

Exegesis of Romans 3:21-26

Historical background:

Paul wrote the book of Romans in approximately 56 C.E. to the assembly of believers in Rome. The book of Romans was written in approximately 56 C.E. by Paul to the assembly of believers in Rome. Rome had a large Jewish population estimated between forty to fifty thousand which had provided a fertile bed for Christian congregations to grow. According to deSilva (*Introduction to the New Testament*, 599), “Christianity in Rome thus probably had a strong Jewish character and a deep rootedness both in the Old Testament (LXX) traditions and the practice of Jewish customs. In 49 C.E., emperor Claudius expelled some segment of the Jewish population from Rome because of a disturbance in that community over a person whom Suetonius (2nd century pagan Roman historian) calls “Chrestus”. *Chrestus* was probably mistaken by Suetonius for *Christos*, the Greek word for Messiah. This led to the expulsion of many of the Jewish-Christians, including their leadership (like Aquila and Priscilla in Acts 18:2). After Claudius’s death in 54 C.E. the exile was rescinded but the effect was that the Roman assembly had continued to grow and evolve for five years without strong Jewish leadership, probably in a direction that some Jewish Christians would oppose (deSilva, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 599-601).

Translation:

But now, independent from law¹, God’s righteousness has been made known², being attested³ by the Law and the Prophets⁴; God’s righteousness *revealed* through Yeshua Messiah’s faithfulness, into all the ones who are believing⁵ (because⁶ there is no distinction, “for all have sinned and are needing⁷ the glorious honor of God”⁸), being freely justified by His grace⁹

¹ Many translations translate this as “apart from the law”, however there is no definite article attached to νόμου, thus may not be speaking about the Torah, but to the concept of law, which was above everyone, including the lawmakers in Roman society (Muller, 27).

² πεφανέρωται is in the perfect tense, indicating completed action whose effects are felt on the present. It shares the same root as ἐπιφάνεια, which is used in reference to Yeshua advent on earth.

³ μαρτυρουμένη is a participle in the present passive form, indicating continuous action. This indicates a continued need to use the Hebrew Bible in understanding the work of Messiah.

⁴ This is a well-known idiom referring to the TaNaKh, the Hebrew Bible (cf. Matt 5:17)

⁵ πιστεύοντας is a participle in the present active form, indicating continuous action. This indicates a continued, active belief, not “once saved, always saved”.

⁶ γάρ used to express cause, clarification, or inference (BDAG)

⁷ ἥμαρτον (“sinned”) is in the aorist tense used to identify undefined action usually in the past and is linked with ὑστεροῦνται which is in the present passive form, indicating continuous “lacking” of and thus “needing” God’s honor (both fall within the semantic range of ὑστερέω according to BDAG).

⁸ cf. Ecclesiastes 7:20

⁹ χάριτι (“grace” or “favor”) was always said to be a free gift by a patron towards his client, but it was understood that an honorable client would reciprocate with loyalty, services, and honoring his patron in order to continue the cycle of grace (deSilva, 94-119).

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through the redemption¹⁰ in Messiah Yeshua; whom God set in place¹¹ *to function like* the mercy seat¹² through faithfulness in his “blood¹³”, which is proof of his righteousness, after having previously¹⁴ cancelled the debt¹⁵ of sin in God’s enduring patience, in order to prove His righteousness in the present time, in order that He be righteous and *He is* justifying the one by Yeshua’s faithfulness¹⁶.

¹⁰ Paul’s usage of the noun ἀπολυτρόσεως is used here as a “gift of grace” but is not fully explained in its theological importance. Rom 8:23 equates redemption to adoption (as sons of God), Eph 1:7 equates redemption to the forgiveness of our παραπτώματων (“trespasses”) which is translated most frequently in the Septuagint (LXX) from the Hebrew מַעַל, פְּשָׁע, and עֲוֹן. All three of these terms are frequently used of grieves and rebellious sins. Of particular note, there was no sacrifice set forth for פְּשָׁע, only the scape-goat ritual of Lev 16 could provide purgation for such a serious offense. Lastly Eph 1:14 speaks of redemption as the becoming of “God’s own people” and to the achieving of the praise of His honor. Thus, the richness of this term “redemption” is the free gift of forgiveness of grievous sins which results in the adoption into God’s family and thus ascribes honor to us.

