

Week Six: (Romans 3:21-31)

Key Verse

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” - Romans 3:23–24 (CSB)

Key Principles

- **The righteousness of God does not come to us by “the works of the law” (Romans 3:20).**
- **The righteousness of God comes upon us because of what Christ did on the cross.**
- **We can only receive this gift of righteousness by faith.**
- **Because God set it up this way, we get unity and righteousness, God gets all the glory, and his righteousness is on display in the story of our lives.**

Romans 3:1–20, our study passage for Week Five, brings a great conclusion to the larger argument Paul has been making in 1:18–3:20. Here, beginning in 3:21–31, we are finally going to see how Christ’s work on the cross solves the problem of humankind’s unrighteousness. This provides us with the answer to the question that hangs over this section of Romans—How can a righteous God save unrighteous sinners?

Remember, as we discussed in Week Two, righteousness can be defined as the extent to which one is morally right or virtuous. Romans 3:21–23 serves to summarize what Paul has said earlier in Romans. We cannot create our own righteousness, and doing works of the law cannot make us righteous, so we need a righteousness to come in some other form. This righteousness will come by faith. We’ll read in Romans 4 that God had been declaring sinners, like Abraham, righteous in his sight because of their faith. This righteousness-by-faith all happened before the law came into existence, since the law came through Moses, and Moses arrived centuries after Abraham. What does this prove? Righteousness comes to us from something outside of ourselves and something other than the law. God has graciously provided the righteousness humankind needed all along and it is gained only by faith in the work of Christ.

Romans 3:24–26 declares the glorious redemption that Christ brings us. God’s righteousness comes to us as a gift. But make no mistake, it is a costly gift. For a righteous God to declare us righteous, he had to deal with our sinfulness somehow. Think for just a moment of all of the unrighteousness and sin that has existed in your life—and then imagine what it would take to right every single one of those wrongs. God, being rich in mercy, sent his Son to be a sacrifice for our sins. Through his great love, he paid for it all, and not just your sins, but the sins of the entire world. By his blood, Jesus died for our sins and redeemed us from being under judgment. This is the essence of what is meant by the words “atoning sacrifice” or “propitiation” in verse 25—our sins have been removed and our guilt has been dealt with through the self-sacrifice of Jesus. The atoning sacrifice of God’s own Son is the only way a righteous God can be in relationship with unrighteous humankind. More than that, God’s plans revealed in Christ (3:24) are actually a demonstration of God’s righteousness (3:25–26). By punishing Christ for all sin, God shows his righteousness and can also now declare us righteous by faith.

Romans 3:27–31 explains that our only part in receiving this gift is to have faith in Christ’s finished work of redemption. Thus, faith becomes our way to enter into God’s righteousness, showing God’s brilliance and great character. We have to be saved by faith, and not by works, because we do not have the capability of righteousness in our actions. We have to be saved by faith in Jesus Christ, so that God can receive all the glory for this wonderful salvation. It is

through faith in Jesus Christ that Jews and Gentiles alike can be united equally through the same salvation, entering into one righteousness. Because God set it up this way, we get unity and righteousness, God gets all the glory, and his righteousness is on display in the story of our lives.

This week, as you wrestle with the text, look for moments to praise God for the redemption he's provided through the gift of righteousness. As you reread the text, answer questions, and pray through a psalm, ask the Lord to open your eyes to how profound this gift truly is and to let it take root deep in your heart.

Study Guide

1. How often is righteousness mentioned in Romans 3:21–31? What are the things that put righteousness on display according to this passage?
2. How do the first two words of Romans 3:21, “but now,” tie everything that has come before in Romans with what Paul is about to say in Romans 3:21–31?
3. How does Romans 3:21–31 say people can obtain righteousness from God? Why do we need it?
4. Paraphrase this passage in your own words. What themes are common in the responses of your small group?

Respond in Prayer

In Romans 1–3, Paul references specific psalms in order to grow our understanding of God's righteousness. Each week of this Study Guide will include a recommended psalm that helps us focus on the righteousness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected psalm and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this psalm on your own at home and together with your small group. And for those looking for more passages to pray, feel free to return to Romans 1–3 and pray through those passages as well.

This Week's Prayer Passage: Psalm 63

Read Psalm 63.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

Adoration: Praise God that he has reached down to his creatures to be in relationship with us. Praise God because of his steadfast love (63:3). Praise God that he is the ultimate answer to all our desires and hopes (63:1–2, 5–8).

Confession: Confess to God where we have tried to justify our existence in ways that are separate from him and his will for our lives. Confess to God where you have tried to be satisfied with something other than your relationship with him. Confess to God where you have praised created things when you should have been praising the Creator.

Thanksgiving: Thank God that he has saved us! Rejoice that God upholds us and exults us when we cling to him (63:8). Thank God for satisfying our very souls when we reach out to him (63:1, 3, 5).

Supplication: Ask God that we would see and understand how he is spiritually upholding us (63:8), even when we feel crushed by the enemy or worried about our lives. Ask God to remove the harmful idols that we try to cling to when we need to cling to him.