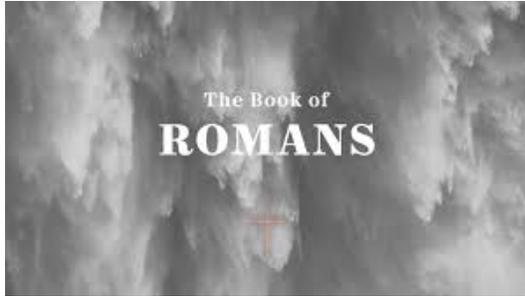


Righteousness Revealed
Romans 3:21-26
Romans #7
Weekend of March 14-15, 2020



Introduction

Listen--and this is not over-speak: This might be the most important passage in Romans. Some scholars say the most important in the whole Bible. **Martin Luther said that Romans 3:21–26 is “the chief point and the very central place of the Epistle and of the whole Bible.”**

Leon Morris says it “is possibly the most important single paragraph ever written.”

Additionally, this passage answers a couple of questions I get from people outside the faith a lot. The first question is, **“Why do you Christians make such a big deal about Jesus? I get the emphasis on God--we should be connected to the divine. But why is the life of a migrant Jewish rabbi who lived 2000 years ago essential to my knowing God today?”**

It leads to this second question: **What’s the cross got to do with actually knowing God? In fact, it seems primitive to say we can only know God is through a sacrifice.**

Which leads to the last question I get a lot: **Why do Christians say Jesus is the only way?** People think, “I’m glad Jesus works for you- -that he’s your missing piece, but why force that on everyone else? Why can’t we all just know God in our own way?”

Let me ask you: If you are a Christian, how do you respond when you are asked that? Other than slowly backing out of the room. Romans 3 is not just declaration that he is the only way, its explanation for why he is the only way. Let’s begin again in Romans 3:20...

Bible Study

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. Romans 3:20

Paul has spent nearly two chapters explaining why the law is an insufficient answer to the universal human problem of sin. And the law is basically what every religion puts forward. Every religion puts forward some list--some law--of things to do and say, “Do these things, and if you do them well enough, you will live.”

Religion works off this premise: “I obey, therefore I am accepted.” That presupposition is flawed in a couple of ways...

First, that you can’t change the substance of the heart simply by giving it laws, any more than you could change my palate by commanding me to eat certain things. To keep a pig from eating pig slop you’d have to put a barrier between them and it. And the moment you remove it, the pigs will go hog wild. But for the average human, you don’t have to command them not to eat it. It’s revolting. No law required.

God doesn't want spiritual pigs in heaven who only avoid the slop of sin because they are commanded. He wants people there who avoid sin because it's revolting to them and who do good because they delight in it.

Here is the second problem of the law and the focus of Paul in this paragraph... **Our sin leaves us legally guilty before God, and no amount of good works can repair the damage we've done.** Sin violates—destroys—God's glory in the universe, and overturns his justice—a justice that God tells us is the foundation of his creation. Look at what God says in Psalm 89...

Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you. Psalm 89:14 For creation to remain good, sustainable, justice has to be upheld.

In this paragraph, Paul explains that **no one can be justified in God's sight by the works of the law because knowledge of sin comes through the law. All the law can do is show us how messed up our hearts are.** Look at how he describes this in Romans 3...

...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... Romans 3:23

"Fall short" is a term you might use in archery. You miss the mark. The law shows us how far we miss the mark of what God wants. The law is a precious gift to us because without the law, we end up thinking we're not that bad.

Most of us define sin as "doing wrong," and we admit that we do that sometimes, but most of us assume what's in our hearts is pretty good. The law disabuses us of that.

Without the law, we are like the man who comes home from shooting archery and his friend says, "How'd you do?" And he responds, "I'm a pretty good archer. I hit the bullseye every single time." His friend says, "Wow, how did you manage that?" And the man says, "After I shot my arrows, I found my arrow out in the woods and then drew the circles around each arrow."

The law—particularly the 10 commandments—show us the real target and reveal just how far our hearts miss the mark. The law's purpose is to diagnose the heart but it never had the ability to repair the heart.

It is like the thermometer that measures the spiritual temperature of your heart; it's not a thermostat that can adjust that temperature. The law is like railroad tracks, pointing us toward the direction to go, but powerless to move the freight along the tracks.

Reading Romans 2 and 3, where Paul weaves in and out of the law, is supposed to give you the feeling of spiritually drowning. This is how we should feel regarding our sin after Romans 2–3. I am overwhelmed. Everywhere I turn I find more guilt and corruption. I look at my bad deeds and see they are full of anger and selfishness and rebellion. But then I look at my good deeds and see they are full of pride and competitiveness and jealousy. And we say with Paul, "Oh, wretched man that I am!" I am stained through and through with sin. Look at what Paul does next...

