

Studies in Romans

No Exceptions and No Defence (3:19-20)

Context

- **1:1-17 Introduction**
 - 1:1-5 Paul's greeting and a summary of the gospel
 - 1:6-15 Paul's relationship with the Romans
 - 1:16-17 Paul's thesis: God's gospel is powerful to save all who believe
- **1:18-4:25 The problem and God's solution**
 - 1:18-3:20 The problem: God's wrath at our unrighteousness
 - 1:18-32 Mankind is facing God's wrath, both now and, ultimately, in the future, because we have all rebelled against Him
 - 2:1-3:20 There are no exceptions and no excuses; even the Jews are sinners who face God's wrath

Take note of Paul's conclusion in **3:19-20**...

*Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. **Romans 3:19 (ESV)***

*For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. **Romans 3:20 (ESV)***

Cranfield: "If the Jews, the people who might seem to have reason to regard themselves as an exception, are in fact no exception, then without doubt the entire human race lies under God's judgement."

So Paul's concluding verses expose the stark reality – the hopelessness of our plight. We have *nothing* to say in our defence.

Thomas Shreiner: "If the Jews, who had the privilege of being God's covenantal and elect people, could not keep the law, then it follows that no one, including the Gentiles, can." So every mouth is closed.

Unanswered questions:

- If everyone is rightly under God's condemnation, is there any hope for us?
- If God is completely just and faithful, how could he righteously save anyone?

But God... (3:21-31)

So how can God possibly fulfil his promises of saving a people; there seems to be no hope for anyone.

Note the word "but" – it's an important pivotal word. Look at a number of beautiful examples where this phrase is used in the Bible:

Genesis 8:1; Exodus 13:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Romans 5:8; Acts 13:30; 1 Corinthians 1:27; Ephesians 2:4; 2 Timothy 2:19;

Go back to **Romans 3**... Fortunately Romans does not end with **Romans 3:20**! If it did – we would be totally overcome with despair! But Paul has more to say.

“But now...!” What a great mercy it is that God intervenes to rescue us. Salvation comes through God’s gracious intervention. Man cannot save himself. He cannot cleanse himself from degradation. His mouth is shut; he has no answer to give to God (**3:19-20**). That’s a huge problem. An insurmountable problem.

But what is God’s solution?

So the argument from **v. 21** onwards unfolds like this: first Paul makes a statement and then he goes on to develop that statement (**vv. 22b and following**)

Outline:

- **1:1-17 Introduction**
- **1:18-4:25 The problem and God’s solution**
 - **3:21-4:25 God’s solution: justification by faith**
 - 3:21-26 God has revealed a way by which he justly makes people righteous through Jesus’ death if they have faith in Him
 - 3:27-4:25 Faith is what God has always wanted – it is the only means by which a person may inherit God’s promises
- **5:1-8:39 What it means to be justified by faith**

A righteous solution (vv. 21-26)

Having established the big problem, Paul now moves to answer the question: “How is the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel of Christ?”

Three things to note in a general way

What word is repeated over and over in vv. 21-26?

Note the connection with **1:17**.

1:17	...in the gospel	the righteousness of God	is revealed...
3:21	But now	the righteousness of God	has been made known

Now, if “the righteousness of God” is the theme in this paragraph, what does that mean for us?

The paragraph is firstly about God before it’s about us!

Secondly, **this righteousness of God was revealed publicly** – openly. What’s the point of that?

Thirdly, **all this comes entirely and only from Jesus Christ (vv. 22, 24, 25, 26)**.

The paragraph divides quite cleanly into four:

1. The witnesses (v. 21)

The saving righteousness of God is taught in the Old Testament and more clearly taught in the gospel.

Negatively: this is _____.

Positively: the law and the prophets bear witness to the righteousness of God that was to be clearly revealed in the good news of Jesus Christ.

See **John 5:46; 2 Cor. 1:20; Gal. 3:8.**

2. The recipients.

The saving righteousness of God comes only from Jesus Christ to whom?

One thinks of Luther's counsel to someone in this kind of distress: "Learn to know Christ...and say 'Lord Jesus Christ, you are my righteousness, I am your sin. You took on you what was mine; yet set on me what was yours. You became what you were not, that I might become what I was not.'"

And of course, there is another anxiety which may be the most destructive of all: doubt about the adequacy of one's faith. "Is my faith enough? Is it strong enough?" The faithfulness of Christ knocks this kind of doubt on its head. (Michael Eaton)

What is the reason that this salvation—this rescue—this deliverance through the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Christ—only comes to those who believe?

Note that because we have sinned we *lack* the glory of God.

3. The source.

The saving righteousness of God comes only from the death of Jesus Christ as our propitiation (see **vv. 24, 25a**).

*What happens to those who trust and believe in Christ? They are *righteoused*. They're declared righteous. They are justified.*

So right at the moment of faith—right at the moment of trusting in Christ's works and his faithfulness – God makes them right with Him. He declares here and now that he or she will be vindicated in the final Judgement. Don't confuse this with moral change. Don't confuse this with sanctification... Justification is an immediate, absolute change of legal status."

"Redemption" –

But how is this possible? Look at v. 25: "...through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith."

What is propitiation?

Note **v. 25** again. *Who was it that took the initiative?*

"...by his blood" – in other words, he gave up his life to redeem us.

"...received by faith" – again, "the just shall live by faith."

4. The proof.

This revealed righteousness of God proves that God is right to rescue guilty people (**vv. 25b, 26**).

The cross demonstrates—manifests—publicly proves—that God has always been right to rescue the guilty when they repent and trust in the promise of the Saviour. It proves that God is fair to forgive.

"...passing over" – *what does that remind you of?*

Verse 26: the problem is how can God be “righteous” if he is at the same time the one who declares righteous adulterers and murderers?

The propitiatory death of Jesus proves God is right to declare righteous all who are covered by that sacrifice. So, God is able to be just and the Justifier at the same time. He is fair to forgive all who are in Jesus. We see this because on the cross God Himself, in Jesus, substituted Himself for the sinner. And so the justice of God is satisfied and the mercy of God is complete.

The subject of this paragraph is really “God and His reputation.” So think:

- How much does it matter that God is fair?
- How much does it matter that God forgives?

We’ve focussed on the problem mankind faces for a few months. Let’s meditate on the majesty of God’s solution. Let’s lose ourselves in wonder and praise!

Unanswered questions:

- What does it mean to have faith?
- How can one man’s death deal with the sin of all people?

For further discussion

(Perhaps choose one or more to think about further or to discuss in a group)

- *Again: what is the central theme of this paragraph of Romans? How does Paul show this by saying it four times?*
- *Why is trust in Jesus the only way to be rescued (vv. 22, 23)?*
- *What does the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross prove about God (vv. 25b, 26)?*
- *Consider carefully how much it matters for the universe that God is fair.*