

Justified by Faith in Jesus

Lesson Scripture: Romans 3:21-30

Focus Scripture: Romans 3:21-30

Key Verse: For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:22b-24

ROMANS 3:21-30 (NRSV UE)

21 But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed and is attested by the Law and the Prophets,

22 the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,

23 since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;

24 they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

25 whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed;

26 it was to demonstrate at the present time his own righteousness, so that he is righteous and he justifies the one who has the faith of Jesus.

27 Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. Through what kind of law? That of works? No, rather through the law of faith.

28 For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of gentiles also? Yes, of gentiles also,

30 since God is one, and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

ROMANS 3:21-30 (KJV)

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

29 Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:

30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

KEY TERMS

- **Eternal Security Doctrine** – The teaching which says once a person truly repents and accepts Christ as Savior, that person’s salvation is eternally secured and cannot be lost by subsequent sinful deeds.
- **Ascetic** – Punitive and severe, especially of rituals.
- **Psyche** – The whole being, the soul, or essence of life.
- **Propitiation** – Appeasement offering or gesture (offered to please God).
- **Testy** – Test as in belief, patience, etc.; irritating.
- **Patron** – Supporter, sponsor, donor of person or event, usually for a given cause.
- **Pedigree** – The true class (qualification) that gives a person rights to special honors.
- **Beneficiaries** – People who benefit from an act.

INTRODUCTION

In this section, we turn from individuals acting in faith (courage) to the grounding or reasoning behind the theology of righteousness with God through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. To most of us today, this is a simple concept because we have heard it all our lives. And what is the competing theology? It is that we can get right with God by keeping certain rules and rituals in a prescribed form (works).

To appreciate this and similar lessons, consider how difficult it is for someone to change your mind about an idea or concept you have believed in all your life. You heard that idea at home from your parents, at

school, at church, at work, and in all your encounters with friends and family. Now comes a new teacher or group that tells you what you have heard and believed all your life is wrong.

We have deliberately not put an issue

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in this explanation to stay clear of emotive responses. Nevertheless, consider your response to the new teaching. How easy is it to let go of something you have believed in all your life, and which leading, respected authorities have approved?

As you read Apostle Paul's arguments on justification with God purely by faith in Christ, appreciate that this was the uphill battle he was fighting. He was asking the Jews to let go of something that was ingrained in their psyche. Worse yet, he was calling on them to adopt a new thinking which shook the foundation of their righteousness with God. How easy is it for you to accept you are wrong, and have been wrong on an issue all your life?



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TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

At the start, appreciating the text brings us into an argument that Paul started at the beginning of the book of Romans. The jump-off point for the text is the preceding verse 20, which states the purpose of the law was not to reconcile

sinners with God, but to show what sin is and how sinful we are.

If therefore, the law with its works (rituals) and provisions could not make us right with God, what could make us right? The obvious answer is grace through faith in Jesus the Christ. Everything in the text revolves around this key concept. Let us see how Paul sold the argument.

In verse 23, Paul in effect summarized the arguments he presented in chapters 1 and 2: all people (Jews and Gentiles) have sinned. We have all missed the divine standard for right standing before God. This was not a hard point to sell because the Jewish religious system rested on it, and the need to seek

reconciliation with God.

At verse 25, Paul anchored the argument in another plank of truth the Jews had accepted: God required sacrifice, the shedding of blood, to erase sin. Again, Paul was on friendly ground because animal sacrifice was the

foundation of the Jewish system of sin, atonement, and forgiveness. At this point in the argument, Paul was hitting home runs.

Verse 25 is where it gets somewhat testy. Here, Paul made the switch from the traditional animal sacrifice (done annually) to the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Hear Paul make the argument in a modern tone. “My brothers and sisters, you were right in saying God demanded a sacrifice for the erasing of sin. But the real sacrifice is not the sacrifice of a spotless lamb which you buy around the temple. It was the sacrifice of the pure innocent Lamb, Jesus Christ.”

That was the part the Jews found hard to swallow. How could the sacrifice of one man replace the yearly sacrifice (and other sacrifices) for sin? We can understand why no one cheered when Paul made this argument. It asked the Jews to trade in everything they believed about righteousness and the forgiveness

of sin.

Depending on your version of the Bible, you will notice the word “grace” or “gracious” in verse 24. The Jewish audience understood the special mention of this word. Grace, in this context, spoke to what today we call “patronage” or sponsorship. The favor of grace occurred when a patron freely offered an individual

a new opportunity (social or financial) in return for the person’s (beneficiary’s) support or loyalty. Grace was therefore free because it cost the beneficiary nothing financially. But the patron expected his loyalty in return.

The same applies to God’s grace in salvation. We cannot buy the favor with money or good works. Yet our loyalty

God expects. This is the reason some preachers point out that grace was not free. It cost God the life of Jesus Christ. All it requires from us is our loyalty. That seems like a fair exchange.

