**God’s Righteousness through faith in Jesus**

Romans 3:21-31

Key Verse: 3:22a

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

In 1:18-32, Paul depicts How humanity became corrupted by sin when they rejected the truth of God. As a result of turning away from God, his creation degenerated and became enslaved to sinful desires. In 2:1-16, he proclaims God’s righteous judgment upon all people, Jews and Gentiles. God’s judgment is based on truth - truth that is fundamental, universal, and eternal truth. He judes not only what we have done, but also the secrets of our hearts and motives. Therefore, God’s judgment is perfectly righteous and No one can escape it. In 2:17-3:20, Paul makes the charge that all human beings, including Jews who had received the law but dishonor God by breaking the law, are under the power of sin. “There is no one righteous, not even one” (3:10b).

These are about man’s hopeless and powerless condition under the power of sin. Despite the remarkable progress humanity has achieved throughout history in culture, economics, philosophy, and science, human nature itself remains fundamentally unchanged —we are still sinners, under the power of death. Victor Hugo writes in Les Miserables. “Everything terrestrial is subject to sin. Sin is like gravitational force.” No matter how high we jump - by our efforts to reach God or by trying to do all the right things - we are still dragged down by our sin - Gravity of sin. As long as we live, there is no way to break free from this force of sin on our own.

 But, Thanks be to God! He did not leave us alone in our helplessness. God made a way to justify sinners. It is by faith in Jesus Christ. It is available to all who believe. It is the gift of God’s grace. This passage can be divided into three parts: God’s righteousness is given through faith in Jesus (21-24); How this righteousness come (24-26); There is only one God who justifies (27-31). Let’s learn what God has done for us. May God help us to receive this righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

**First, a righteousness of God through faith in Christ (21-24)**

Let us read verse 21. “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.” The phrase “But now” in verse 21 marks a great turning point which is a contrast with everything that has come before. It was impossible for any man on this earth to be righteous by observing the law or doing good deeds. But now, God provided a new way to be righteous. Under the law, men were in a desperate situation. But now, there is a wonderful hope in God. Under the power of sin, people suffered from guilt, judgement, and condemnation. But now men can receive forgiveness of sins. As Peter testified in 1 Peter 2:9-10, once we were not a people, but now we are the people of God; Once we had not received mercy, but now we have received mercy. Once, we were slaves to sin, but now we are God’s chosen people, a royal priesthood, holy nation, and God’s special possession. How are such amazing things possible? God has made this possible through “the righteousness of God.” Then, what is the righteousness of God?

This righteousness is not something new. The Law and the Prophets have been bearing witnesses to it. For example, when God called Abraham to begin his work of salvation, he promised that all nations on earth would be blessed through his offspring. (Gen 12:2-3) Abraham believed God and his promise, and his faith was credited to him as righteousness. (Gen15:6) In Galatians 3, Paul testified that this promise was fulfilled by Jesus Christ who brought the blessing of forgiveness of sins to all who believe in him. As another example, the prophet Isaiah foretold the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ in Isaiah 53. Peter testified to the fulfillment of this prophecy in his own life. “Jesus himself bore my sins in his body on the cross, so that I might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds, I have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24) In this context, “The righteousness of God” refers to the saving work of Christ - particularly his atoning death that brings forgiveness, redemption, justification, and a right relationship with God.

This righteousness of God has been made known to us! Then, here is the question to ask. How can we have it? Can we earn it? Or buy it? Look at verses 22a. “This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” This righteousness does not come from man. It comes from God. We cannot earn it with our effort nor buy it. However, God freely gives this righteousness to all who believe. So, this is a gift of grace. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” This gift is given to all who believe. God does not ask us to do anything or to pay even a penny for it. We simply accept this gift by faith in Jesus Christ.

