

JUDGES & ROMANS: RUINED TO RIGHTEOUS

Lesson 6: Righteous by Faith

Key Verse: ...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...~ Romans 3.22-23

Elevators are the most common method of rising from the ground floor of a building to any other floor (kudos to all who take the stairs instead!) Typically, a light turns on and/or a bell-like sound “dings” when you press the button to go “up”. But what if you press the button and a light doesn’t flicker on and a bell fails to sing “ding”? How do you know that an elevator will come to retrieve you? How will you get to your desired floor, especially if it is the twenty-first floor?!?! Does this noiseless, light-less elevator even know that you exist and where to take you? Fortunately, God doesn’t use an elevator to get us to our final destination! Rather, *He* has provided solid evidence through **faith** in Jesus as our Savior to assure us that He has given us what we need to get to our eternal final destination. God’s **righteous** character is given to His people through legal deliverance of death for our sins, or **justification**. Thus, God’s righteous character and His justification are both the elevator light and bell that assure all His people of their eternal destination WITH Him! (Thanks be to God, *alone!*)

Hallelujah! What a Savior! God Almighty, we bow in awe and honor and praise and worship for what YOU have done for so sinful a people. As we study your servant's writing, help us understand these foundational truths. Give us the willingness to wrestle, think, pray, and toss and turn until we understand within our innermost being the depth of Your Love. Here YOU have given us life! Empower us through Your Spirit to embrace what YOU have given us through Your Son, Jesus: salvation, truth, and Your presence now and forevermore. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Romans 3.1-31: Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? **2** Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

3 What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? **4** By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, “That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.”

5 But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) **6** By no means! For then how could God judge the world? **7** But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? **8** And why not do evil that good may come?—as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

9 What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, **10** as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; **11** no one understands; no one seeks for God. **12** All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” **13** “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” **14** “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” **15** “Their feet are swift to shed blood; **16** in their paths are ruin and misery, **17** and the way of peace they have not known.” **18** “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

19 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. **20** For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— **22** the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25** whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. **26** It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. **28** For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, **30** since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. **31** Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Diamonds: Romans 3 is an audacious exposé of God’s power: God’s power through the Law to silence every mouth in fear

before Him (3.19); His power to acquit (declare “not guilty”) His people despite their sins using His own Son’s blood (justification, 3.23-26); His power to confidently secure His people to Him in faith (3.26, 30), His power to rightly judge His sin-stained people as righteous before Him (3.25b-26). Paul’s explanation of God’s power defined him as a liberal within his own Jewish community. His explanation of Christ Jesus as Messiah, God’s Son, made him worthy of death according to his own Jewish community. While we read Paul’s liberal theology in his mind-blowing explanation of God’s power from comfortable spaces and with familiarity, when Paul first said these things, he was accused of radicalizing Gentiles while simultaneously overthrowing the Jewish conservative movement.

1. What do you find controversial within Romans 3? What in Romans 3 pricks at your conscience or highlights something in your understanding of God that runs contrary to what you want to believe about God and/or Jesus?

Paul began this mind-bending thought process at the beginning of his letter when he pronounced that God’s power is summed up as “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1.16). In Romans 3, we too drop our jaws in response to Paul’s revealing the work God has done for all the godless, the religious hypocrites, the fools, and the barbarians (sinners like us!). Paul’s question and answer format reveals his own personal struggle in dissecting and de-programming religion from a cultural and political “faith” into faith whose power source is eternal and transcends earth’s domain, saving people from the realm of death to eternal life with God. Paul’s example teaches us that there is more danger in avoiding hard questions about God than in pondering, meditating and pursuing God to answer questions we have about Him, faith, Jesus, and whatever else we know we don’t understand about God!

