

# 5. The righteousness of God

## Romans 3:21-31

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### Introduction

Have you ever been looking for a product but no matter where you looked no one seemed to stock it anymore? Perhaps the product was discontinued or temporarily out of stock. What things have you looked for but were unable to find?

In our last study we heard the apostle Paul declare that that there was no one righteous. If God were to do a worldwide search to find “righteousness” he would not find it. Jew and Gentile alike are under sin. The whole world is a righteous free zone. This lack of righteousness is the greatest problem that our world has ever faced. God is holding us all accountable for this. His wrath is not only being revealed against all unrighteousness and wickedness people now, but we are storing up his wrath for the Day of Judgment.

This was the conclusion that Paul’s argument reached in the last study. It was very gloomy indeed. In this study we see the sun shining in the mist of all the gloom. There is a ray of hope that shines for the righteousness of God has been revealed and it’s available to all people. Please read 3:21-31 to discover more about it.

## A righteousness from God

The apostle describes the righteousness that has now been made known. He refers to it four times in this passage. Please read 3:21-26 to understand more of how from where this righteousness has come.

1. What righteousness has now been made known and what is its relationship to the law (21,22)?

Redemption

To redeem something or someone was to pay a price for something to be released or for a person to be freed.

2. Who is this righteousness available to and how do they receive it (22,23)?

3. To be justified is to be declared to be righteous before God. How do people who are under sin and unrighteous get to be declared to be righteous (24,25)?

4. What sins committed beforehand had God left unpunished (c/f Heb 10:1-4)?

5. How can God declare sinners to be righteous and at the same time be just? How is the redemption that comes through Jesus also a demonstration of God's justice (25-26)?

#### Sacrifice of Atonement

The word translated as “sacrifice of atonement” in the NIV is actually the word that is used in the Greek version of the Old Testament to refer to the ‘mercy seat’, which was the cover over the ark in the tabernacle. The only other place that this word is used in the NT is Hebrews 9:5 where it is obviously referring to this ‘mercy seat’. In the OT the ‘mercy seat’ was the place where God took care of his people sins. On the Day of Atonement, the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on ‘this mercy seat’ (c/f Lev 16) to make atonement for the sins of the people. This sacrifice was made in so that the people might be forgiven, and so God's wrath might be turned aside.

#### Think about it

No one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law. It is not something we earn, but this righteousness is something that we receive as a gift. What words might use to describe this gift? List as many ways to describe this gift as you can.

How was this payment for sin made for all people (c/f 1 Peter 3:18, Hebrews 10:10-14, 1 John 1:7; 2:2)?

To what extent is Christ death for all people? Does everyone get saved?

## No more boasting

Having described this righteousness that is now available to all who believe in Christ, the apostle now explains what this means for those who have such faith. Please read 27 to 31.

6. What has this righteousness excluded and why?

7. What differences does being a Jew or a Gentile make to being righteous before God?

8. Does faith make a mockery of the Law? Does it make the Law irrelevant?

### Think about it

Jesus said that he was the way, the truth and the life. Why is there only one way to be saved?

By preaching faith in Jesus how does Paul continue to uphold the law?

The Law obviously isn't irrelevant for Christians. How then do you think Christians ought to use the Law today?

## Conclusion

In chapter 4 Paul will show us how God has always justified people by faith. He reveals this from the Law itself. The Law upholds this truth and by preaching salvation as gift that comes by faith Paul was in fact upholding the Law.

### Think about it

Salvation has always been a gift that God graciously gives people. Why do you think people have trouble accepting salvation as a gift from God?

Write a prayer that you might give to someone who wanted to become a Christian. Think carefully about what things would need to be said in this prayer.

## Going Further

1. Continue to learn the memory verse from last week. If you learnt Romans 3:10-12 you might also try to learn the shorter verse as well. If you learnt Romans 3:23 why not try to learn the longer verse.

2. Read Romans 4 in preparation for the next study. In this chapter Paul recounts the story of Abraham and how it was through faith that God declared him to be righteous.

3. Please also read the story of Abraham's call in Genesis 12:1-9 and the promises God made to him then and a little later in Genesis 15:1-21. What did the Lord promise Abraham (or Abram as he was known then) in these chapters and how did Abraham respond?