

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: Receiving Righteousness in Christ, Romans 3:21-31

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INTRODUCTION: If I were to say “I am a sinner, but I am righteous,” that’s almost true. It’s a true statement, but it’s almost fake news if I don’t put in the last two words. “I am a sinner, but I am righteous IN CHRIST”... because it’s only through Christ that I am made righteous.

We have been studying Paul’s letter to the Romans for the past couple weeks. Paul was writing to the believers in Rome. Some he knew personally (we know because he greeted them by name), but he never had met many of them. His letter was probably written to believers who were a part of several different church groups because we see in Romans 16, he greets multiple “home church” groups. They were made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus.

We see these churches were having some problems, questions, and uncertainties about doctrine, and Paul wrote this doctrinal letter to explain things and set the record straight. We don’t really know how these believers were established in Rome. But, we do know the churches were not established by him or by another apostle like Peter because Paul stated he wanted to only preach the gospel where no other apostle had been. So, these churches probably started in the hearts of people who were at Pentecost back in the early part of Acts. They would have returned to Rome afterward. At Pentecost, these people were together, and the Holy Spirit came down and filled the apostles so that they spoke in the many languages of the people there. And, then the people scattered throughout the earth, taking the Gospel with them.

Rome in this day had a very diverse population, of both Jews and Gentiles from different church groups and different religious backgrounds. This sounds a little like our diverse congregation. Paul took the time to write to them with the hope of uniting them in Christ. I hope in studying this book together, we will be even more united in Christ.

A review of Romans—

- Romans 1 –Paul emphasizes humanity’s unrighteousness and God’s wrath because humanity has traded the glory of knowing God for worthless pursuits.
- Romans 2 – Here we see God’s kindness is meant to lead us to repentance and the danger of superficial religious acts apart from the inward change of our hearts brought about by God.
- Romans 3 – Last week, we got through verse 20 of Chapter 3. Paul writes how God’s righteousness is upheld and how we are all guilty before God in our sin. Last week’s message was “Humanity on Trial,” and our verdict was GUILTY.

Today, we continue in Chapter 3, to see how after this court-case decision—in our guiltiness before God—we can receive the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Here’s my question this morning: How can unrighteous sinners enter into a relationship with a holy, righteous God? How can he tolerate us enough to call us his friends? You don’t call someone your friend when you can’t tolerate him, but Jesus calls us his friends.

ILLUSTRATION: Two people were driving in a car. They passed a chicken processing plant, and the smell was so bad. One woman said she thought she would become a vegetarian.

Did you know elite athletes and body builders will train their bodies to be repulsed by certain foods through associating food with smells like this chicken plant? They would associate a horrible smell like the smell of the chicken processing plant when they would see a candy bar.

APPLICATION: God is perfect, and when he sees sin, it repulses him. He can take no part in a relationship with sin. In righteousness, God must defeat sin, which can be only be done by killing it, by death. How can it be God wants to relate to us? Why is it that he wants to be our friend? How can we have relationship with God, when he cannot tolerate sin, and we are at the core of who we are—sinners? How can this be? How does this work?

So—we will see—Paul answers this question, “How can it be?” in Romans, continuing in Chapter 3, verse 21.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 3:21-26 ²¹ *But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.* ²² *This*

righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.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—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.

EXPLANATION: In Biblical study, we see there is no question God is righteous. It is not a new concept. God's righteousness was revealed in many ways throughout scripture (the Law, his blessing of obedience, his judgments against sin). As verse 21 says, the Law and the Prophets, in the Old Testament, show God's righteousness.

But, the scripture here introduces a new concept for the first readers of Paul's letter. Here we have a new righteousness apart from the Law, given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. We will look at how this glorious mystery impacts all of us today. There are three points to my message today:

1. God calls us righteous.
2. This righteousness is costly.
3. This righteousness excludes boasting.

First, GOD CALLS US RIGHTEOUS.