2. Join Paul in asking, and answering, the hard questions! Using an additional Bible translation, “The Message”, complete Paul’s Q&A in Romans 3 by filling in the blanks:

Paul’s Question (The Message)	Paul’s Answer
V 1 So what difference does it make who is a Jew and who isn’t, who has been trained in God’s ways and who hasn’t?	V 2
V 3 So, what if, in the course of doing that [writing/caring for the Holy Scriptures], some of those Jews abandoned their post?...Do you think their faithlessness cancels out His faithfulness?	V 3-4
V 5 But if our wrongdoing only underlines and confirms God’s ‘rightdoing’, shouldn’t we be commended for helping out? Since our lies don’t make a dent in His truth, isn’t it wrong of God to back us to the wall and hold us to our word?	V 6-8
V 9 So where does that put us? Do we Jews get a better break than the others?	V 9-20
V 27 So where does that leave our proud Jewish insider claims and counterclaims?	V 27-28
V 29 And where does that leave our proud Jewish claim of having a corner on God?	V 29-30

V 31 But by shifting our focus from what we do to what God does, don't we cancel out all our careful keeping of the rules and ways God commanded?	V 31

3. How has asking and answering the same hard questions as Paul through this exercise strengthen your belief in God? Which answer reshaped or debugged your prior understanding about God into absolute truth?

4. Consider God's decisions and behavior towards His people's persistent faithlessness in Judges. How do you see the book of Judges illustrating any of the truth Paul teaches us about God here in Romans? How does this increase your faith?

Deity: Righteous~ (Romans 3.21-26) God is righteous, or in a permanent "state of being just or morally pure"¹. Jesus' obedience to God's law and His sinless character prove God as righteous and prove Jesus as the "Lamb of God" who alone "takes away the sin of the world" (John 1.29). Jesus' righteousness is imputed, or credited/attributed, by God to His people through their union with Christ (Matthew 3.15; Galatians 3.27).² Just as our sins were imputed to Jesus on the cross (He was sinless yet was credited with our sin), God imputes His righteousness to us (we are sinful yet credited as morally pure!) Hallelujah! *What a Savior!*

Even when imputed we are not granted perfection, rather this imputed righteousness is the legal basis for our justification. Our sins are pardoned but we are not perfect, nor perfected. Our need for confession before God remains. Being declared legally righteous does not set aside our need for forgiveness of our sins. As Paul explains, we remain in this "body of death" even as our mind serves God's law through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Romans 7.22-25).

5. Paul references three time periods of unrighteousness resolved by God through Jesus' blood sacrifice (or propitiation): the past (V 25b), the present (V 26), and the future (V 26). From Romans 3.21-26, how do you see Paul proving his main idea from Romans 1.16, that God's power is summed up as "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes"? How is the power of God revealed in His ability to make His people righteous from past, present, and future sins?

Doctrine: Justification~ (Romans 3.24-26) "Justification is a legal, or forensic, declaration of righteousness, not an actual impartation or infusion of righteousness. It describes what God *declares* about the believer, not what He *does to change* the believer. In fact, justification itself effects no actual change whatsoever in the sinner's nature or character. It is an

¹ MacArthur & Mayhue, p. 937

² MacArthur & Mayhue, p. 617

instantaneous change of one's status before God, not a gradual transformation that takes place within the one who is justified."³

As Dr. Stott explains, "To justify is to declare or pronounce righteous, not to make righteous...to justify does signify to make righteous, but that 'righteous' does not mean 'virtuous', but 'right', 'clear', 'acquitted' in God's court."⁴

Justification is established by God through the Law of Moses, or the Levitical Law. Through the blood sacrifices necessary to approach God in Leviticus 1-15, we learn of God's acquittal process. Through the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), the once-a-year sacrifices and rituals that allow the high priest to enter the presence of God, we learn of God's judgment and His ability to make His sin-stained people clean. The required rituals, festivals, and "legislation for the priesthood" remind us of God's holiness and His desire to be with His people detailed in Leviticus 17-27.⁵ Through Christ's perfect blood, Christ's willful taking upon Himself God's judgment for our sin, and Christ's sinless life, His righteous living, God's people are justified before God. Hallelujah! *What a Savior!*

6. Paul explains that God is both just and the justifier in Romans 3.26. These are two unique roles of God. God is just as the Judge of sin AND He has the authority to render an acquittal to His people as justifier of His people. How does God render an acquittal of people who are guilty (Romans 3.26)? What does this teach you about both God's wrath (Lesson 4) and His Love?