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. Romans 3:21-22

There are several really important words here that we have to define...

Justified- In the Roman Catholic Church, it was taught that justification was a process whereby God actually made you into a righteous person by infusing his righteousness into you by means of the 7 sacraments--baptism, the eucharist, confirmation, last rites etc.

Eventually, through observing the sacraments and confession and doing good, you would become a righteous enough person that God would declare you justified. And if by the time you died, you weren't righteous enough, you'd go to purgatory where your sin would be purged from you through fire and suffering. Purgatory. This, they taught, was the process of justification.

Luther pointed out that that's not what the word "justified" means and not how . Justification means a legal declaration that happens all at once. Justification is not a process whereby we become righteous. Justification is a pronouncement whereby we are declared righteous all at once.

Justification does not refer to that transformation of the heart (that is sanctification); Justification is a declaration of righteousness.

In justification, God's righteousness is not infused into us, it is imputed, credited to us. In the gospel, because Jesus' righteousness is credited-- imputed--to us, we are declared justified. Here is how Luther described it...

"All the prophets foresaw that on the cross Jesus became the greatest murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel, and blasphemer that there ever was. Our most merciful Father sent his only Son into the world and said to him: Jesus, you will become Peter the denier; you will become Paul that persecutor, blasphemer and cruel oppressor; you will become David that adulterer; you will become Adam, that sinner which did eat the apple in Paradise...

Christ Became...

**The husband who abused or neglected his family
The immoral women who wrecked someone's marriage
The drug addict
The teenaged girl lying to her Mom and Dad
The hypocrite living a double life
The proud, the selfish, the apathetic**

Bearing shame, and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood... so that when I lay my hand of faith on him, my sin becomes his and his righteousness becomes mine. It's not that I become righteous enough that he declares me righteous, but while I am still a sinner God declares me righteous because Christ's righteousness is given to me. That's the heart of the gospel. Here is a second word...

Redemption: Redeem means to buy something back; to bring it back from destruction; to restore it. People use the word redeem when they buy something back at a **pawn shop**. If you fall on really hard times economically, and have to hock your engagement ring, if you got enough money to go back to the pawn shop to buy it back, we'd call that 'redeeming' it.

Jesus paid the full price to buy us back—to redeem us—from condemnation to sin. He offered it to us freely, but it wasn't free; it cost him everything. Look at verse 25...

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished...Romans 3:25

That's how God feels about our sin: Sin destroys his creation and the glory and righteousness which are the foundation of that universe, and us. So he hates—is angry—at sin. There is a third word that comes out of this verse...

Sacrifice of Atonement or Propitiation in some translations: It's a word that means that God's wrath is assuaged; his claim against you is settled. 'Propitiation; (or, atoning sacrifice) means that God poured out on Jesus the righteous anger he had toward us.

When you love someone, you hate the things that destroy them. If you love the cancer patient, you hate the cancer that destroys them. That's how God feels about our sin: Sin destroys his creation and the glory and righteousness which are the foundation of that universe, and us. So he hates—is angry—at sin.

What does this last phrase mean in verse 25 when he says, **because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished...**

The sins of all the OT saints had never actually been atoned—paid for—they had only been 'passed over.' Not resolved, just passed over. Psalm 51: "The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin" These were only symbols of what Jesus would do. It took a perfect man living the life we were supposed to live and dying in our place to pay for them. The lamb was just a symbol. So, throughout the OT, God forgave Abraham's and David's sins on credit. Look at verse 26...

...he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Romans 3:26

At the cross, God was able to able to reconcile things that look like a contradiction..

God's justice was satisfied, his righteousness was upheld, and we were saved. For God to be righteous, sin had to be punished. The cross was not just Jesus showing us God's love. He was taking the place of our punishment. It's why we say he didn't just die for you, he died instead of you.

Application

Corrie ten Boom, the woman who survived a Nazi concentration camp, said: **"In the cross God hurled our sins in the deepest part of the sea and then put up a sign there saying, 'No fishing allowed.'"**

To not embrace full forgiveness is to insult him and to say that his bloody death was insufficient. To declare, "Not enough!"

What Jesus offers you, by the way, is more than forgiveness. It is justification. Forgiveness says, "You may go, you have been released from your penalty.' Justification

says, 'I want you to stay; you are welcome to all my love and presence.' Martin Luther said it this way... "Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that a man could stake his life on it a thousand times."