In verse 25, Paul reached back to the concept of Propitiation, which came from



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Leviticus 16:14-16. Again, we note this is debating at its best. Paul was brilliant in using the planks from the Jewish religious system of sacrifice to make his point about Christ, the perfect sacrificial lamb of God.

When we visit the Leviticus text, we see that the key to the Jewish atonement process was the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrificed animal on the “mercy seat.” This ritual reminded Israel of the high price of sin. Also, it was an act of faith in God’s ability and willingness to forgive the people’s sins. Can you now see the mastery of Paul’s argument? Paul argued that with salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, the same process was

at play. The only minor adjustment was God’s substitution of the perfect man, his sinless son, for a ceremonially perfect lamb. It was the same process, only this time God completed it with true (not ceremonial) perfection.

In verse 26, Paul went for the home run on the argument of how to get right

with God. Again, he reached back into the scriptures that the Jews accepted and believed. The “one who has faith / believes” in Jesus Christ is an echo of Habakkuk 2:4, which clearly states that faith (not works and rituals) gives life (a life that is pleasing to God).

This is the steel and concrete in the foundation of the Christian’s faith. We are therefore not surprised when we see this truth popping up at so many corners of the New Testament: Romans 3:26, Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38. To all reasonable readers of Romans chapter 3, Paul made his argument with convincing clarity.

SANKOFA

In verse 30 of the text, Paul underlined the concept that God offers salvation to all people (Jews and Gentiles) on the same basis of faith in Christ. That idea took on a new complexion in recent times, with certain intellectuals questioning the relevance of Christianity for black people. Maybe you have heard the assertion that

“Paul was brilliant in using the planks from the Jewish religious system of sacrifice to make his point about Christ, the perfect sacrificial lamb of God.”

Christianity is a “White Man’s religion.” We cannot answer that claim directly in this brief lesson. Yet we address two matters surrounding it.

First, is an observation we heard from a prominent Caribbean politician a few years ago. He noted that in this age of social media, all people need to make themselves expert

on any subject is an internet connection and a Google search. Maybe this is nowhere truer than in religious commentary. Today, we have no shortage of self-made social media “theologians.” And these Google-savvy “theologians” freely float ideas which have no intellectual, historical, or biblical legs. Our caution with

“arguments” from these “experts” is to check the pedigree of people who give you darts to throw at Christianity. Popularity on a TV show or on social media is not enough to establish credibility on matters of religion.

Second, on TEDx Edina is a super-excellent, magnificent, cool, must-see

Talk by Olivia Pierce, entitled “Why Christianity Is Perceived as the White Man’s religion.” We are not promoting that chat. However, if your church offers you an option of a free scholarship to seminary, or a paid one-week course to study that talk, pass on seminary and pay for the course. That talk covers crucial topics like unconscious bias, lack

of representation, and the historical realities of the Christian viewpoint. These are the matters which we must assess if we are to gauge the relevance of Christianity for black people. Some people found the short talk by Olivia more stimulating than the emotional rants from some “modern thinkers” who try to cast doubt on Christianity. Again, please check it out.

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CASE STUDY

It is easy to believe that Paul settled conclusively the issue of salvation and removed the tension between works and grace through faith. And in many political alliances, mainstream theology has laid those matters to rest. However, that is not

the full story. Among some theologians and philosophers, the question remains on how far the grace of God extends to reach and reconcile humankind to God. As expected, there are varying views on this. They include exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.

Here are some quotes from Wikipedia oneachofthesereligious views. We share them so readers will know of their existence and be on guard against the confusion they can open. People may not recognize these arguments, or their variations, because supporters of them do not use standard theological jargon. However, if you pay attention to persons who challenge the traditional Christian view, you will recognize these alternative salvation views.

For example, arguments that suggest people have many paths to God, or rhetorically question if Christianity is the only true religion, takes us into these alternative faith perspectives. So, we

issue two cautions on this issue.

First, not every faith argument that sounds reasonable is scriptural. Each person must decide in his or her own mind the weight he gives to scripture text. Second, each religious perspective must stand or fall on its own merit. Support of a religious view by a media celebrity does

not give the perspective credibility. This is particularly relevant when religious thought is not the specialty of the celebrity. Here are the views.

“**Pluralism** is the belief that multiple religions are true and equally valid in their communication of the truth about God, the world, and salvation. The chief expounder

of this view is John Hick of Claremont Graduate School in California, who first propounded it in his book *God and the Universe of Faiths* (1973).

“**Inclusivism** is the belief that God is present in non-Christian religions to save adherents through Christ. The inclusivist view has given rise to the concept of the

Among some theologians and philosophers, the question remains on how far the grace of God extends to reach and reconcile humankind to God. As expected, there are varying views on this.

“anonymous Christian,” an adherent of a non-Christian religion whom the Christian God nevertheless saves through Christ. This position was popularized by the Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner (1904-1984).

