

HOW TO GET RIGHT WITH GOD

Romans 3:21-31

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Today we are going to study a very important passage in the Bible. Commentator Leon Morris says this passage (specifically Rm 3:21-26) “is possibly the most important single paragraph ever written.” In other words, we may be looking at the most important paragraph in all of human literature in the history of the world!
2. The theme of Romans is the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ (Rm 1:16-17). To explain the gospel, Paul began by devoting a significant amount of space to the problem – man’s desperate need for salvation from sin. In Romans 3:9-20, Paul said that all are sinners, all are subject to God’s judgment, and no one can save himself. That’s the bad news. Now Paul gets to the good news. In our passage today, Paul is going to show that God has provided a way for us get right with Him – to be saved from sin.

II. TEXT: Romans 3:21-31

21 But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets. 22 The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe, since there is no distinction. 23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; 24 they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. 25 God presented him as the mercy seat, by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed. 26 God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be just and justify the one who has faith in Jesus.

27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By one of works? No, on the contrary, by a law of faith. 28 For we conclude 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 one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the

uncircumcised through faith. 31 Do we then nullify the law through faith? Absolutely not! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

1. In this passage Paul explains five facts about God's way to get right with Him.

III. GOD'S WAY TO GET RIGHT

1. It is apart from the law.

- i. **Romans 3:21** But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, attested by the Law and the Prophets.
- ii. Notice the phrase "the righteousness God has been revealed."
 1. This is not talking about God's virtue of righteousness and justice.
 2. It is talking about a right standing with God, a right status with God.
 3. We are sinners under judgment, but now, a way to have a right standing with God, a right status with God, a right relationship with God, has been revealed.
- iii. How has it been revealed? Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- iv. Notice that this way of getting right with God is "apart from the law."
 1. By the law, Paul commandment-keeping.
 2. This new way of getting right with God is not about earning your way to heaven, or earning God's favor by meticulous rule-keeping.
 3. That's good news because previously Paul has said...
 - a. We've all broken God's laws. In fact, Paul made it clear that we are all serial law-breakers. In Romans 3:9-18 Paul said the problem is not just that you aren't perfect, but that you are bad. In God's eyes, you aren't a good person.
 - b. As well, in Romans 3:20 Paul said that no one can be made right with God by law-keeping because the more you learn about God's law, the more you discover how sinful you are. If you think you are a good person, it's only because you don't understand

God's standard. You must be comparing yourself to other people and not the law of God.

- c. So this is really good news. Now, in Jesus Christ, a new way to be right with God has been revealed, and it has nothing to do with rule-keeping.
- v. Paul makes this point in several different ways in this passage.
 1. He says it directly:
 - a. **Romans 3:21** "apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed."
 - b. **Romans 3:28** "For we conclude that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law."
 2. The term "the righteousness of God" in verse 21 can also be translated "a righteousness from God," or a "right standing with God that God gives." It is given by God, not earned by man.
 3. **Romans 3:24** "they are justified freely by his grace..."
 - a. The word freely means that it is a gift that is not earned or deserved. The word "grace" means it is an act of God's unmerited favor of God toward people.
 4. **Romans 3:27** Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law?, By one of works? No, on the contrary, by a law of faith."
 - a. "Boasting" is the act of taking credit for your salvation, either in part or in whole. It is claiming that you have right standing with God because of your own effort to keep God's rules.
 - b. Paul asks, in light of what he has already said, "Where, then is boasting? It is excluded." He uses the strongest language that can be translated, "Once for all boasting has been banished (Hendriksen)," or "The possibility of boasting is excluded once and for all (Morris)." In other words, this new way of getting right with God leaves no room for boasting. You can't take any credit whatsoever for your salvation. It is all of God and none of you.

vi. If the way to get right with God is apart from the law, then how?