Doctrine: Faith~ (Romans 3.28) Faith means "trust". "Biblical faith is the resting, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation (John 3.16-21). More than simply a mental agreement of historical facts, genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the gospel (1 John 4.13-16), followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life (John 1.10-13). Biblical faith is not blind faith, for it rests on the historical life, death, and resurrection of Christ."⁶

"Faith comprises the essence of our hope for the future (Hebrews 11.1). In simple terms, this means that we trust God for the future based on our faith in what He has accomplished in the past...The only solid evidence we have for our own future is drawn from the promises of God. Here faith offers evidence for things unseen. We trust God for tomorrow...Faith includes believing *in* God. Yet that kind of faith is not particularly praiseworthy (James 2.19). To believe in the existence of God merely qualifies us to be demons. It is one thing to believe *in* God; it is another thing to believe God. To believe God, to trust Him for our very life, is the essence of our Christian faith."⁷

In Romans 3.27, Paul turns the law on its head by introducing the truth of the "law of faith". The law of faith is founded in God's power to forgive sin through His Son's sacrifice. It reveals God's power to rightly judge our sins yet declare His people as righteous before Him – acquitted rather than convicted. Our faith is given to us by God because we are legally acquitted from our sins. The result of this legal acquittal is the imputation of His righteousness on sinful people. Thus, faith, or belief in His work alone for our righteous standing before Him, originates and is secured eternally by Him. We do not choose faith, rather He chose us to have faith in His work on our behalf. Should we believe that we are the reason we have faith, we are boasting in self-righteousness (Romans 3.27-31).

7. You have one decision to make: trust in the law of faith or the law of works. Who will save you from your sin's just punishment of death: God and His work on your behalf through Jesus, or faith in your own works to save you from the death you deserve (for your sins)? How do you know your choice is the right choice?

³ MacArthur & Mayhue, p. 612

⁴ Keller, pp. 96-97

⁵ Morales, pp. 29-30

⁶ The Gospel Project, *The 99 Essential Doctrines: #68 Faith*, Lifeway Christian Resources (2018)

⁷ Sproul, R.C., *Luke: An Expository Commentary* (Sandford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2020 by R.C. Sproul Trust) p. 192

Your Scripture-Soaked Prayer:

Lecture Outline:

Aim: Christ's righteousness is the only remedy for sin's ruin.

- I. Divine Diagnosis: Ruined (Romans 3.1-20) **T1:** A believer's proper pride is in God and His justice.
 - a. What is your response to God's divine diagnosis of the universal ruin of mankind?
 - b. Who or what are you taking pride in? Is your pride a ruined pride in worldly privileges and possessions or a righteous pride in God and His justice?
 - c. How do you or could you express your pride in His holy character and His perfect justice?
- II. Divine Declaration: Righteous (Romans 3.21-31) **T2:** A believer's proper pride is in the ONLY One Who pleases God the Father: Jesus Christ.
 - a. In what ways do you show the world you are proud Jesus Christ is Your Savior?
 - b. When the eyes of the world watch how you live, how does it demonstrate the righteousness Christ died to give you?

Keller, Timothy, *Romans 1-7 For You* (Charlotte, NC: the good book company, 2014) pp. 65-92

MacArthur, J. & Mayhue, R., *Biblical Doctrine, A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2017)

Moo, Douglas J., *The Letter to the Romans: The NIV Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: 2018) pp. 186-277

Morales, L. Michael, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015)

Stott, John R.W., *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press: 2020) pp. 81-108