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# ROMANS

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## PART 4: THE GRACE OF GOD

### ROMANS 3:21-4:25

#### ROMANS OVERVIEW

##### PROLOGUE (ROMANS 1:1-17)

1. "THE WRATH OF GOD" (ROMANS 1:18-3:20)
2. "THE GRACE OF GOD" (ROMANS 3:21-4:25) ← We are here
3. "FREEDOM IN CHRIST" (ROMANS 5:1-8:39)
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#### **PART 4 OVERVIEW**

- The Center of the Gospel: Romans 3:21-26
- Abraham: the Model?: Romans 4:1-25
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# THE CENTER OF THE GOSPEL:

## ROMANS 3:21-26

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*21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

- ROMANS 3:21-26

### THE KEY: THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD (3:21, 22, 25, 26)

- Without a doubt, the key concept in Romans 3:21-26 is the concept of the “righteousness of God”: the phrase “righteousness of God” / “His righteousness” appears four times in this passage alone (3:21, 22, 25, 26), along with the related word in Greek, “justified,” in Romans 3:24.

“righteousness” = *dikaïosynē* (Gk.)

“justified” = *dikaioō* (Gk.)

- In this passage, Paul will answer three questions about the “righteousness of God”:
  - What is the “righteousness of God”?
  - How do we obtain the “righteousness of God”?
  - What does Jesus’ death have to do with the “righteousness of God”?

### QUESTION 1: WHAT IS THE “RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD”?

The “righteousness of God” = “salvation”;  
it is the process by which God puts people in the “right” with Him

- One of the key questions that Paul has been trying to answer is “How can someone be made right with God?”
- Romans 1:18-3:20 has made it clear that this is harder than it looks: both human obedience and being a part of God’s people doesn’t make someone right with God, because God’s standard is perfection and “are all under sin” (3:9); “there is none righteous, not even one” (3:10).
- Therefore, Paul has concluded that “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified [made right with God] in His sight.” (Romans 3:20). There is no way to be made right with God through works / through the Law.

## THE CENTER OF THE GOSPEL: ROMANS 3:21-26

- But if we can't be made right with God by "works," how can we be made right with God? Paul tells us in Romans 3:21, 23-24:

*21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets...<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified [being made right with God] as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus... – ROMANS 3:21, 23-24*

- The key in this passage is the phrase "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (3:23).
  - Since we can't *earn* salvation with God, the only way that we can be made "right" with God is through the gracious gift of God. That is what God has decided: He has given us salvation entirely as a gift!
- But how do we obtain this righteousness? This is what Paul talks about next.

### QUESTION 2: HOW DO WE OBTAIN THE "RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD"?

- Although God's righteousness is given to us as a gift, there is something that is needed of us to receive this gift: **we obtain God's righteousness solely through our faith in Jesus Christ.**
- Indeed, "faith" is the second-most repeated theme of this passage:

*the righteousness of God **through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe...** (3:22)*

*<sup>24</sup> being justified as a gift by His grace **through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;** <sup>25</sup> whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood **through faith...** (3:24-25)*

*so that He would be just and the justifier **of the one who has faith in Jesus.** (3:26)*

We can only be made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

- In keeping with the purpose for which Paul wrote Romans (to unify Jewish and Gentile Christians), Paul makes it clear in this passage that there is no exception to the above principle: all are made right with God the same way: by God's gracious gift to us through faith in Jesus Christ.

*<sup>22</sup>for there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup>for **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.** <sup>24</sup> being justified **as a gift** by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus... – ROMANS 3:22-24*

## THE CENTER OF THE GOSPEL: ROMANS 3:21-26

- Paul deals with this idea in greater detail in Romans 3:27-30:

*27 Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. 28 So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law. 29 After all, is God the God of the Jews only? Isn't he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is. 30 There is only one God, and he makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. – ROMANS 3:27-30 NLT*

### QUESTION 3: WHAT DOES JESUS' DEATH HAVE TO DO WITH THE "RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD"?

- But why did Jesus have to die to make God's righteousness available as a gift to believers? Why couldn't God just forgive people their sins and give them His righteousness?
- Paul's answer to that is found at the end of Romans 3:21-26:

*24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. – ROMANS 3:24-26*

- Paul's argument in this passage can be broken down into two parts:
  - When God forgives people, He does not treat them as they deserve to be treated, calling into question His justice.
  - And so God poured out His righteous justice—His wrath—on Jesus so that those who believe in Him could be forgiven.
- Let's take a look at each of these.

#### 1. When God forgives people, He does not treat them as they deserve to be treated, calling into question His justice.

- Paul has just demonstrated in Romans 1:18-3:20 that all people sin, and therefore all are deserving of God's wrath (Romans 1:18). He reiterates again in Romans 3:23 the universality of sin:

*"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." (3:23)*

- But after establishing that we all deserve God's wrath, Paul makes it clear that God has not treated people the way that they deserve:

*"in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed" (3:25)*

- While this might seem great to us, it creates a problem for God: God is ignoring the rules that He Himself set up! A God who allows people to do evil and get away with it—rewarding them for eternity when they have done awful things—is hardly a God worth worshipping. **So how can God forgive sin and still be just?** The answer is found in Jesus and His crucifixion.

