

# Romans 3:21-31

# THE CROSS

## BIBLE TALK DISCUSSION: 15 MAY

What insights, principles, or observations from this weekend's message did you find most helpful, eye-opening or troubling? Explain.

Read this passage (from the ESV bible) as a group and feel free to mark and highlight anything as you go along.



*<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—<sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:  
<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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.*

Justified by faith

*<sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> For we hold that one is justified*

*by faith apart from works of the law. <sup>29</sup> Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not*

*the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup> since God is one—who*

*will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. <sup>31</sup> Do*

*we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we*

*uphold the law.*

You'll find some definitions on page 49 that you might find helpful as you discuss Romans 3:21-31.

## GROWTH GROUP DISCUSSION

This passage brings the argument of Romans to a grand climax as he turns to the cross. It reminds us where we started in 1:16-17 'For in it (the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed'. It draws together the threads of 1:18-3:20 where the wrath of God is revealed against the ungodliness of the Gentile world and the self-righteousness of the Jewish world which leads to a charge against all humanity. Paul shows how the gospel, centered on Jesus death, is the solution for Jew, Gentile, and indeed for all of humanity. This passage is crucial for understanding the role of the cross in the gospel and where true righteousness is to be found.

**1.** In what ways do we seek to be righteous (or morally right) in the eyes of:

**a.** Our parents or spouse

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**b.** Our employer (or perhaps a teacher or lecturer if you're studying)

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**c.** Our society

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**2.** This passage begins with a 'but'. What is this passage contrasting to? Feel free to go back to review the last study/passage.

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Paul has argued how righteousness by obedience to the law is a dead end. However, the law and prophets point to the gospel of justification by faith. There are many instances in the Old Testament where God's salvation comes upon Israel, not for their inherent goodness, but because of their hope in God as their saviour. Chapter 4 will give us two examples (Abraham and David) of how faith and justification worked in the Old Testament. This leads to a key question of this part of Romans – Where then is true righteousness to be found?

**3.** Righteousness stands at the heart of this passage. It is mentioned four times. However, justification derives from the same word. It is the declaration of being righteous. Highlight or circle the instances where righteousness and justification appears in the passage. Whose righteousness is primarily on view?

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**4.** The concept of the 'righteousness of God' is a complex one that has several possibilities to its meaning. Some have suggested that is a righteousness that comes *from* God and given to sinners (this is how it is translated in the NIV church bibles). It could also be *a quality of* God – that God himself is righteous. Or alternatively, it could be *God's justifying activity of sinners* – how God declares sinners right. Looking at those options, which do you think the passage supports the best? Is there a difference between the use in v21, 22 compared to v25, 26?

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**5.** Tim Keller says, 'Faith is simply the attitude of coming to God with empty hands'. How does faith relate to the righteousness of God? How is this a contrast to the law?

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**6.** All humanity, both Jew and Gentile, are lumped into the same boat when it comes to sin and judgement, which we saw in the last study. Yet there is hope because we can be 'justified by grace as a gift' (v24). Write out what you think it means in your own words and discuss.

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# JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ROMANS 3:21-26

## GOD & HIS GRACE

### THE SOURCE OF OUR JUSTIFICATION

We are justified by God's grace, his unmerited favour toward us (3:24).



**JUSTIFICATION** = being legally declared right before God

### GOD'S REDEMPTION

= slavery language

Jesus has bought us out of slavery to sin and death with the ransom-price of his own blood (3:24).



## CHRIST & HIS CROSS

### THE BASIS OF OUR JUSTIFICATION

We are justified through the cross of Christ by the grace of God (3:24-25).



### GOD'S PROPITIATION

= temple language

Jesus is the perfect sacrifice who turns away the righteous wrath of God from us and our sin (3:25).



### GOD'S DEMONSTRATION

= law-court language

Jesus' death demonstrates the justice of God in passing over sins (3:25).



## FAITH NOT WORKS

### THE MEANS OF OUR JUSTIFICATION

We are justified by faith in the cross of Christ by the grace of God (3:22, 25-26).



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**7.** Refer to the diagram on the opposite page. There are several different ways to understand God’s work to justify us. Redemption, propitiation and demonstration are all examples of different biblical words used to describe Christ’s work on the cross. Using the definitions given in the diagram, explain the difference between redemption and propitiation as they relate to the cross. Alternatively, for the visual learners, draw a picture or diagram to show the differences!

**a.** Redemption

**b.** Propitiation

These verses take us right to the glorious heart of the gospel and shows why the cross is absolutely central. We are declared as righteous as a result of Christ’s blood. The righteousness of God describes His work to justify us with no input from us. This benefits us when received by faith, as we acknowledge our inability to bring anything to justify ourselves.

**8.** If our right standing with God has nothing to do with our performance. How might this change your view of yourself? How might it change your view of your sin?

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V25-26 Paul speaks of God passing over former sins – likely referring to those Old Testament people who had faith in God and were accepted on the basis of the future work of Christ (see Abraham in Chapter 4).

Following that, God is described as both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. God is both the just judge, who holds us accountable, and the justifier, who forgives and restores us.

**9.** How does that make you feel about God?

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The chapter ends with a call to humility because of justification by faith. This is a stark contrast to the boastful and judgemental attitudes of those under the law of Chapter 2.

**10.** Why must there be no place for boasting as a result of justification by faith?

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**11.** What might you be tempted to boast in as the grounds of your confidence or self-worth today? What encouragement have we seen to turn our hearts toward boasting in Christ alone?

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## **PRAYER**

This passage is one that should lead us to an outpouring of praise on God. We could do nothing to justify ourselves yet God, the just judge, has declared the sinner righteous because of what Jesus has done on the cross. Pray that this would humble us deeply, that it would bring relief from the sin that burdens us and that we would repent of our self-righteousness.



## DEFINITIONS



**righteousness** (v21, 22, 25, 26): the quality of being morally right and without sin. God declares righteous (ie. Justifies) those who trust in Jesus Christ.

**manifested** (v21): to reveal or make something known.

**justified/justification** (v24): the process by which God can declare a sinner to be righteous.

**redemption** (v24): the freedom from slavery – usually by payment. Sometimes described as rescue or deliverance.

**divine forbearance** (v25): the act of God ‘bearing’ with sins committed in the past by those of faith in the Old Testament (e.g. Abraham) until their payment at the cross.

**propitiation** (v25): the turning away of God’s wrath/anger against human sin. This is a slightly different term to ‘expiation’ – the removal of sin.