¹¹ προέθετο is used in the LXX in Exod 40:4, 21, Lev 24:8 referring to the placing of the showbread in its proper location in the sanctuary. Since the direct object of this verb is the “mercy seat”, Paul is most likely using this verb to allude to this practice.

¹² ἱλαστήριον is used exclusively in the Old Testament and in the only other occurrence in the New Testament (Heb 9:5) in reference to the “mercy seat”, i.e. the lid of the ark of the covenant which served as the throne of God on earth (Isa 37:16) and for purging the uncleanness effects that Israel’s sins had upon the house of God on Yom Kippur (Lev 16:16).

¹³ Paul is playing upon the word αἵματι (“blood”), literally referring to his faithfulness to endure an unjust murder upon the cross while alluding to the cultic usage of blood as a purification agent of the sanctuary, which was required as part of the process of forgiveness of sins.

¹⁴ προγεγονότων is in the perfect active participle, indicating a completed action whose effects are felt in the present.

¹⁵ πάρεσιν is used only here in the New Testament, but is from the same root as ἄφεσις and contextually fits its usage. The LXX uses ἄφεσις to most frequently translate the Hebrew terms רִוּחַ, יוֹבֵל, and פְּקוּדָה which are all events referring to the release of debt and restoration back to one’s original inheritance; an establishment of social justice. The *yovel* or “jubilee” was declared on Yom Kippur (Lev 25:9-10), the same day that Israel was forgiven for their grievous and rebellious sins (Lev 16:21).

¹⁶ Most major translation translate as “faith in Jesus”. However the Greek text here is ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ. ἐκ means “from, out of, by”. πίστεως and Ἰησοῦ are both in the genitive indicating possession. In order for this to be translated “faith in Jesus”, Ἰησοῦ would have to be in the dative form.

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References:

David Arthur deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 94–119.

David Arthur deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 600.

Roland Muller, *Honor & Shame: Unlocking the Door* ((Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corporation, 2000), 27.

William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

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Critique of presentation

I presented this as a teaching/sermon to my local congregation on the Sabbath. We are a non-denominational that enjoys in depth studies with a heavy emphasis on learning the original Hebraic faith that Yeshua lived and taught with little regard for any later church doctrines. A typical sermon lasts between 2 to 4 hours for us. The audience is typically very critical of the Greek text as they recognize that historical evidence points to Yeshua and his disciples primarily speaking the Semitic languages of Hebrew and/or Aramaic. After discussing the historical background of the text and showing evidence of the preferred usage of the Septuagint over the Hebrew text for Jews outside the land of Judea, I stated that we can be certain that a letter written to an assembly in Rome would have been originally written in Greek to which the audience wholly agreed.

Building upon that, we discussed the root word of justification and its connection to righteousness as well as its Old Testament Hebrew usage. We went through several different passages in the New Testament including Acts 15 to show that there was a big issue with the ruling of the Sanhedrin with regards to what was required to convert (and hence be "justified") and the Jerusalem council's rejection of the conversion practices instituted by the Pharisees of the house of Shammai.

Next we read over my translation and carefully discussed each of the footnotes. I believe that the translation I produced is much closer to the original intent of Paul. Since Leviticus has been an area of intense study for me, I discussed the usage of blood manipulation in the temple system and how misunderstanding of the function of blood has lead to translations that are not true to the text. This was well received as I have taught frequently in the past about the true function of the animal sacrifices and the blood manipulation.

Finally, we discussed the implications to our understanding of Romans and to the work of Messiah that this translation has. I have previously done several teachings based on deSilva's book on honor and patronage and so when we put this passage in the perspective of an honor and shame based culture instead of forcing Western culture into the text, the audience was able to easily grasp the reason why God would need to publicly display His righteousness in order to restore His honor and our honor.

Overall, I felt that I was able to translate the text well. Even though I had to rely on Logos software to identify several of the words along with their conjugation, I felt that I have been adequately prepared to be able to discuss the nuances of the text once I recognize the root word and its particular conjugation in the text. With adequate preparation, I was able to intelligently present my translation and defend my choices in that translation.