

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 2-14-10 PM  
 “FINALLY, THE GOOD NEWS”  
 ROMANS 3:21-23  
 #18 in Series, “Verse by Verse through Romans”

We have come to a new section in the book of Romans. After an introduction in 1:1-17 we entered a lengthy section that was difficult but very necessary. Paul, like a prosecuting attorney has divided all mankind into three groups. The three groups are pagan Gentiles who have never heard God’s Word and worship idols and even creeping things. The second group is the moral Gentiles. They were the Gentiles who had high standards of morality in their behavior. Then there was the third group, the Jews. The bottom line is that all three groups which together included all mankind were guilty before God, without excuse, and justly condemned with no hope of coming up with a remedy on their own. Why so much time on these depressing and dark verses? It is because no man can become a Christian by depending on his own righteousness. There must be a sense of hopelessness in the flesh to ever be reconciled with the God that created us in His image to glorify Him. **A proud, self-righteous person cannot be saved.** Let’s hear the good news that goes through the rest of the book.

I could camp out a month on those two beautiful words, “But now”. Those words are like the sun breaking through on a cloudy, dreary day. The Apostle has shown with airtight logic that all are guilty and there is no ray of light, no flicker of hope, and no prospect of deliverance, “but now”. Let’s look at those two simple words. The word “but” is a word of contrast, an adversative. The key concept in 1:18-3:20 has been the unrighteousness of man and now the theme turns to the fact that a way has been man for man to have the very righteousness of God. Oh so often that little word “but” introduces good news. Let me give you just a couple of examples. By the time we get to Genesis 6, mankind had been overtaken and consumed by sin. God could have justly wiped humanity off the face of the earth. Was this the end of the human race? Then we read **Genesis 6:8 (NKJV)** “**But** Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” In Ephesians 2:1-3 we read of the horrible condition of mankind apart from Christ. We were dead in trespasses and sin, we walked according to the ways of this world and the prince of the power of the air (Satan), we were ruled by the desires of our flesh, and we were corrupt down to our very core – our nature. Ah, but listen to the next two verses – **Ephesians 2:4-5 (NKJV)** “**But** God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)”. Let’s look for a moment at the little word “now”. When man depended on the law, there was no true righteousness, **but now** (contrast) there is a righteous that comes through faith. That word “now” is not only used as a contrast; it is also used in the sense that “NOW something new has happened”. That something new is that God the Son became flesh and suffered the wrath that our sin deserved and has made it possible for us to have His righteousness imputed to our account.

A key word in this passage and indeed in the entire book of Romans is the word “righteousness”. In its noun and verb forms, it is used more than 60 times in Romans. As we saw last week, we have no righteousness in and of ourselves. To be righteous means that we have right standing with God or that we are accepted by God because His standard has been met. In this text and indeed in this whole section we are going to see how we can be righteous and thus accepted by God because His standards have been met. Job asked a question that has troubled mankind since Genesis 3. **Job 9:2b (NKJV)** “But how can a man be righteous before God?” This section of Romans gives the answer Job longed to have answered. Let’s take a closer look at righteousness.

### I. Righteousness Is Apart from the Law (V21a)

To understand what this verse is saying, we need to understand the meaning of the word “law” in the Scripture. The word means different things in different contexts (just as it does in English). Sometimes law refers to the whole Old Testament – the entire written word of God at any point in time before the

New Testament was written. Sometimes law refers to the first five books of the Bible. It is called “The law of Moses” because he was the instrument God used to write the first five books of the Bible that contain the moral, civil, and ceremonial law. Sometimes the law refers just to the moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments. Other times (I believe this is how the law is used in this passage) law is simply a sense of legalism where man tries to merit God’s acceptance, tries to become righteous, by his own human efforts. The context tells you which use of the word law is referred to in any one text. In verse 21, Paul is referring to man’s works to earn righteousness or right standing before God. The law was never, under any covenant or dispensation or however a person divides history, a means of righteousness. Since sin came into the world in Genesis 3, man has been counted righteous before God by faith and not by works (law). We’ll examine that more closely in the next point.

The phrase “the righteousness of God” is translated “righteousness from God” in the NIV. I believe that both are correct. The righteousness that saves is God the Son’s righteousness, and also the righteousness that saves is supplied by God (“from God”) because verse 10 has told us that no man has any righteousness of his own. Paul said this same thing of himself in different words in **Philippians 3:9 (NKJV)** “and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith”. This is the gospel! The righteousness that we could never attain through keeping the law, through good works, God has given to us in Christ! Law righteousness won’t pass the test. God gives His assessment of it in **Isaiah 64:6 (NIV)** “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” Dr. Donald Barnhouse summarizes the work of the law: “At the point we have reached in our studies, the law has spoken. The unchangeable conditions have been set forth. The law has announced the just sentence of death and having spoken stands silent before the sinner who is now silenced forever. The law has no warrant to do anything for the sinner. The law cannot relieve his fears. The law cannot allay his grief. The law cannot pay his debts. The law has its horrible business to attend to. The law can do nothing but thunder: ‘Thou shalt not sin’ and, ‘The wages of sin is death’” [Donald Barnhouse, “Romans Volume II” Page 31]. Ah, “But now”! The cross of Christ has given hope where there was no hope.

