

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 3:21-26 (A)

Student Notes

“But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.”

Paul’s Progression on God’s Righteousness:

- Romans 3:21-26 -- He portrays the righteousness through Christ’s Cross.
- Romans 3:27-31 – He defends the Gospel against its Jewish critics.
- Romans 4:1-25 -- He illustrates this righteousness through the life of the Jewish patriarch Abraham.

“The Heart of Romans” – 3:21-26

Bible scholars often describe Romans 3:21-26 as the very center and heart of Paul’s letter. Many consider it to be the most important paragraph in the entire book.

- **The “Righteousness of God”:**

Romans 3:21: “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.”

Romans 1:17: “For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith...”

Both 1:17 and 3:21— the emphasis is upon God’s initiative in bringing salvation to humans. There is absolutely no hint of anything that we, as the estranged creations of God, have done or could have done for ourselves.

As such, a righteousness “has been made known” and “has been revealed”. Both phrases remind us that the impetus begins with God – not with us.

The difference between 1:17 and 3:21:

Romans 1:17: The tense was present. A righteousness is being revealed; the wrath of God is being revealed.

Romans 3:21: Past tense -- Something has happened that has caused the righteousness of God to be revealed:

That “something” is the historical death of Christ. The Cross is the demarcation line between the Law and the revelation of righteousness apart from the Law.

“God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement...”

- **Two Additional Statements with “God’s Righteousness”:**

Verse 22: “This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

This righteousness: 1. Comes through faith in Jesus Christ (to all who believe). 2. There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles in receiving it.

Note: Chapters 1-3 -- Paul has been telling us that there is “no difference” between Jew and Gentile when it comes to the wrath of God upon sin. “All have sinned and fall short of God’s perfection”.

Verse 24: Now, for the first time, God’s righteousness is identified with justification. He tells us that we are “justified freely by his grace”.

The “righteousness of God” is normally understood as a phrase denoting God’s personal righteousness that He alone possesses. But

now God is, as it were, implanting or transmitting His own righteousness to those who believe in Christ's atoning work.

- **The Impetus and Definition of Justification**

The impetus or initiative of the transmission is entirely with God. A righteousness from God has been made known – not a righteousness stemming from humans.

Verse 24: "And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." This is probably a good place to discuss the term "Justification" as it is central to this passage.

In legal terms "justification" is a forensic term, belonging to courts of law. In Christian theology the word has much deeper significance because it is directly tied to God's activities on the Day of Judgment.

When God "justifies" a human He is anticipating the day when He will judge all humans. God's justification is actually the full removal of the cause of indictment and the grounds of condemnation.

There have been many discussions on whether or not justification is synonymous with pardon or forgiveness. Most scholars arrive at the conclusion that forgiveness is the remission of punishment, whereas justification is the declaration that grounds do not exist to condemn a human to eternal punishment.

So, having seen this overview, let's specifically look at verses 24-26. We can find three major truths presented in these three verses. Let's look at them one at a time:

The Locus or Source of Our Justification

In verse 24 Paul writes, "And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

The locus or source of our justification couldn't be clearer; it is God's grace and God's grace alone. That's the core of the gospel -- that salvation was God's idea, it was His initiative. Otherwise it begins with us – and that is simply not possible. See: Romans 1:21-23

Here I will make a second statement that you must hear carefully. Our salvation was not accomplished by our initiative. In a way it was not even at Christ's initiative.

Certainly, Jesus was submitted to God's will. He was willing to lay his life down in order to redeem us, but the ultimate initiative to save us rested with the Father. See: John 3:16; Romans 5:8; John 6:44; Ephesians 2:4-6

The source of our justification is God's Grace and God's grace alone. The initiative was always with God – never us.