We read in this passage of scripture, righteousness is given freely to us. Verse 24 says *all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.*

EXPLANATION: Let's talk about this word—justified. Justification, first of all, is an act by God, not man. Justification is God declaring the believer righteous in Christ. Justification does not make a person righteous in himself. Justification is God calling a person righteous in Christ. Even though we are guilty, he has declared us righteous.

As we said last week, we must all stand before God in silence. Facing a GUILTY verdict, we have no justification for ourselves. But, here we read the good news. We are justified. We are called righteous. God accepts Jesus' life, death on the

cross, burial, and resurrection on our behalf, so that in Christ, we take on Christ's status before God. We become God's children.

Christian means "little Christ." When believers, followers of Christ, were first called Christians, it was a slang term. "*Hey, there go the little Christs. There go the Christians.*" If I identify as a Christian, I am saying I am a little Christ. I am a representative of Christ. It puts a new meaning on it.

APPLICATION: Righteousness is foreign to us. Many reject God. Lacking faith, they have an internal immune response. But, by faith in Jesus, we are given a new heart, a new status—righteous in the name of Jesus.

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 2:20 says ²⁰*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

If you can set one goal for yourself this year, it should be to memorize this verse.

But, how can this be? How can Paul continue to live by faith? Paul answers...through and because of the work of Jesus Christ.

So, we have God calling his people righteous.

Next, THIS RIGHTEOUSNESS IS COSTLY.

EXPLANATION: The scripture says we are justified by the redemption that came by Jesus Christ. The word redemption in the Greek is *apolutrosis* related to the verb *luo*, which means "to loose" or "set free" and *lutroo* "to deliver by the payment of a price." The Bible says we are all slaves to sin. We have no hope of escape in of ourselves, but Jesus provides a way to set us free by paying the price for redeeming us—his own blood. That was the price.

APPLICATION: When Jesus redeems us, we are set free from sin and death. We were slaves to our sin, but Christ paid the price for us. Just because we get grace freely, doesn't mean there wasn't a great price. We were slaves to sin, and Jesus comes in and buys us out of slavery.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION: One word used for redemption in the Old Testament is the word “Kinsman-Redeemer.” This is looked at in great detail in the Book of Ruth (It’s a great read). Boaz was the Kinsman-Redeemer. According to Jewish law, land was supposed to stay within a family’s ownership. So, if the economy or a family member’s death caused the family to lose the land, by law, the family needed another relative, a Kinsman-Redeemer, to buy back or redeem the land so it could remain owned by the family.

And, in Ruth, Boaz was known as the Kinsman-Redeemer. He married Ruth, the widow of his relative, to redeem the land.¹

APPLICATION: This Kinsman-Redeemer comes from an Old Testament word *goel*. Jesus is our *goel*, our Kinsman-Redeemer, because he became one of us in flesh. This made him so he was related to us and was able to pay the price of blood he could only pay as one of us. This price can be further understood by this Old Testament concept of atonement.

In Verse 25—we see Christ noted as the atoning sacrifice...to be received by faith.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION: Atonement refers to the Old Testament sacrificial system. It’s so important for Christians to know this. This Old Testament sacrificial process was very complex. And, the way sins were atoned for was through this complex process. In other words, animals paid the price for the sins of humans. Christ, from the New Testament onward, was the atoning sacrifice. His blood was shed to cover our sins. And, later Paul would say in Romans, *if we confess with our mouth Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in our heart Jesus was raised from the dead, we will be saved.*

EXPLANATION: God had passed over the former sins of his people in the Old Testament times. The sacrificial system rolled their sins forward until they could be paid for someday. And, they were paid for by Jesus.

SCRIPTURE: Verse 25 says, *in his forbearance, he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.*

But, as a righteous God, he had to fully deal with sin. He couldn’t continue to pass over sin as he has did for so many years —*so he to demonstrate his righteousness at*

the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (verse 26), he presented Jesus Christ as the sacrifice.

EXPLANATION: God had to fully deal with sin. And, to be saved, we must repent of sin and accept this free gift. But, never for a moment, should we forget the price God paid in love for his children.

