

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series two teachers will do Bible study from ROMANS 3:21-31.

In Romans 3:19-20, Paul concludes his teaching that no Gentile or Jew is righteous in God's eyes and that everyone stands condemned before God. He also concludes that keeping the law cannot attain righteousness. In Romans 3:21-31, Paul teaches how righteousness can be attained.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read Romans 3:21-31 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read Romans 3:21-31 for yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in Romans 3:21-31. "Which truth in this passage is important for you?" or "Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?" Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in Romans 3:21-26. Paul explains the nature, ground and purpose of justification. In verse 21-24, Paul explains *the nature of justification by faith*. Justification of believers is based on God's righteousness and not on human righteousness. Because it is a free and gracious gift of God, man cannot earn or buy it, but can only receive it by faith. In verse 24-25, Paul explains *the ground of justification by faith*. Justification was acquired at a very costly price. God gave Jesus Christ as a ransom price, which saves us from the slavery or bondage of sin. He gave us Jesus Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, which saves us from the wrath of God. In verse 26, Paul explains *the purpose of justification by faith*. The death of Jesus Christ proves that God is completely just in his character, because he did not leave sin unpunished.

(T) An important truth for me is in Romans 3:27-31. Paul explains the results of justification. In verse 27-31, Paul explains *the three important results of justification by faith*.

One. Justification by faith excludes all boasting by people.

Two. Justification by faith represents God in his true nature as the God of all people and as God who uses the same method of justification for all people.

Three. Justification by faith does not set aside God's moral law. Although people are not justified by the works of the law, they are not set free from the law. God's law as commandment that Christians must obey, is upheld, as Paul later teaches in Romans 7:7-13 and 13:8-10.

(S) **STEP 3. QUESTION**

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 3:21-31 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. "Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?" Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. (3:21). What is the meaning of the word "law" in Romans chapter 3?

(T) Paul teaches that the righteousness of God is established without the works of the law, but the law nevertheless testifies to this righteousness. Here is a clear example how easily Paul changes from one meaning of the law to another meaning of the law. The letter to the Romans cannot be understood without clearly distinguishing between the different meanings of the word "law" in this letter. In one sense, the law pronounces the opposite of God's justification, and in another sense it proclaims God's justification.

One. The law is God's just requirement or commandment. Because the God of the Bible is 100% holy and just, the law is God's holy and righteous requirement that all people must be 100% holy and righteous and that all sin must be 100% punished. This requirement is expressed in God's commandments, requirements and judgements in the whole Bible. These commandments demand complete and perfect obedience as the condition for justification and sanctification. God's law as God's just requirement or commandment is summarised in the Ten Commandments. Verse 21 says the same as verse 20. The works of the law *does not* and *will not* contribute in any way to the justification of any man,

simply because there is no one who *can* obey the law perfectly. The righteousness of God that *can* and *will* justify believers in Jesus Christ is a righteousness that is completely apart from the works of the law as God's commandment.

Two. The law is the Old Testament. The law as the whole of the Old Testament testifies to this righteousness of God apart from works of the law. For example, in Genesis 15:6, the Old Testament law says, "Abraham believed God and he credited it to him as righteousness."

Three. The law can also be a principle or system or method or order of things. It has this meaning in verse 27.

2nd Question. (3:21-24). What is the *nature* of justification or salvation?

(S) One. Justification is the righteousness of God, not the righteousness of man. Some people regard God's righteousness as righteousness that *comes from God*. Others, as righteousness that is *approved by God*. Others as righteousness that *avails with God* and can therefore justify man.

However, the context makes very clear that this righteousness is nothing less than *the nature of God and the possession of God!*

The righteousness of God is contrasted with the unrighteousness of all people. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." There is not a single human being who possesses God's glory, that is, God's holiness or righteousness or faithfulness or love. All human beings have lost their state of perfection, have lost God's glorious characteristics and consequently have lost God's approval (3:22-23).

The righteousness of God is also contrasted with human righteousness. Even the most perfect human righteousness produced by keeping the law is never adequate enough to satisfy God's righteous anger against the situation created by human sins, nor adequate enough to meet his absolute standard of perfection for human conduct. Therefore, *the righteousness of God stands in absolute contrast to both the unrighteousness and the righteousness of man.*

The righteousness of God is never produced by people, but is the possession of only God. God is the only Author of righteousness, the only Possessor of righteousness and the only Giver of righteousness. Therefore it is a righteousness of which God approves and a righteousness that avails with God.