## II. Righteousness Is Built on Revelation (V21b)

This righteousness from God apart from the law is not something that has just popped up unannounced. It was not a divine afterthought. It was foretold long before the cross happened in time. The phrase “the Law and the Prophets” was an often used phrase that included the whole Old Testament. The foundation for the gospel that we now have fully revealed is the Old Testament Scriptures. Even back in Genesis 3 we have a foreshadowing of the righteousness that God provides when God Himself killed an innocent animal and used the skin to cover Adam and Eve’s shame. Their fig leaf coverings picture man’s attempts at self-righteousness. God gave them something that pictured the sacrifice of an innocent one. Abraham saw this gospel in veiled and shadowy form when he prepared to sacrifice His son and God provided a substitute, a ram. The Law of Moses, especially the ceremonial law with its sacrificial system, foretold the gospel. An innocent animal was slain to cover the sins of those who offered it in faith. The sacrificial system was never meant to be a meaningless ritual to stay God’s judgment; it was to be offered in faith as a confession of sin and a dependence on God to cover their sin. Each sacrifice for sin pictured the sacrifice of THE Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who did not just cover sin, but took it away. We see this gospel, this righteousness from God revealed in the Psalms. Paul was referring to Psalm 32:1-2 when he wrote in **Romans 4:6 (NKJV)** “just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works”. This righteousness from God, or of God is sprinkled all through the Psalms: **Psalms 31:1 (NKJV)** “In You, O Lord, I put my trust; let me never be ashamed; deliver me in Your righteousness.” **Psalms 51:14 (NKJV)** “Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, the God of my salvation, *and* my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.” **Psalms 119:40 (NKJV)** Behold, I long for Your precepts; revive me in Your righteousness.” The prophets prophesied of this provision for our unrighteousness over and over. The gospel is nowhere more clearly expounded than in Isaiah 53. In

this wonderful chapter, we see the substitute, the One who was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, and by whose stripes we are healed (made righteous). **Isaiah 45:24a (NKJV)** “He shall say, ‘Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength’”. God speaks in **Isaiah 46:12-13a (NKJV)** <sup>12</sup> “Listen to Me, you stubborn-hearted, who *are* far from righteousness: <sup>13</sup> I bring My righteousness near, it shall not be far off; My salvation shall not linger.” Salvation has always been by faith. **Hebrews 11:6a (NKJV)** “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*...” The difference in the Old Testament and in the book of Romans is that the Old Testament Saints had a faith that looked to the future based on the promise of God of a Savior who would come and now we have a faith that looks to the past at a Savior who in fact came and made a way for all who would repent and believe to have a righteousness from God.

### III. Righteousness Is Obtained through Faith (V22)

This righteousness of God and from God comes to us not by our works, but through the instrument of faith. I am going to say something that may sound “picky” but it is not; it is very important. Technically, we are not saved **BY** faith; we are saved **THROUGH** faith. We are saved **BY** Jesus Christ – because He shed His blood and gave His body. It is not faith that saves us. That is the view of many in our culture, but it is not the view of the Bible. Some have faith in their good works, in the demands of Islam, in the teachings of Buddhism, or faith in the weird teachings of Scientology. The world says, “It doesn’t really matter what you believe as long as you have chosen to believe something that is right for you.” Faith is simply the instrument, the means that connects us to Christ and His cross. If you are not careful, faith becomes a work and we are told of salvation in **Ephesians 2:9 (NKJV)** “not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Faith links us to Christ who saves us. Through faith in Christ alone we who have no righteousness are given the very righteousness of God in Christ. What is this faith that links us to Christ for salvation? We have gone over this many times, but I don’t think we can go over it too many times. This faith that results in our being made righteous has three elements. The three elements of saving faith are first, a ***knowledge of the truth***, second, ***assent to the truth***, and third, ***trust in the truth***. Without that third part, what we have is not Biblical faith. Let me give you an excellent quote from Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: “We can put it in this way: the man who has faith is the man who is no longer looking at himself, and no longer looking to himself. He no longer looks at anything he once was. He does not look at what he is now. He does not look at what he hopes to be as the result of his own efforts. He looks entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ, and His finished work, and he rests on that alone” [Martyn Lloyd-Jones, “Romans”, Page 45]. In the days of the Protestant Reformation, many feared that when the Reformers said that a person is saved through faith alone that it included a cavalier view of faith as just mental assent to certain truths with no changed life and a continuing life of wickedness. Martin Luther addressed those concerns and said that it was *fides viva*, a living faith, a vital faith, a faith that was beating with a heart that was pulsating after God. A. W. Tozier describes this faith that Paul proclaims like this: “The faith of Paul and Luther was a revolutionizing thing. It upset the whole life of the individual and made him into another person altogether. It laid hold on the life and brought it unto obedience to Christ. It took up its cross and followed along after Jesus with no intention of going back. It said good-bye to its old friends as certainly as Elijah when he stepped into the fiery chariot and went away in the whirlwind. It had a finality about it. It snapped shut on a man’s heart like a trap; it captured the man and made him from that moment forward a happy love-servant of his Lord” [A. W. Tozier quoted in John MacArthur, Romans Commentary, Page 205]. That is an excellent description of what happens when a person savingly believes on Jesus Christ.