## THE CENTER OF THE GOSPEL: ROMANS 3:21-26

### 2. And so God poured out His righteous justice—His wrath—on Jesus so that those who believe in Him could be forgiven.

- Paul uses an important word for Christ’s death: he calls it a “propitiation”:

*24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a **propitiation** in His blood through faith.*  
(3:24-25)

- To “propitiate” means to “appease the wrath of (a) God.” When Jesus died, God was pouring out His wrath for the sins we committed on Jesus. This allows God to both punish sin and forgive sinners...or as Paul puts it, it allows God to be...

***“just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”*** (3:26)

“There can be no gospel unless there is such a thing as a righteousness of God for the ungodly. But just as little can there be any gospel unless the integrity of God’s character be maintained. The problem of the sinful world, the problem of all religion, the problem of God dealing with a sinful race, is how to unite these two things. The Christian answer to the problem is given by Paul in the words: ‘Jesus Christ, whom God set forth a propitiation...in his blood.’”

- James Denny, *Death of Christ*

### SUMMARY: RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH

- We cannot miss the main point of this passage: there only one way to be saved, and that is through faith in Jesus Christ.
  - No amount of works can save a person because no one can do what God wants them to do perfectly, and God has to punish sin.
  - We have two choices in this life: we can bear the punishment for sin ourselves, or we can let Jesus take it.
- All it takes for Jesus to take the punishment for our sin is faith in Him: have you put your faith in Jesus Christ? If not, what are you waiting for?

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# ABRAHAM: THE MODEL?

## ROMANS 4:1-25

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### INTRODUCTION

- In Romans 3:20, Paul made the bold declaration that “no one will be justified” by works. This is why faith is necessary for someone to be made right with God.
- Paul knows, however, that this assertion would not be met with widespread agreement, particularly among those raised in the Jewish faith. At this point of Paul’s argument, Paul anticipates that many would point to Abraham as the “wrench” in Paul’s argument. This is because widespread Jewish belief at this time believed two things about Abraham, both of which go against what Paul has said:
  1. Abraham was able to obey the Law fully, and thus *he* was justified by his “works.”
  2. Abraham is recognized as the father of the *Jews*, and therefore the blessing of salvation God gave him is only given to his descendants—the Jews. Thus one has to become Jewish in order to be saved.
- In order to confront this, Paul goes back to Scripture and shows how both of these beliefs are erroneous.

### POINT 1: EVEN ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH!

- For Paul to make his point, he spends much of Romans 4 zeroing in on what he considers to be a crucial verse in the Old Testament about Abraham’s life: Genesis 15:6.
  - Genesis 15:6 occurs right after God told Abraham that he would have as many offspring as their were descendants in the sky.
  - Right after God tells this to Abraham, this is what we read:

*Then [Abraham] **believed** in the LORD; **and [God] credited it to him as righteousness.*** – GENESIS 15:6 NIV
- Examining that verse, Paul makes the point that God made Abraham right with Him because of his faith/belief ONLY, not because of any work or any Law that Abraham followed.

*<sup>1</sup> What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? <sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” – ROMANS 4:1-3*

## ABRAHAM: THE MODEL?: ROMANS 4:1-25

- Paul then goes on to say that if Abraham had earned his “righteousness” through works, it wouldn’t be a “favor” (v. 4—literally, a “gift”), it would be something owed him. But Abraham’s righteousness was given to him as a gift by God. Therefore, it had to come solely because of God’s grace to Abraham through his faith.

*<sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. <sup>5</sup> But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness... – ROMANS 4:4-5*

- For those who might argue that circumcision played a part in Abraham’s righteousness, Paul makes it clear that Genesis 15:6—and the declaration that Abraham was “righteous”—came before Abraham got circumcised:

*<sup>9</sup> Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, “Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness.” <sup>10</sup> How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; <sup>11</sup> and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, <sup>12</sup> and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. – ROMANS 4:9-12*

- Paul’s point is clear: if Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised, then circumcision is not necessary for salvation. The Jewish people cannot appeal to Abraham’s obedience to argue that they can be accepted by God based on their own obedience.
- The implication of this is important, and often misunderstood by many Christians: even before Jesus, God has always saved people based on their faith. No one who is in heaven will be there because they earned their spot. Anybody born before Jesus will be in heaven because of their faith in God as He revealed Himself in the Old Testament; anybody after Jesus will be in heaven because of their faith in Jesus. **It is faith, and faith alone, that has always saved people.**

### POINT 2: ABRAHAM IS THE SPIRITUAL “FATHER” OF US ALL!

- The second point that Paul makes flows naturally from the first and would have been very important to his audience in Rome: since Abraham was the “father” of the Jewish faith, and since all Jewish people were physical descendants of Abraham, many Jewish people believed that God was only the God of the Jewish people, and thus would only save Jewish people. Therefore, if any “Gentile” wanted to be saved by God, that Gentile had to “become” Jewish by obeying the Law, with men specifically being required to be circumcised.
- Once again, going back to the Old Testament, Paul shows that Abraham was not just called the “father of the Jews,” but the “father of *many nations*.” The only way that this can be accomplished is Abraham is the “spiritual father” of anyone who has faith, and thus Abraham is also the father of the Gentiles!