Two. Justification is made known in the gospel. The Old Testament already testified to this righteousness of God. But now in this present time, this righteousness of God is made clear in the gospel and is still continuing to be made clear in the preaching of the gospel (perfect tense)(21).

Three. Justification is accepted by faith only. The righteousness of God is not a righteousness of man, and therefore, in order to attain this righteousness, man must *receive* it from God by faith. He cannot earn it or buy it from God. He can only receive it from God! He receives it by believing in Jesus Christ. The original Greek makes very clear that faith is *not* a kind of good work, which is *the ground or reason* why God justifies the believer. Faith is nothing more than *the instrument* by which a believer in Jesus Christ receives the righteousness of God.

The faith that justifies is also not a general kind of religious faith, but a very specific *faith in Jesus Christ*. The righteousness of God is received by faith only and is given to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ without any distinction of race, culture or degree of faith (3:22). There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. The way of salvation is the same for all people, because there is no difference as to the state of their spiritual and moral depravity and there is also no difference as to the means by which they are saved.

Four. Justification is a gracious free gift from God. This is the most important part of Paul's doctrine of justification. There is *nothing in human beings or done by human beings* that constrains God to act or compels him to justify human beings. As a matter of fact, everything human beings are and do compels God to judge and condemn them. The wonderful message of the gospel is that God's action is completely determined by *whom he himself is and what he himself does* in the exercise of his free and sovereign grace (3:24). However, the emphasis on free and sovereign grace does not exclude the medium through which this grace has come into operation. The Mediator of God's grace is Jesus Christ and his completed work of salvation on the cross.

3rd Question. (3:24-25). What is the *ground* of justification or salvation?

(T) The ground of justification or salvation is God's grace, expressed in Christ's death on the cross. God's grace is never *cheap grace*, distributed to people without a price. God's grace is *costly grace*, offered to people at the payment of the most costly price, namely, the life of his own son, Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross uniquely enhances the gracious character of God's act. God's love does not overrule God's righteousness, but rather fulfils the demands of God's righteousness. Thus, God may exercise his love and grace without setting aside his righteousness!

One. The ground of justification is the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. *Redemption* means “to ransom or liberate by the payment of a price.” Christ ransomed, that is, liberated us from the slavery or bondage to sin by paying the price of dying on the cross (Mk 10:45; Eph 1:7). Christ is not simply the One who procured redemption: He is the embodiment of redemption. He is the Redeemer. Whenever a person believes in him, that person is effectively redeemed, that is, liberated from the slavery or bondage to sin. Jesus Christ is the Mediator of redemption. God’s grace provided Jesus Christ as the ransom. *Justification by God’s grace* means that *justification is free* for man – it cost man absolutely nothing! In contrast, *justification by Christ’s redemption* means that *justification was costly for God* – it cost God the highest price!

Two. The ground of justification is the sacrifice of atonement of Jesus Christ. God’s grace also provided Jesus Christ as the sacrifice of atonement (propitiation). A “sacrifice of atonement” (propitiation) means that Jesus Christ was the One who satisfied or appeased God’s holy and righteous anger (indignation) against sin, turned God’s wrath aside and took away sins.

The term “by his blood” does not teach that there is some kind of magic power in the substance of blood, but always refers to Christ’s sacrifice of atonement by his death on the cross. Verse 25 is best translated as follows: “By the shedding of his blood, God presented Christ to be a sacrifice of atonement, which is effective through faith” (24-25). Verse 25 says that God “presented” Christ as a sacrifice of atonement. The meaning may be either “God planned, purposed or designed” Christ from all eternity to be the Saviour through his sacrifice of atonement (Eph 1:9,11) or “God displayed or set Christ forth publicly for himself” as the sacrifice of atonement. The intention is the same, namely: *God the Father is himself the One who provided redemption.* It is a perversion of truth to say that God had to be won over by Christ’s intervention. *On the cross, God’s justice and God’s mercy are completely reconciled!* Because God is holy and righteous, he must punish sin, and because God is loving and merciful, he himself provided the means of punishing sin and saving people.

4th Question. (3:26). What is the purpose of justification or salvation?

(S) The purpose of justification is to demonstrate God’s complete righteousness. It is to show God’s perfect character. In verse 26, the righteousness of God means God’s inherent justice, his inherent righteousness that cannot be violated by anything and must be vindicated in the justification of sinners.

