

## 37. The Book of Romans 3:21-26

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### *Paul's Epistle to the Romans*

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

(1-10-24)

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Tonight, we will end the first major section of the Book of Romans—and begin the next major section.

The first section we've entitled, '**Condemnation**' which runs from 1:18-3:20—so, let's review briefly.

In Romans 1:18-3:20, Paul has put the human race on trial. He wants to prove that the whole world apart from Christ is guilty before God—the hedonist, the moralist, and the religionist—everyone! (verse 9)

And then in verses 19-20 Paul moves from the role of prosecuting *attorney* and steps behind the bench and assumes the role of *judge* to give the verdict—'guilty as charged!'

#### **Romans 3:19 (NKJV)**

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Paul isn't usurping God's role as Judge—he is simply acting as a representative of God in *His* court repeating the verdict God has already rendered with regard to fallen man.

#### **Romans 3:20 (NKJV)**

<sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

There are those Christians who believe the Law is bad—and they put it down.

The law is from God and is good (Romans 7:12)—but only when it is used *properly* (for the purpose for which God gave it)—to produce conviction of sin and ultimately to lead a person to Jesus for salvation—but is worthless as a means of making a person righteous in God's eyes.

There are many people who believe that—all they need is a '*little religion*' a '*little law*' to be saved and go to heaven—because they're basically good.

#### **Galatians 3:10 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup> For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "*Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.*"

### James 2:10–11 (NKJV)

<sup>10</sup> For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. <sup>11</sup> For He who said, “*Do not commit adultery*,” also said, “*Do not murder*.” Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

People think that if they violate the law in small ways, it’s okay as long as they don’t commit the big sins—or that doing good works erases the wrong (Jews do the same today with Yom Kippur).

➔ Listen for court illustration

One author rightly points out—

*“Man is not only convicted by God’s law, but he is also condemned by that law. He is found “Guilty!” One reason God gave the law was that “all the world may become guilty before God” (verse 19). We do not have to wait until we die to find out where we shall stand in the judgment—we can know right now. Paul is repeating what Jesus said in John 3:18 that we are “condemned already.” The verdict of God has already been rendered and the Great White Throne Judgment will simply be the sentencing phase of all that Paul has convicted mankind of as set forth in Romans 1–3. Truly, man’s condition is helpless.”*

Now, at this point we enter into the second major section in the Book of Romans.

- The first section fell under the heading of **‘Condemnation’**—whereas this new section deals with **‘Justification’** and runs from 3:21-5:21. The first section dealt with man’s sin—this new section presents God’s salvation.
- The first section began with, **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...” (Romans 1:18)**
- This new section begins with, **“But now the righteousness of God apart from the Law is revealed...” (Romans 3:21)**
- The first section told man he is *lost*—but in this new section God (thru the Apostle Paul) is telling us how to be saved.

In verses 19 and 20 of Romans Chapter 3 the verdict is pronounced—**‘Guilty as Charged!’** As such, Paul has left us speechless and defenseless—but instead of being cast immediately into hell, which is what we deserve, he says—**“But now...” (verse 21)**

He takes us down to the absolute pit of hopelessness, helplessness and despair and just about the time that things look their blackest—suddenly, he breaks in with good news—**“But now!”**

Ephesians 2:1-5 (paraphrase)—

*“Once you were dead, doomed forever because of your many sins. You used to live just like the rest of the world, full of sin, obeying Satan...all of us used to live that way, following the passions and desires of our evil fallen nature. We were born with this evil nature, and we were under God’s wrath just like everyone else—But God! Who is so rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us, that even while we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead, for it is by His grace that you have been saved.”*

It’s like the little girl who fell into a well and her father rescued her.

Afterward they interviewed her about the ordeal by asking, ‘*What did you do?*’  
To which she responded, “*I just reached up as far as I could, and my father did the rest.*”

Likewise, Paul has just gotten done telling us that sin had caused us to fall into a deep pit from which there was no human way out—but if we will lift our hands to God in faith—He will do the rest—reach down and save us!

It is said of Donald Grey Barnhouse that as he was marking his Bible, he came to this section in Romans and he drew a heart around it because he said, *“This is the heart of the New Testament.”* (Romans 3:21-31)

John Bunyan, the author of ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ attributes his conversion to these very verses in Romans.

The passage before us (verses 21-31) deals with the righteousness of God. When we talk about righteousness as it relates to man it simply means the state of being ‘*right with God.*’

Paul is now going to be dealing with how a person can be right with God (the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ).

Job asked the same question many years ago—*“But how can a man be righteous before God?”* (Job 9:2)—well, Paul is going to tell us how. In the process, he lists 10 characteristics of God’s righteousness.

### 1. **God’s righteousness is—*apart from the law* (verse 21a)**

First of all, the “**righteousness of God**” literally means—the ‘*righteousness that comes from God.*’ In other words, the only kind of righteousness that will get a person into heaven doesn’t come from man (religion)—it resides in God (a part of His divine nature) and comes to us from God.