*<sup>3</sup> Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, <sup>4</sup> “As for me, this is my covenant with you: **You will be the father of many nations.** <sup>5</sup> No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, **for I have made you a father of many nations.** – GENESIS 17:3-5 NIV*

## ABRAHAM: THE MODEL?: ROMANS 4:1-25

*16 So the promise is received by faith. It is given as a free gift. And we are all certain to receive it, whether or not we live according to the law of Moses, if we have faith like Abraham's. For Abraham is the father of all who believe. 17 **That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, "I have made you the father of many nations."** – ROMANS 4:16-17 NLT*

### FINAL THOUGHT: A REFLECTION ON TRUE FAITH

- After making it clear that even Abraham himself was made “right” with God solely through his faith, and not through works, Paul gives us a few brief words on the “nature” of Abraham’s faith:

*18 In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “So shall your descendants be.” 19 Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; 20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. 22 Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness. 23 Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, 24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 He who was delivered over because of our wrongdoings, and was raised because of our justification. – ROMANS 4:18-25*

- The opening of v. 18 gives us the nature of faith: to have faith is to believe “in hope against hope”: to hope and put our faith in something that we cannot see.
- When we think about it, we have no idea whether or not heaven is real, whether or not we will be raised at the end of time, how God is doing to accomplish all of that, etc. We simply believe. Why? Because “we are fully assured that what God has promised, He will be able to perform” (Romans 4:21).
- To live with that confidence and assurance—and to order our life around that end—is what faith looks like, and anyone who lives with that faith will experience exactly what God has promised!

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# APPLICATION: “SAVING FAITH”

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1. Paul’s statement that Abraham was “fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform” (Romans 4:21) is a picture of true faith: living in faith is believing that God will do what He says He will do.
2. One of the things that the Bible makes clear is that we will one day stand before God and receive rewards from Him for what we have done in this life—the ways that we have served God and resisted sin.
3. Many Christians, I find, “hedge their bets” in this life: although they want their reward from God at the end of time, they also want to have a “fun” life in the here and now.
4. Though I can’t be certain why people always do this, I think that part of it stems from a lack of faith: we don’t really believe (or know) if God is real and we will have to answer to Him at the end of time. And so, we want to “have our cake and eat it, too”: have a great, fun life here, but also have a “get out of hell free” card if indeed all of this is true.
5. To live a life of faith, however, is to live everything in light of that moment before God, and doing everything in this life to please Him above all else.
6. This would look like being generous with what God has given us; doing what we can to control lust in our eyes; practicing self-control; resisting overindulgence; being honest on our tax returns, etc.
7. In other words, if what the Bible teaches is true, and we really believe it, aligning ourselves with God’s Word comes before all else.
8. Therefore, we ask the question:

**Is there any area of your life that needs to change to bring it in alignment with God’s Word and to live by “faith” and not by “sight”?**

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# QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

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1. What was the greatest Birthday gift you ever received?<sup>1</sup>
2. Romans 3:21-26 is a dense section of Scripture. First read it in the NASB translation of the Bible (top of page 37 in this handout—this version is very literal to the original Greek Paul wrote in). Then read it again in the New Living Translation of the Bible (below—this version is more of a paraphrase). How does this translation aid in your understanding? What stands out to you as you read it?

*<sup>21</sup> But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. <sup>22</sup> We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. <sup>23</sup> For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.<sup>24</sup> Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. <sup>25</sup> For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, <sup>26</sup> for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he makes sinners right in his sight when they believe in Jesus. – ROMANS 3:21-26 NLT*

3. If someone were to ask you, “How do I become right with God?”, how would you answer them based on Romans 3:21-26? Similarly, if someone asked you, “Why did Jesus have to die to make us right with God?” how would you answer?
4. Read Romans 3:27-30. Why is “boasting” about our activities and achievements such a dangerous thing in God’s Kingdom? How do we personally guard against boasting?
5. Read Romans 4:9-12. In commenting on this passage, New Testament scholar N.T. Wright writes, “The church today, and in every generation, must make sure the door is wide enough open to let in people of every ethnic group, every type of family, every geographical region, every sort of moral (or immoral) background. But it must also make sure that the defining characteristic of the membership of this multiethnic family remains firmly stated and adhered to: the faith that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead.” How can the church keep this balance and do so in the right spirit?
6. Read Romans 4:18-25. Here Paul talks about the nature of Abraham’s faith. What stands out to you about the type of faith Abraham had? Is there an area of your life where you need to have faith like Abraham had?
7. Is there any area of your life that needs to change to bring it in alignment with God’s Word and to live by “faith” and not by “sight”?

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<sup>1</sup> Some questions in this section adapted from N.T. Wright, *Romans* (N.T. Wright Bible Studies for Everyone).