“**Exclusivism** is the theological position that holds that there is no salvation in non-Christian religions. Notable among the exclusivists of the twentieth century are Samuel Zwemer, Hendrik Kraemer, and Leslie Newbiggin. Citing the Aristotelian concept of truth, as one of few, exclusivists regard all religious claims other than Christianity as false and invalid. Exclusivists hold that salvation is through Christ alone, and that non-Christians cannot be saved because they neither recognize Christ’s uniqueness nor lordship.”

Before you say it, let us say it. This is heavy lifting theology and there is no need for you to lose sleep over these

concepts. Our intention is purely that of awareness because error has a way of sneaking up on truth and corrupting it.

On the face of it, exclusivism seems to line up with the scriptural text, and notably the Great Commission. For most of us, that should settle it.

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LIFE APPLICATION

In a sense, the text is clear about what we should do if we are outside the community of faith and recognize we are sinners who need forgiveness for sin. By faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ, we accept God’s grace. That is quite simple.

The problem comes when we sin after accepting Christ as Savior and committing to following

his commandments. For simplicity and to make the point, we will sidestep the debatable doctrines, like eternal security. That said, the way to deal with subsequent acts of sin is identical to the way we deal with our original

repentance and acceptance of salvation. We repent and accept God's grace. God does not require us to hide our sin, pay special tithes, perform ascetic rituals, or otherwise work our way back into God's grace. The way into salvation is the same way to maintain salvation: grace by faith.

Standing on this truth, consider how you deal with your acts of sin (after salvation). Some people go to extraordinary levels to hide their acts of sin, to maintain a public image of saintly piety. Remember, as King David noted (Psalm 51:4), all sins are in effect acts of disobedience against God, and only God cleans us of sin. We must, therefore, deal with sinful acts in the way prescribed by God.

But this puts us in a chicken-and-egg loop, since when we enter the community of faith, our behavior should reflect it. In Galatians 5, Paul makes it easy for us to assess whether our behaviors are in keeping with what God demands. Verses 19 to 21 give the behaviors that will keep us outside the kingdom, while verses 22-


23 list the behaviors and attitudes that reflect Christ in us. A review of Jesus' teaching on *The Beatitudes* will also help here.

So, what do you do when you recognize a personal struggle with behaviors in verses 19-21? Again, the right action is not to run and hide or to increase the pious pretense. The same Apostle Paul (and King David) points us to steps we can take to deal with this situation.

First, admit you have a problem and prayerfully ask God for help. Note that the *Fruit of the Spirit* are gracious gifts from God, which we get by seeking after them. At this stage, it is useful to seek the support of your pastor or other

mature Christians. Hopefully, you can find believers who will not look down on you to prop up their own charade of piety.

Second, you may have to take practical steps to stop feeding the sin. A person dealing with a problem of drunkenness should avoid having lunch in sports bars, where the staff has a vested



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interest in serving alcoholic drinks. Paul himself had to do this. He took decisive steps to discipline his body, to bring it into subjection (1 Corinthians 9:27). This you may do on your own or with support from others.

Third, get an accountability partner. This is a Christian brother or sister with whom you can be transparent about your

struggles. Decency and practical wisdom suggest that your accountability partner should be of the same gender. Because of the sensitive nature of what you may share with the partner, gender and confidentiality rules require special consideration. Ideally, you want a partner who can “keep a secret” and will not try to exploit your struggles and stumbles.

One more parting note! In the text, Paul explained convincingly how salvation, though faith in Christ, works. You may never be called on to give such a defense of faith. Nevertheless, you should be able

to explain to anyone who asks why faith in Christ is the only requirement people must meet to get forgiveness of sin. Consider the extent to which you can defend your faith in Christ. You do not need to memorize Paul’s arguments. Just make sure you understand them and can share them in your own words.

QUESTIONS

Nevertheless, you should be able to explain to anyone who asks why faith in Christ is the only requirement people must meet to get forgiveness of sin. Consider the extent to which you can defend your faith in Christ.

1. What do you think of Paul’s reasoning in the text; was it convincing?
2. What link do you see, if any, between the law under Moses and grace under Jesus?
3. Can you detect any teachings in Christianity that are harmful to the interests of black people?

CLOSING DEVOTIONS

Closing Hymn: “In

Christ Alone”

Closing Prayer: Dear Father, guide my heart along the path of your truth. And help me live in that truth for your honor and glory. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

May 6-May 12

Monday	Matthew 20:1-16 (God Is Generous to the Unworthy)
Tuesday	Genesis 13:14-18 (A Great and Blessed Nation)
Wednesday	Genesis 15:1-6 (A Promise of Countless Heirs)
Thursday	1 John 2:12-17 (Little Children, Your Sins Are Forgiven)
Friday	Psalm 32 (God's Abundant Forgiveness)
Saturday	Romans 4:1-12 (Trust God, Who Justified the Ungodly)
Sunday	Romans 4:13-25 (Christ Was Raised for Our Justification)