This is truly the amazing grace of God - something the selfish and prideful cannot comprehend. Who in this world - except someone out of his mind, would freely give away such a priceless treasure - forgiveness, redemption, righteousness, and eternal life? Could you forgive someone who hurt you deeply without asking for anything in return? Even more, could you embrace him as your own child, serve him, and love him? No way. Even though he wants to repay me, I do not want to forgive him. Instead, I want him to be punished. However, God freely gives righteousness to all who believe. We can learn this gift of grace by faith from a robber who was crucified with Jesus. This man had committed terrible crimes. Maybe he was a drug dealer who shot a convenience store clerk to steal money for drugs and ran away; Maybe he was a drunken driver who killed an entire family. Maybe he was a human trafficker or slave trader like “John Newton.” He was caught, convicted, and sentenced to death. He was getting what his deeds deserved. Yet on the cross, he heard Jesus pray, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”(Lk 23:34) He saw God’s love in Jesus who was dying in pain. He simply accepted Jesus as the Lord, who was dying for his sins. Believing that Jesus is the Son of God, he prayed, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Then, Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” When he simply trusted in Christ, this man received forgiveness of sins, redemption, and eternal life in paradise. Though many may feel it is unfair, this story actually proclaims the truth that true righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Chris to all who believe. Only by faith in Jesus Christ, we receive the righteousness of God.

Look at verses 22b-24. “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 Christ Jesus.” Paul emphasized that this gift of Grace is for all people. Firstly, in the sight of God, all people are sinners. As a result, all fall short of the glory of God. It means men could not live up to God’s standards. So, we all deserve God’s judgment. We like to make many kinds of distinctions between and among us. There are men and women; rich and poor; religious and secular; young and old; republicans and democrats; Americans and others and so on. It is because we like to compare ourselves with others and find how we are a little better. However, when we look at God’s standard, these distinctions are superficial and irrelevant. In the sight of God, all we are sinners. Those who work in the white house and those who are in prisons; those who are here to worship and those who are in drinking parties; those who read bible and those who play Games. To human eyes, there may seem to relatively be a great difference between the righteous and the sinners, but before God, all are sinners who deserve God’s punishment.

Secondly, all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.(24) How does God give this righteousness to sinners? “All are justified freely by His grace.” Here, “justified” is a legal term which means “declared righteous in court.” It is “given free forgiveness.” Its opposite is “condemned.” Both are the pronouncements of a judge - the final verdict that establishes our status. Yet it is more than a legal statement. It is an act of God’s love. In justification, God declares sinners to be his children. To be justified is to be forgiven, accepted, recognized and loved by God as his children. When the prodigal son returned to his father, he brought only his repentance. He had sinned against God and against his father. He could not expect to be reinstated as a son; he only hoped to become one of his father’s hired men. But his father, upon seeing him coming in the distance, ran toward his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

Then the father said to his servants, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”(Lk 15:20-24) In the same way, God forgives, accepts, and restores sinners as his own children through their faith in Jesus Christ.

How can the Righteous judge simply declare a sinner to be “Not guilty”? Verse 24b says, “...through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” “Redemption” is a term used in the slave markets of those times. A slave couldn’t get out of slavery all by himself; he had to be set free by someone who paid the price for him. Though some of us do not like to acknowledge, we are all under the power of sin. Since we sin, we are slaves to sin - slaves to lust, greed, pride, anger, selfishness, jealousy and so on. Even though we know we must master these sinful desires, we fail to do so. To be set free, we need a Redeemer who has the power to set us free from the bondage of sins, including pornography, addiction to drugs and alcohol, and gaming, and more. We need a redeemer who pays the price for our lives. Who would be willing to pay the price with their own life?

 Thank God. God redeemed us from the slavery of sin by paying the ransom through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He paid the price, the blood of Christ, his own son. In this way, God delivers us from the empty way of life with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. (1Pe 1:18-19) Did you pay anything for your redemption? Did you do anything worthy of being justified? No. Justification is done only by God’s grace and given freely. There is nothing human beings did. God didn’t require even .1% of ransom from us, but saved us 100% by grace. It is only by God’s grace. Therefore, we should not try to add anything to our salvation. We should not try to clean ourselves up first. This is self-righteousness, which is opposed to God’s righteousness. Instead, like the criminal on a cross or like the prodigal son, we simply need to accept that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, then come to Jesus as we are. Then, God will cleanse us, he will justify us, he will redeem us; he will make us his own.