Notice that last phrase, “to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference...” This righteousness that comes through Christ – the righteousness of God, is first to all. That means that it is to all people groups, to all language groups, to all nations. In other words, this is not just for Jews. Secondly, notice that it is on all who believe. This righteousness of God that is in Christ is on all who believe. When we are in Christ, there are several pictures in the Scripture of what happens. Later in the book of Romans we will see that picture from accounting that His righteousness has been ***imputed*** to our account. We were bankrupt in righteousness, but Christ filled our account with His perfect righteousness. Another picture

(the one referred to here) is that we put on His righteousness like a garment (on all). We see that picture in our hymns. Zinzendorf wrote:

*Jesus, Thy blood and **righteousness**  
My beauty are, my glorious **dress**.  
Mid flaming worlds in these arrayed'  
With joy shall I lift up my head.*

- Zinzendorf

*When He shall come with trumpet sound,  
O may I then in Him be found,  
**Dressed in His righteousness alone,**  
Faultless to stand before the throne*

- Edward Mote

That same picture is used in **Psalms 132:9 (NKJV)** “Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let Your saints shout for joy.” This righteousness of God is to all people groups and on all as Christ took our sins on Himself and pours His righteousness on us.

#### IV. Righteousness Is Needed by All (V23)

When you translate this verse literally according to the tenses, it says, “All sinned at a point in time in the past and right now they are coming short of the glory of God.” This is referring back to Adam’s sin in Genesis 3. We were in Adam when he sinned in the garden and thus that original sin and its consequences have come upon “all”. The same truth is presented in more detail in **Romans 5:12 (NKJV)** “Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned”. Again, the tense indicates something that happened in the past at a point in time. One of the consequences of our being in Adam when he sinned is that we have inherited a sin nature that pulls every descendent of Adam toward trying to be his own God (which is the definition of sin). All mankind has sinned in Adam, and all mankind is continually falling short of God’s glory. The word translated “fall short” can mean to have a lack or to miss. Here is what this is saying. God’s standard is His own glory. If you would ever be right with God, accepted by God, then you must measure up to God’s glory. This is all about God’s standard. God’s standard is not more good than bad; it is not that one is better than average; it is that we measure up to the glory of God. Our holiness is equal to His; our purity is equal to His. That’s what Jesus was saying in **Matthew 5:48 (NKJV)** “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Drop back to the last sentence in verse 32. The reason there is no difference in all mankind is because the standard is so high no one even gets close. The great Bible scholar Handley Moule (1841-1920) said, “The harlot, the liar, the murderer, are short of [the glory of God]; but so are you. Perhaps they stand at the bottom of a mine, and you on the crest of an alp; but you are as little able to touch the stars as they” [Quoted in John Stott, “Romans”, Page 109]. Ah, but there is one who does measure up to the glory of God. It is said of this One whose name is Jesus in **Hebrews 1:3a (NKJV)** “who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person...” He alone measured up to the standard of God’s glory; He alone has righteousness sufficient to stand before the judge of all the universe and measure up to the standard of the Glory of God. The gospel is that this One has taken our sins and has given us this perfect righteousness. In Christ we stand righteous before God; we stand accepted by God; we measure up in His righteousness.

The great hymn writer, Joseph Hart said it well:

*Come, ye weary, heavy laden,  
Bruised and broken by the fall;  
If you tarry till you’re better,  
You will never come at all:  
Not the righteous, not the righteous,  
Sinners Jesus came to call.*

*Let not conscience make you linger,  
Nor of fitness fondly dream;  
All the fitness He requireth  
Is to feel your need of Him:  
This He gives you; this he gives you;  
Tis the Spirit's rising beam.*

Hallelujah! (3281)