2. It is received by faith.

- i. **Romans 3:22** The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe, since there is no distinction.
- ii. "The righteousness of God."
 1. Or right standing with God, or right status with God...
- iii. "is through faith in Jesus Christ."
 1. To get right with God, you need to put your faith in Jesus; you must believe in Jesus.
 2. Paul repeats this over and over in this passage:
 - a. **Romans 3:22** The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe
 - b. **Romans 3:25** God presented him as the mercy seat, by his blood, through faith
 - c. **Romans 3:26** so that he would be just and justify the one who has faith in Jesus.
 - d. **Romans 3:28** For we conclude that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.
 - e. **Romans 3:30** since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.
 3. Paul is here simply elaborating on the theme of the book of Romans that he stated in the first chapter.
 - a. **Romans 1:16-17** 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.
- iv. What does it mean to put your faith in Jesus? There are three elements to saving faith.
 1. Noticia (knowledge): You must understand the gospel. You are a sinner headed for eternal destruction, and you can't save yourself. But God sent Jesus to die and pay for your

sins on the cross. If you believe in Jesus, God will forgive you and restore you to a right relationship with Him.

2. Ascensus (assent): You must agree that the gospel is indeed true.
3. Fiducia (trust and surrender): You must repent of self-righteousness and self-rule. Self-righteousness: You must switch from “Do” to “Done.” Stop trusting in what you can do for God, and starting trusting only in what Christ has done for you. Self-rule: Abdicate the throne of your life to Jesus and let Him be in charge.

3. It achieves justification, redemption, and propitiation.

- i. Next, Paul says that God’s way to get right achieves three things: Justification, redemption, and propitiation.
- ii. Justification:
 1. **Romans 3:24** they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
 2. Paul uses the term “justification” several times in this passage.
 - a. **Romans 3:26** God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be just and justify the one who has faith in Jesus.
 - b. **Romans 3:28** For we conclude that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.
 - c. **Romans 3:30** since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.
 3. When you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you are justified.
 4. What does that word mean?
 5. God declares you legally righteous in His sight.
 6. It is a legal term; a forensic term. It is term in a court of law. It means to acquit. It is the equivalent of a judge saying, “Not guilty.” It is the opposite of condemnation, or declaring you guilty.
 7. Remember the problem: you are a sinner, subject to judgment, unable to save yourself.

8. But when you put your faith in Jesus Christ, God acquits you; He declares you righteous. He says, "Not guilty," He gives you right standing, right status with Him.
9. Justification has implications for there here and now, and the hereafter. In the here and now, justification means that instead of treating you like an enemy, now God treats you like a beloved child. And in the hereafter, it means that on judgment day, God will not punish you for your sins but will welcome you into an eternal home.
10. I've heard people say that justification means that when God looks at you, he doesn't see your sin, but Christ's righteousness. That always confused me because God can see everything, and when I sin, the Bible says that God will discipline me – if I am a child of God. Justification doesn't mean that God no longer sees your sin; it means that legally He doesn't count it against you because He counts it against Christ. It means that your status has changed from enemy to friend and child of God. He will discipline for your sin, but He will never cast you off and send you to hell.
11. God's way of making you right with Him also achieves redemption.

iii. Redemption.

1. **Romans 3:24** they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.
2. "Redemption" means setting someone free through the payment of a ransom.
3. Back in those days, a prisoner of war and slaves could be redeemed, or set free by the payment of a ransom.
4. Paul has already stated that the whole world is under sin (Rm 3:9). They are under sin's power or dominion. You are a slave to sin; a prisoner to sin. You are stuck in sin because you are subject to judgment and cannot save yourself. But God provided a way for us to be redeemed.

5. **Mark 10:45** For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
6. A ransom is the payment required for release. When God sent Jesus to die for your sins, His death was like a ransom that paid for your release. When you put your faith in Jesus, God applies the ransom of Christ's death to your sins, and sets you free from the penalty of sin.
7. Redemption means through Christ's death you are set free from the penalty of sin.
8. And God's way of making you right with Him also achieves propitiation.

iv. Propitiation.

1. **Romans 3:25-26** 25 God presented him as the mercy seat, by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed. 26 God presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so that he would be just and justify the one who has faith in Jesus.
2. First, the Greek word for "mercy seat" is better translated propitiation. It can be translated "mercy seat" (Heb 9:5), but most commentators agree the word should be propitiation. And that is how several Bible versions translate it.
 - a. ESV: whom God put forward as a propitiation
 - b. KJV: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation
 - c. NASB: whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation
 - d. HCSB: God presented Him as a propitiation
 - e. In fact, the CSB has a footnote that says that "mercy seat" can also be translated "propitiation."
3. Propitiation is not a word we often use today, so what does it mean? It means the removal of wrath; the satisfying of wrath; the quenching of wrath.
4. The Bible says that sinners are under the wrath of God (Rm 1:18). God's wrath is his hatred of sin and his determination

to punish it. But when Jesus died on the cross, He removed God's wrath against us. How? He absorbed God's wrath upon Himself. God's wrath against you was poured out fully upon Jesus, so not it is removed, satisfied, quenched against you.

