balanced, and no one would have been treated unfairly.

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I heard about a lady who didn't seem to understand the concept of balancing the books.

One day when she got home from shopping, her husband said, in a bit of an irritated tone, "My dear, four of your cheques have been returned."

"Wonderful," said his wife. "Now I can
spend them again."

I'm not sure what he said after that.

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Well, what we have here in V 21 is
righteousness imputed ---"**But now the
righteousness of God without the law is
manifested, being witnessed by the law
and the prophets ---.**"

It is not righteousness earned, nor is it
righteousness bestowed.

It is righteousness imputed, and it
transfers a debt from one person to
another.

You see, righteousness imputed also requires
sin imputed.

For it's the only way to balance the books.

And, as Romans 6:23 points out, "--- **the
wages of sin is death.**"

And it always has been.

When God warned Adam about the consequences of rebelling against His command, He said, ---"**in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.**"

Yes, "--- **the wages of sin is death.**"

That's why Christ had to die in order to save us.

On the cross of Calvary, our sins were imputed, or transferred, to His account.

At the same time, His righteousness was credited to ours.

*♪ Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow.*

Under this new set of circumstances, God is not obliged to judge us according to our works, for He has already done that at Calvary.

In fact, when He looks at the redeemed, He can find no fault in them at all.

On the other hand, He could not even look at His Son as He hung on the cross.

That's because God, Who cannot look on sin, had **"made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."** 2

Corinthians 5:21

And the anticipation of this awful hour, which caused Christ to sweat, as it were, **"great drops of blood"** in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And it was the realization of this awful separation which caused Him to cry out in

agony --- **"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"**

What a price had been paid.

But now the books had been balanced, and now the righteous demands of the law had been satisfied.

Yes, Christ has taken our place as God's divine Substitute.

It was an event that had been anticipated by all the Old Testament saints.

And it was an event that had been foreseen by all the Old Testament prophets.

Isaiah 53:6 **"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him (that is, on Jesus) the iniquity of us all."**

And again in Isaiah 53:11 **"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be**

satisfied: by his knowledge shall my
righteous servant justify many; for he
shall bear their iniquities."

Yes, "To him give all the prophets witness,
that through his name whosoever believeth
in him shall receive remission of sins."

Act.10:43

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And how do we obtain such a gift?

I guess I've already told you the answer,
haven't I?

Yes, it's a gift, and regardless of the
cost, it can be received by simple faith
in the integrity of the Giver.

Romans 3:22 **"Even the righteousness of God
which is by faith of Jesus Christ."**

And if it is available by faith alone, then
it is available to all, both Jew and
Gentile.

And that's exactly what the rest of V 22
tells us --- **"unto all and upon all them
that believe: for there is no difference:
23 For all have sinned, and come short
of the glory of God."**

Yes, the most costly gift ever purchased is
free.

V 24-26 **"Being justified freely by his grace
(or by His love) through the redemption
that is in Christ Jesus:**

**25 Whom God hath set forth to be a
propitiation through faith in his blood,
to declare his righteousness for the
remission of sins that are past, through
the forbearance of God;**

**26 To declare, I say, at this time his
righteousness: that he might be just, and
the justifier of him which believeth in
Jesus."**

Again, we must take our time in considering these verses.

The first thing we notice is that we have been **"justified freely by his grace."**

Let me quickly add, we're not talking about forgiveness here. We're talking about justification.

If God turned a blind eye to sins of certain individuals and simply forgave them, then every lost sinner could cry out *Unfair*, and he would be right.

And not only that, but God's righteous law could cry out *Unjust*, and it would be right also.

But there's a lot more involved here than forgiveness.

We are **"justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."**

Yes, Christ has paid the price to make us
just in God's sight.

In fact, the word redemption simply means to
deliver by paying a price.

And that's exactly what Jesus has done.

He has paid the price to redeem us out of
the slave market of sin, and then He has
set us free.

In V 25, we come across the word
propitiation --- **"Whom God hath set forth
(or put forward) to be a propitiation
through faith in his blood."**

What does the word propitiation mean?

Well, it means to atone, or to make amends
for.

In this particular case, Christ's sacrifice
so satisfied God's holiness that He is
able to look upon us in favour.

And just as Christ's righteousness is obtained by faith alone, so this wonderful atonement can be ours **"through faith in his blood."**

And who are the recipients of this marvellous gift of grace?

Actually, there are two groups involved here, and the first one is described in the remainder of this verse --- **"to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God".**

As you will notice, this verse is talking about past sins, and that should give us a clue.

Another significant thing about them is the fact that God hasn't exercised His judgment upon them as yet.

It's not that God has ignored them. He has simply postponed judgment.

This could only refer to the sins of the Old Testament saints.

Through the sacrifices, they had looked ahead in faith to God's Divine Substitute.

At the same time, God has been able to look at these same sacrifices and postpone judgment.

He could do that because each and every sacrifice foreshadowed the coming sacrifice of His own dear Son.

You might say God allowed the Old Testament saints to use their *credit card*, as it were, to postpone payment.

But pay day must come some day, even at Leon's!

And payday did come . . . at Calvary.

That's when God's forbearance became God's righteous judgment.

Yes, at Calvary, Jesus was made "--- **sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.**" 2 Corinthians 5:21

At Calvary, "**the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world**" paid the outstanding debt of every Old Testament saint.

But what about the New Testament believer? What about those who have looked back to the cross in faith?

I believe V2 6 refers to this Age of Grace and every New Testament believer when it says "**To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness:**"

Yes, the righteousness of Christ is
sufficient for all, whether they have
looked forward or backward to the cross.

For **"--- once in the end of the world hath
he appeared to put away sin by the
sacrifice of himself."** Hebrews 9:26

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And not only did Jesus reconcile mankind to
God, He reconciled God to man.

That's the wonderful truth that is found in
the rest of this verse.

V 26 **"--- that he might be just** (that is,
God might be just) **and the justifier of
him which believeth in Jesus."**

I remember the first time I discovered this
verse.

I was 19 years old, but only about one-year
old, as a Christian.

The years have gone by, and now I am a senior, but the truth of this verse still warms my heart --- **"that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."**

Yes, for the first time since sin entered the Garden of Eden, God had the power to draw us to Himself without one iota of damage to His righteous nature, and without one iota of damage to His righteous law.

V 27-31 **"Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.**

²⁸ **Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.**

²⁹ **Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the**

Gentiles also:

³⁰ **Seeing it is one God, which shall
justify the circumcision by faith, and
uncircumcision through faith.**

³¹ **Do we then make void the law through
faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the
law."**

That's the good news of the Gospel!
And that's God's only remedy for sin.

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*♪How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives of away his fear.*