

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Romans: God's Power for Salvation

TITLE: *Finally, Good News!*

SCRIPTURE: Romans 3:21-26

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The book of Romans is a masterfully written exposition of the gospel of God. Without a doubt, it is the foundation of authentic Christianity and the most articulate, systematic understanding of our faith found in the Bible. Countless lives have been changed by the truth found in this ancient letter, and it continues to change lives today. Interestingly enough, Romans was written to Christians. So, while the good news found in Romans can certainly bring people to faith in Jesus, the actual focus is on how the gospel helps Christians think rightly about God, life, faith, and Christian community. If you want to grow to know God more personal and intimate way, this letter is for you!

There is a serious problem in the church in Rome—a problem that was present in many churches in those days. God, in Christ, has broken down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, but what God can tear down, people can rebuild. Each group thought they were better than/superior to the other. So right off the bat, Paul levels the playing field (1:18-3:20; 2:12; 3:9-11; 3:20). Paul wants both groups in the church to see that as God sees it, all people stand before the judgment bench of God's justice condemned and deserving of death. Put simply, he wants both groups to see that they all need the Gospel in the same way for the same reason.

What is the Gospel? The Gospel is the Good News that God has made a way for all people to be declared right with himself through faith in Jesus. The Gospel is not good religious teaching—not even, the good teaching of Jesus. No, the Gospel is *news—an announcement—a special alert*. God has made a way for everyone who believes in Jesus to live in and enjoy a personal relationship with God. Romans 3:21-26 is the clearest explanation of that simple definition of the Gospel in all the Bible—an explanation with rich theological significance so we will have to dig underneath words like righteousness, faith, justification, propitiation, redemption, and atonement along the way.

Romans 3:21-22 — “Righteousness” is a word from a courtroom—it has to do with a person's legal standing before a judge. In Bible times, a righteous person is someone who lives in a “right” relationship with God and other people. The problem is none of us has lived rightly in our relationship with God. We are all in trouble with God because of our sin. But now, the Good News is that there's a righteousness that comes to us apart from religion—apart from the law. God's righteousness is given to all who believe—to all who place their faith in Jesus and what he's done for us.

Romans 3:22-24 — Let's unpack the word “justification.” (1) The word “righteous” and “justify” are essentially the same word—both come from the Greek root word *dikaïos*. (2) *Dikaïos* means “right standing” when measured against the law. If a judge declares you guilty, you have to pay for the wrong you've done. If the judge declares you innocent, you are justified—you are in right standing with the court—no payment is required. When God declares you righteous/justified he's declaring you to have right standing with him. But “justification” does not mean that God treats us just-as-if we'd never sinned. No, God declares us righteous while we were yet sinners when we place our faith in Jesus. Justification is not the same as forgiveness. Forgiveness is the negative—the removal of the penalty of sin. Justification

is the positive—the bestowal of a right standing with God. (3) Verse 23 says that we are “justified by his grace as a *gift*.” Meaning, “*without cause*.” We can do nothing to earn or deserve right standing with God. (4) God freely gives us his righteousness because of the “redemption that is in Christ Jesus. “Redemption” is a word from the market place. To “redeem” is to purchase—to pay the price for something or someone. Jesus shed his blood to redeem us—to pay the price for the penalty of our sins—and Paul presses this idea of the necessity of Jesus shedding his blood for our sins even further...

Romans 3:25-26 — “Propitiation” means “sacrifice of atonement.” Propitiation refers to the act by which God’s wrath is appeased through an acceptable sacrifice. Propitiation points back to the OT Day of Atonement when the High Priest sprinkled blood on the mercy seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant. This animal sacrifice covered/atoned sin for one year and then had to be repeated. In this way God let sins go unpunished until Christ came (Heb 10:14). The question is—*Why did Jesus have to die? Why can’t God just forgive us by saying “I forgive you” and that be the end of it?* The reason is because God is just—God is a God of pure justice. For God to forgive sin apart from his justice would be for God to say that moral evil doesn’t matter. For justice to be trust justice, somebody has to pay for wrongs that are done. And in the death of Jesus, God shows himself to be both “just and the justifier” of all who believe in Jesus. *What does that mean?* It means that because Jesus died to pay the penalty of our sins, God’s justice is satisfied and God’s mercy and grace are magnified.

- In his justice, God _____ payment for our sins.
- In his mercy, God _____ payment for sins for a while.
- In his grace, God _____ the payment through Jesus’s death on the cross.

In this way, God has made a way for all people to be declared right with himself through faith in Jesus.

For Discussion —

1. How does the Gospel address the problem between Jews and Gentiles in the church in Rome?
2. Where do you see tensions between Christ-followers today that may be similar to the tensions between Jews and Gentiles in Paul’s day? How are Paul’s words helpful in uniting people?
3. How does 1:18-3:20 (and the last four sermons) begin to address the problem in the church?
4. Talk about the context of the much-quoted Romans 3:23. How does the truth of v.23 fit with Paul’s whole train of thought?
5. What is the relationship between justification and forgiveness? Are they the same thing?
6. Someone take a stab at explaining the term “propitiation” against the backdrop of the Day of Atonement.
7. How did God pass over or let sins go unpunished prior to Jesus’ coming?
8. Why did Jesus have to die? Why can’t God just say “I forgive you” and that be the end of it?
9. What does it mean that God has shown himself to be both just and justifier of all who believe in Jesus?
10. What was your biggest “take-away” from this message?