So, we have God calls his people righteous, this righteousness is costly, and now—

Third, THIS RIGHTEOUSNESS EXCLUDES BOASTING.

EXPLANATION: It's very interesting that point is a part of Chapter 3 because it means apparently there was a problem with boasting, spiritual pride—*look what I've done, look at the laws I've kept, look at the rules I've followed—I'm better than these people*. In fact, many of the Jews of this day, who had become Christians, thought they really had it made because before they had been saved the first time under the Law, and now they had the fullness of Christ. So, they thought they had some special package waiting for them in heaven.

ILLUSTRATION: Let's say you've been in church all your life. You were involved in Bible drill. You grew up giving to offerings. And, let's say you went on mission trips, and you've been a thither from the very beginning. And, then let's just say someone who has none of that history is saved. Who's the most saved? Both!

APPLICATION: So, we should not have spiritual pride in thinking we have a special package waiting on us versus the brand new believer who has none of the background. You know, Jesus is the great equalizer. This righteousness, given to us by God through Jesus to people who have faith in Jesus, excludes boasting.

Christianity is different than all other religions because it is clear people can't do anything to add to what God has already done. All other religions say people can do something to earn or add to their being saved, but true believers in Christ are humbled rather than built up by their attempts to earn salvation.

In Christ, God made a way to save us from sin. So, why then, would this salvation from sin make a provision for pride—another horrible sin?

SCRIPTURE: Romans 3:27-31²⁷ *Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith.* ²⁸ *For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.* ²⁹ *Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too,* ³⁰ *since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.* ³¹ *Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.*

APPLICATION: Back to my simple illustration—about the person who has grown up with all this privilege and has accepted the Lord at a young age and has lived a strong Christian life. It shouldn't give any of us a sense of security or a sense of pride. Rather, we uphold the Law. Rather, we uphold what we know to be true. We are grateful for the training we received as children. But, now, it's time to accept the new brother and sister who is finding it all to be brand new.

EXPLANATION: Paul gives two main reasons we should not boast.

- (1) First, we aren't saved by works but by faith. How many times does the scripture tell us that? Over and over again, and we have to hear it over and over because human nature leads us to believe certainly there's something we can do for ourselves in the spiritual realm.
- (2) Second, another reason we should not boast is that God is both the God of the Jews and the Gentiles. In this day, it was shocking news to all who heard it. God is the God of the Jews and the God of the Gentiles. Paul says we are all condemned, and we are all offered grace. No one is special. No one has any reason for pride.

No doubt, this passage would have spoken to the Jews, who had pride in the Law—in their works, which was meant to set them apart from other nations and to set an example to other nations. They also had pride in the exclusiveness of their Jewish nation's relationship with God. They had a stereotypical idea of the Gentiles—that they worshiped idols, that they were heathens, that they were not part of God's chosen, and that there was no possibility of redemption. So, Paul's message came as difficult news for those who thought another way.

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 6:14¹⁴ *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

CONCLUSION: I asked two questions at the beginning of the message.

1. How can unrighteous sinners enter into a relationship with a holy, righteous God?
2. How can he be tolerant of us enough to call us friends?

Both questions have the same answer—because of Jesus Christ. When you understand who God says you are in Christ—you are his righteous, beloved child, and you understand the cost associated with it—you will live differently. And, our spiritual pride balloons will deflate.

If you have been striving to be righteous or struggle with self-righteousness, step back for a moment and put your faith where it belongs—in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We can never think about that too much. Where are you? Do you understand this? If you are a Christian, have you grasped this principle that we're all in this together? We're all sinners together, and we're all made righteous in Christ and because of Christ together. If you're not a believer, let me welcome you to the body of believers because we know we're not any big deal.

You don't have to start acting or dressing or talking a certain way because when Christ comes into your life, his Spirit is going to lead you into all those things. So, if you think you have to change a bunch of stuff before you can repent and trust Jesus, you're wrong. You start where you are right now.

Lord, forgive me a sinner. I believe you died for my sin. I believe you were buried and you rose again. This is the hope of the Gospel.

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