John Newton, a former slave trader, wrote the hymn about this amazing grace. This hymn touches many hearts, because all are sinners like him. Let’s come to Jesus just as we are! Jesus will remove all our dirty sins and clothe us with his righteousness.

**II. God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement. (25-26)**

Look at verse 25a. “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.” Though our redemption comes freely by grace, it was very costly for God to accomplish. God had to sacrifice his one and only son Jesus Christ to pay the demand of sin. The “sacrifice of atonement” originated in the Old Testament (Lev 16:14). Sinful man could come to the Holy God only through the blood of a sacrifice. There is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood (Lev 17:11). It is because “It is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.” (Heb 9:22) The price of sin is lifeblood; nothing less.

However, the blood of animals was insufficient to be a fundamental solution (Heb 7:27-28). so, God presented Christ Jesus to be perfect and eternal sacrifice, the lamb of God. Only the blood of Jesus, the sinless Son of God, satisfies God’s righteousness. Heb 9:26 explains the power of Jesus’ sacrifice. “But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. ” Jesus’ blood has the power to cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death so that we may serve the living God (Heb 9:13-14). The blood of Jesus has the power to truly change us into new creations. The blood of Jesus has the power to wash away all our sins once for all. So, no matter how sinful we may be, the blood of Jesus cleanses us, we can be accepted in the presence of the holy God. Not only so, but we can also serve the living God. The blood of Jesus has the power to enable us to live as holy children of God every day.

God completed his work of redemption without compromising His own righteousness. Look at verses 26b-26 “He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 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.” Our God is righteous and holy. This righteous God is the ultimate foundation of all justice and righteousness. However, if God were to overlook or simply forget sin, there would be no justice or righteousness in the world; the wicked, the godless, the immoral would prosper, die in peace and enter eternal rest. God is holy; God is righteous. Not even a single sin can go unpunished. Since God punishes every sin without missing one, there will be absolute justice and righteousness.

At the same time, our God is love and mercy. He did not punish sinners as their sins were committed. Out of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, God has endured and embraced all sinners, waiting for the moment of Jesus’ crucifixion. Then at the cross, God punished sin to the full measures. God punished the sins of all people of all times who believe in him. In this way, he demonstrated his righteousness. No sin will remain unpunished. God’s righteousness is absolute.

Also, God demonstrated his righteousness by saving sinners without compromising his righteousness. Since Jesus paid for our sins, God freely justified sinners who believed in him. Whoever has faith in Jesus Christ will be justified. Whoever trusts in him and calls on his name will be redeemed from the slavery of sin, will be forgiven and will be saved. That is what the righteousness of God, revealed in the gospel of Jesus Chirst, truly means.

Therefore, this gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

**Third, There is only one God who will justify sinners by faith (27-31)**

 Asking rhetorical questions, Paul emphasized the gospel truth: we are saved by faith alone. The first question: Where, then, is boasting? (27-28). Boasting is excluded by the law of faith. The law of faith is that we are saved by faith alone. Because salvation comes only by God’s grace through faith, not by our effort (27b), we cannot boast anything. The second question: Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? (29-30) God is the God of all sinners, Jews and Gentiles. There is only one God who will justify the circumcised (Jews) by faith and the uncircumcised (Gentiles) through that same faith (30). There is only one God who justifies sinners by faith. The third question: Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith (31)? When Paul emphasizes the theme of “by faith alone,” it seems that the law becomes useless. However, the principle of faith doesn’t nullify the law, rather, it upholds the law. It is because the law was completed by faith, not by works. Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Mt 5:17) by

shedding his blood on the cross as the perfect sacrifice. Furthermore, faith in Jesus enables us to keep the law through the Holy Spirit.

In this passage we have learned that God gives his righteousness to us through faith in Christ. Let’s accept his gracious gift by faith alone.