

## Romans – session # 9

We left off in chapter 3 with verse 21. Up until this point, Paul in his letter to the church in Rome has made the point, that Jews and Gentiles are both guilty before God, due to their sin. Even though God's chosen people, the Jews, should have an advantage before God as members of the covenant people, because they have the Law, their actions and by how they actually live, is no better than the Gentiles status before God. Both Jews and Gentiles do abominable things, repugnant to God Immoral relations plague both Jews and Gentiles.

So today, we begin in ch. 3:21, where Paul now begins to outline and spell out his great doctrine of Justification. His treatise on justification spans from 3:21 – 5:51. In these verses Paul turns from the problem, namely man's disobedience, to God's gift of salvation; justification through faith in Jesus Christ.

Man's dilemma before a holy God, is that we are sinners in God's eyes. Man cannot save himself, but God has acted via Jesus death on the cross and his resurrection to save him and make man right before God. In and of himself, man has not merit, our sin disqualifies us from being in a right relationship with God. Our only hope before a holy God is Jesus, who is our righteousness. (Read 3:21-31).

In vs. 21-26 of chapter 3, the person of Jesus and what he did for us is central to Paul's doctrine of justification. Some scholars state that vs.21-26 of chapter 3 of Romans are the most important paragraph ever written. In these verses, Paul shares the essence of the Gospel, the good news.

Vs. 21 – begins with two small but very important words: **"But Now"**. Paul is saying that at this moment in time, everything about man's status before God has changed, through the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. God declares all who believe in Jesus death and resurrection, to be righteous in His eyes. What we cannot do for ourselves, God has done for us. **"But now"**, Paul says a new day has dawned, which makes possible our becoming new creations. Everything is now different in our relationship and status with God. History will never be the same. Our righteousness does not come from within us, it comes as a free gift of grace from God. It is not based on our merits, no matter how hard we try, for as Paul says in vs 23 – "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God".

Up until this point in his letter to the Romans, Paul has meticulously laid the foundation leading up to his doctrine of justification. We are all guilty before God, we are all sinners in need of redemption.

Vs. 22 – Paul says -the law and the prophets pointed us to this day of our salvation and redemption. Paul claims he is not telling us something he came up with himself, it had been foretold. This is Revelation. Righteousness comes to us in one way and one way only, through faith in Jesus Christ.

So much for Universalism, which is so popular today in the times we live, and sadly especially in the church today. Universalism claims it really doesn't matter which world religion you follow, they will all lead to the same place, heaven. That is not what Holy Scripture says, and if people believe this, then there was no need for the cross, no need for Jesus agonizing death there. Universalism gives no respect to the concept of righteousness. The Christian faith teaches that we can not achieve righteousness with God on our own, by what we do. It is not something we earn. There is only one way, one solution to our dilemma. That is the death of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection.

Universalism has taken a wonderful truth about God and distorted it. The truth is that yes, God loves us. Love is one of the attributes of God. And if you just focus on this one attribute of God, I can see how you might be a universalist. But when you separate this one attribute of His love for us, from the other attributes that are part of God's nature, his holiness, his justice, and many more, then you are not holding the essence of God in proper tension. God's love, does not override that He is just. He cannot overlook our sin as if it doesn't exist because He is also Just and fair. He sets the rules, and they are always consistent. God makes no exceptions, in His eyes we are all the same. He plays no favorites. There are not many pathways to heaven, there is only one. Jesus said this Himself in John's Gospel: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no man comes to the Father but by me." This bold "I am" statement (of which there are several in John's Gospel, is either true or false Universalists make the mistake of thinking they are God. They think that because

God is indeed love, that all pathways lead to Him. It is a nice sentimental feeling that suits our politically correct culture, which says that the worst thing you can be is "judgmental". After all they say, isn't it arrogant to claim Jesus is the only pathway to heaven?

No, it is not arrogant, it is revealed Truth.

Vs. 23 – Paul reminds us "that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." All of us are condemned before a holy God. God's love for us never overrides His Holiness, it cannot. Love and Holiness are both integral to God's nature. If one obliterates the other, God is diminished. His holiness demands judgment. His love ultimately led to providing us with a path to Him, through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul says: "All have sinned". This is the human tragedy, the human dilemma. A problem only God can solve for us.

Vs. 24 – We move from tragedy to triumph. "they are justified by His grace as a gift", "through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

The word "justification" is a metaphor from a court of law. Paul is saying, when we sinners are tried at the court of God's justice, we will be acquitted because of Jesus saving work on the cross, IF we place our trust in Him. One day you and I will all face God. We have no merit on which to plead our case and innocence. There is only, as we say in our liturgy, one who can get us acquitted, Jesus Christ, "our only mediator and advocate".

Vs. 25 – Paul tells us, in our guilty state before a holy God, God "put forth our solution". Jesus was "put forward", to be our expiation, a word tied to the Jewish sacrificial system. The shedding of the blood of an animal, was seen in accordance with the Law, to accomplish the wiping away of sin. Propitiation literally means: "the removal of wrath". Jesus dies as the "paschal lamb", whose shed blood makes possible the wiping away of our sins, we are made clean before God. Jesus death is our propitiation, meaning God's wrath towards us is removed! Hallelujah. Paul reminds us at the end of Vs. 25 that our propitiation is ours only "through faith".

At the end of vs. 25 Paul says "the righteousness of God, shows his forbearance towards us. He has "passed over" our sins. Forbearance shows God's willingness to withhold our deserved punishment, to postpone it. This is why it is so important for people to come to faith before it is too late, before they die.

Vs. 26 – Paul states again that God's righteousness justifies us, if only we have faith.