This righteousness is “**apart from the law.**”

Paul uses the Greek word *nomos* here for ‘**law**’ —a word that he uses in different ways in his writings, so you have to be careful how you interpret it.

- a) Law = *legalism*
- b) Law = *ceremonial law*
- c) Law = *moral law*
- d) Law = *Old Testament Scriptures*
- e) Law = *principle* (general law consisting of 613 commandments)

So, he uses the word in different ways—and in fact he uses it in 2 ways in this one verse (verse 21)—and from the context it’s obvious that Paul has in mind—‘*legalism.*’

Let me paraphrase—

**“But the righteousness that comes from God is apart from legalism (religion).”**

Or, in other words, if you want to be right with God and go to heaven you can’t achieve that thru human effort, good deeds, or acts of piety.

True righteousness is apart from all of that (keeping sacraments, lighting candles, praying the rosary, fasting, going to church, giving to the poor etc.). The righteousness of God is not earned—it’s imputed (placed to a person’s account by faith).

**Romans 3:28 (NKJV)**

<sup>28</sup> Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

**Romans 4:5–6 (NKJV)**

<sup>5</sup> But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, <sup>6</sup> just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.

**Galatians 2:16 (NKJV)**

<sup>16</sup> knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

These and many other verses in the New Testament say the same thing—that salvation comes through faith apart from works. Yet, the biggest lie the devil has ever fed the human race—is the lie that you get to heaven by being *good* (moral and religious) or in other words, that heaven is a *reward* for deserving people—which is the lie of religion.

As we have said numerous times—there are really only two ‘*religions*’ in the world—the religion of human achievement, and the religion of divine accomplishment. Every religion and religious system in the world apart from Christianity falls under the category of human achievement—in other words, what we do for God to earn His favor (and if they believe in the God of the Bible)—to earn a place in heaven.

Only Christianity (which is not a religion but a relationship) falls under the category of divine accomplishment—in other words—what God has done for us through His Son, Jesus Christ to offer us a place in heaven as a gift.

The world says—“Human achievement is how you’re made righteous in the eyes of God.”

But God says, “My righteousness is apart from all of that—My righteousness is based on ‘divine accomplishment’—it’s based on what I have done for you, not on what you do for Me.”

**Isaiah 64:6a (NKJV)**

<sup>6</sup> But we are all like an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags...

**Matthew 5:20 (NKJV)**

<sup>20</sup> For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

**John 3:13 (NKJV)**

<sup>13</sup> No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, *that is*, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

**2. God’s righteousness is—revealed and affirmed in the Old Testament (verse 21b)****Romans 3:21 (NKJV)**

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets [a euphemism for the Old Testament Scriptures]—

**Romans 1:1–2 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated to the gospel of God <sup>2</sup> which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

Look, the gospel isn't a New Testament truth—it goes all the way back to the Old Testament—for example:

**Genesis 3:15 (NKJV)**

<sup>15</sup> And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel." (The first gospel)

**Genesis 15:6 (NKJV)**

<sup>6</sup> And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

**Habakkuk 2:4b (NKJV)**

<sup>4</sup> "...But the just shall live by his faith.

**John 5:39–40 (NKJV)**

<sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. <sup>40</sup> But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.

Also, Genesis 22; Psalm 16; Psalm 22; Isa. 53.1-9 and so on. So once again, the gospel isn't a New Testament truth—it goes all the way back to the Old Testament.

There are Christians who believe there are 2 gospels—the Gospel of the Kingdom meant for Israel and the Gospel of Grace revealed by Jesus to Paul for the Gentiles.

They point to verses like Galatians 2—

**Galatians 2:6–10 (NKJV)**

<sup>6</sup> But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed *to be something* added nothing to me. <sup>7</sup> But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as *the gospel* for the circumcised *was* to Peter <sup>8</sup> (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), <sup>9</sup> and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup> *They desired* only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

One author explained it this way—

*"Are there two gospels, the gospel of the Kingdom and the gospel of grace?  
In short, no. There is only one gospel. But there are different aspects that are emphasized depending on when the message is given.*

*Matthew 4:23 has the first mention of 'gospel' in the New Testament. William MacDonald in the Believers Bible Commentary writes well on this stating: 'While there is only one gospel, there are different features of the gospel in different times. For instance, there is a different emphasis between the gospel of the kingdom and the gospel of the grace of God. The gospel of the kingdom says, "Repent and receive the Messiah; then you will enter His kingdom when it is set up on earth." The gospel of grace says, "Repent and receive Christ; then you will be taken up to meet Him and to be with Him forever." Fundamentally, they are the same gospel—salvation by grace*

*through faith—but they show that there are different administrations of the gospel according to God's dispensational purposes.'*

*Is the gospel of the circumcised and uncircumcised (Galatians 2:7) different?*

*No. Please be clear on this. There is not one gospel for the circumcised (Jews) and another for the uncircumcised (Gentiles)...This whole passage is NOT speaking of different gospels but simply who, among the Apostles, was to go to whom. James, Peter and John recognized the grace and position that God had given to Paul and agreed that he should go to the Gentiles while they concentrated on the Jews. They didn't have a different gospel to tell. They simply went to different people groups to proclaim the one (and only) gospel."*

So, people in the Old Testament got saved the same way that people in the New Testament get saved—by grace thru faith.