One. Justification before the death of Jesus Christ. Before Christ’s death, during the Old Testament times, people could have argued that God was unjust, because according to Acts 14:16, he let all nations go their own way, and according to Acts 17:30, he overlooked their ignorance of God and God’s will. In the Old Testament period, God showed his forbearance by passing by the sins that occurred. He did not punish people according to what their wickedness and ignorance deserved. And he justified believers in him without punishing their sins (Genesis 15:6; Psalm 32:1-2). However, God’s *forbearance* during the Old Testament period may not be interpreted as *indifference* to sin. God’s *suspension of punishment* may not be interpreted as *forgiveness of sin.*

Two. Justification after the death of Jesus Christ. By finally providing a ransom and a sacrifice of atonement in Jesus Christ, God punished the sins of the people who were justified during the Old Testament period and the sins of all people who are justified during the New Testament period! After the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, no one can ever say that God is unjust! The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is the ground of justification in both the Old Testament period and the New Testament period. The death of Jesus Christ proves that God was completely just when he left the sins that were committed by believers before the coming of Christ unpunished. It also proves that God is still completely just when he leaves the sins that are committed by believers in the present time unpunished! The merits of the ransom price and the sacrifice of atonement, which Jesus Christ brought on the cross, reaches *backwards* to the creation and *forwards* throughout all the ages to the second coming! The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the centre of God’s dealings in the history of this world! When God justifies believers, they are not justified on account of their own character or good works. They are justified on account of what God in Christ did! They are also not justified by an act of God, in which he sovereignly sets the demands of the law aside. They are justified by the completed work of salvation of Christ in their place, in which the righteous requirement of God has been perfectly met! Only this way of justification or salvation reconciles the justice and righteousness of God with the exhibition of his love and mercy to the sinner.

5th Question. (3:27-31). What are the result of justification or salvation?

(T) One. Justification by faith humbles man by excluding all ground of boasting (27-28). “The law of faith” excludes all human boasting. Here the word “law” means “principle, system, method or order of things”. Two things are contrasted, each excluding the other. The system in which the law is the method of justification is excluded by the system in which faith is the method of justification. Justification by works is grounded on what a person is and does, while justification by faith is grounded on what God is and does! Works of the law congratulates itself, while faith in

Jesus Christ renounces itself. Works of the law boasts about its own accomplishments, while faith glories in the accomplished work of salvation of Jesus Christ. The law or principle of faith therefore totally excludes the law or principle of works as a means of justification. Therefore verse 28 says that a person is justified “by faith alone.”

Two. Justification by faith represents God in his true character as the God of all the people on earth (29-30).

Deuteronomy 6:4 proves that the first thing the Jews believed was that there is only one God. If there is only one God, then he must be the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles. And if he is the God of all people, then there is only one way in which he justifies people. That way is by faith. He will justify the Jews *by faith* and the Gentiles *through faith*. The future tense does not refer to the final judgement day, but to every case of justification to be accomplished now and in the future. There is no difference between the words “by faith” and “through faith”, because Paul uses these terms indiscriminately to signify the same thing.

Three. Justification by faith confirms the law (31). In verse 31 the word “the law” refers to “God’s law of commandment that demands obedience of all people”. In chapter 3 verse 20, Paul said, “no human being will be justified by the works of the law”. In verse 21 he said, “God’s righteousness has been manifested apart from the law”. In verse 27 he said, “the principle or method of the gospel is faith and not the works of the law.” And in verse 28 he said, “a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”

The irresistible question is then, “What about the law? Has the law, in the sense of God’s commandments which demands obedience of all people, been made useless?” Paul emphatically answers “No!”. Paul anticipated this question and answers it without further elaboration. Christians do not nullify the law by faith. They rather uphold the law. Paul’s complete argument about the function of the law follows later in Romans 7:7-13 and 13:8-10.

(S) STEP 4 and 5. APPLY and PRAY

After brainstorming with one another and recording a list of *possible applications*, consider which possible application God wants you to turn into a *personal application*. Then take turns to pray about one truth that God has taught you in Romans 1:1-17. Romans 3:24 says that we are justified freely by God’s grace. I want to remember, that on the one hand, I am justified free from any cost that I can pay, but on the other hand, that I am justified at a very high price that God has paid. He gave his one and only Son as a ransom price and a sacrifice of atonement in my place.

(T) Romans 3:27 says that the method of faith in Christ excludes the method of works by man and therefore no one can boast in any way of his own accomplishments. 1 Corinthians 1:30-31 says that I may boast, but only in Christ, who became my righteousness, holiness and redemption! I want to boast only in Christ and his salvation work for me.

(S) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. Use “the five steps” Bible study method to prepare Romans 4:1-16.

Second. See the workbooks “Go and preach God’s Kingdom” and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to “Discipleship training on the air”.