5. Now, notice that it says twice in this passage that God presented Christ as a propitiation to demonstrate God's righteousness, "because in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed." When God saved you, He passed over all the sins that you committed. I love the phrase "passed over." It reminds me of the story in Exodus when the death angel passed over the homes that had the blood of the lamb on their door frame. When you put your faith in Jesus, God passed over your sins, not holding it against you. But how is that just? How is that fair? How is that righteous? The righteousness of God here stands for God's attribute of justice and righteousness. How is it just for a Judge to acquit the guilty?
6. **Proverbs 17:15** Acquitting the guilty and condemning the just — both are detestable to the LORD.
7. **Exodus 23:7** I will not justify the guilty.
8. The Bible says that acquitting or justifying the guilty is wrong. Can you imagine if someone murdered your friend, and the judge let them go free? How is it just for God let you go free? That's where propitiation comes in to play. Through propitiation, God can be just and justify the one who has faith in Christ. How? Because doesn't just let sin go unpunished. Through the cross God carried out the full penalty of sin against the world. The wrath of God was fully poured on Jesus. So now, He can forgive us look upon us with favor.
9. So God's way of getting right with Him achieves justification, redemption, and propitiation.
- v. There is one more fact about God's way of getting right with Him.

4. It upholds the law.

- i. **Romans 3:31** Do we then nullify the law through faith? Absolutely not! On the contrary, we uphold the law.
- ii. Throughout this passage Paul has been stressing the idea that the way to get right with God is by faith, not by works. It's not by keeping the law. But Paul knows that this doctrine might tempt some to adopt antinomianism. Antinomianism means "against law." It is the idea that since we are saved by faith and not by law-keeping, then God's law is obsolete. It is no longer necessary. We can just sin all we want.
- iii. Without elaborating (he will do that in Romans 6), Paul simply says, "Absolutely not! On the contrary, we uphold the law."
- iv. If the gospel says that salvation is apart from the law, then how does it uphold the law? In several ways.
 1. **Genesis 15:6** Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.
 2. **Habakkuk 2:4** But the righteous one will live by his faith.
- vi. Second, the gospel is the answer to the law. The law was never meant to save; it was intended to teach us how much we need a Savior. The purpose of the law is to teach us how sinful we are. This is called the pedagogical use of the law. Pedagogy means teaching. **Martin Luther** said it is "the principal purpose of the law, and its most valuable contribution."
 1. **Romans 3:20** because the knowledge of sin comes through the law.
- vii. Third, Christians strive to keep God's moral law out of gratitude to God. Just because we are not saved by law-keeping doesn't mean law-keeping is unimportant. The law not only shows us we are sinful, but it teaches us how to please God, and now God has lovingly saved us through the sacrificial death of Christ, out of gratitude we strive to please Him.

1. **Galatians 5:13** “For you were called to be free, brothers and sisters; only don’t use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.”
2. God has redeemed us not only from the penalty for sin, but from the power of sin. His will for us is to walk in obedience to His moral commands.
3. We are not saved by good works, but we are saved unto good works. God saved us not so we could live in sin, but so that we could honor and serve Him.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. Getting right with God is man’s deepest need. You are under sin, subject to judgment, and can’t save yourself. How can you be made right with God? God has provided a way. It is apart from the law. It is received by faith. It achieves justification, redemption, and propitiation. And it upholds the law.
2. Are you right with God? If you died today, would you go to heaven? When you stand before God on the day of judgment, will He say, “Not guilty”?
3. How can you get right with God? Three easy steps. Admit your need for a Savior. Believe in Jesus as your Savior. Call on Jesus to save from the penalty and power of sin, handing Him the steering wheel of your life.