Barnhouse—

*"The men of the Old Testament were saved by believing God's Word about the substitutionary sacrifice which was slain on the altar. It was a picture of the death of Christ the Savior, and God counted their faith, no matter how uninformed it might have been, for the righteousness which they did not have in themselves. On down into the future, to the end of time, God will save men still on the basis of faith in the grace manifested when Christ gave His life for us on the cross."*

Someone has said that "People in the Old Testament were saved on 'credit' until Jesus came and died on the cross to pay theirs and our debt saying from the cross, 'paid in full.'"

### **3. God's righteousness is—received thru faith in Jesus Christ (verse 22a)**

#### **Romans 1:17 (NKJV)**

<sup>17</sup> For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "*The just shall live by faith.*"

#### **Romans 4:13 (NKJV)**

<sup>13</sup> For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

#### **Romans 5:1 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Spurgeon—

*"Faith is believing that Christ is who He said He is, that He will do what He has promised He will do, and then expecting Him to do it."*

➤ Define true and false faith for a person professing faith in Jesus:

#### **John 2:23–25 (NKJV)**

<sup>23</sup> Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all *men*, <sup>25</sup> and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

#### **John 8:30–31 (NKJV)**

<sup>30</sup> As He spoke these words, many believed in Him. <sup>31</sup> Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.

#### 1 John 2:19 (NKJV)

<sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

#### 1 John 2:3–6 (NKJV)

<sup>3</sup> Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. <sup>4</sup> He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. <sup>5</sup> But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. <sup>6</sup> He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

#### 4. **God’s righteousness is—available to all who will believe (verses 22b-23)**

#### Romans 3:21–23 (NKJV)

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, **to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;** <sup>23</sup> **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**

**“For there is no difference...”**

One pastor and author said this—

*“That is the wonderful point of Romans 3:22. **All those who believe** will be saved, because in God’s sight **there is no distinction**. Just as everyone apart from Christ is equally sinful and rejected by God, everyone who is in Christ is equally righteous and accepted by Him. Even the “foremost of all” sinners, as Paul called himself (1 Tim. 1:15), was not too wicked to be saved.”*

**“For all have sinned...”**

The word ‘sin’ is a Greek word that literally means “to miss the mark.” It was an archery term for hitting the bullseye on a target. Here in Romans 3:23 Paul says that—“**all have sinned (all have missed the mark).**”

Of course, the next question is “What does the ‘mark’ or the bullseye represent?”

Well, we’re not left to guess because Paul goes on to tell us in Romans 3:23—“**for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**”

What is the “glory of God?” → [It’s perfection.](#)

➤ “Yes, but perfection with regard to what?”

The perfection that Paul is referring to in Romans 3:23—is perfectly keeping God’s righteous standards as set forth in His divine law.

In the Old Testament God’s law contained 613 commandments—to break anyone of them was to miss the mark (sin) and to be guilty before God. But let’s not deal with all 613, let’s just limit ourselves to the ten we are most familiar with—the Ten Commandments (not the 10 suggestions).

In that regard, being *good* in the eyes of God means hitting the ‘mark’ (sinless perfection) all day, every day!

It is keeping perfectly all the Ten Commandments of God your entire life without fail! These commandments are like the wooden boards that make up the hull of a ship—it doesn't matter if most of them are there—if only one is missing or broken that ship is going down!

The same is true for the person who tries to get to heaven by keeping the Ten Commandments.

➤ *"I keep most of them."*

It doesn't matter if they keep *most* of them—if any commandment is broken even once—that person is sunk (condemned)

James said—*"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point (break only one of God's commandments), he is guilty of violating them all."* (James 2:10)

This is why Paul calls the law a curse—it's because it makes salvation dependent upon a person keeping all of it without fail—in other words, the law demands moral perfection from a person to gain access into heaven.

**"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."**

(Listen for illustration of some people trying to jump across the Grand Canyon)

Yet when I ask people, *"If you were to die tonight would God let you into heaven?"*—they almost always tell me, *"Yes!"* When I ask them to explain why—they respond, *"Because I'm a good person. I know I'm not perfect (morally speaking), but I still think I'm good enough to get into heaven"* (they have bought into the devil's lie!).

Listen to what God's Word is saying—  
If you're *not* morally perfect  
you're *not good enough* to get into heaven!

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If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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