

GOD'S PROVISION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH 3:21 - 5:21

In verse 21 Paul begins the second major division of his letter to the Romans. It extends through 5:21 and deals with God's provision of righteousness or justification by faith. It is provided (3:21-31); it is illustrated in the life of Abraham (4:1-25); it produces peace, joy, and hope (5:1-11); and it overcomes the effects of Adam's disobedience (5:12-21).

3:21-31. Righteousness Provided by Faith

The righteousness of God apart from the law is made known (v. 21). It had been mentioned throughout the Old Testament (v. 21); and it is made available to all by faith in Christ and is, in fact, given to all who believe (v. 22). It is needed by all because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (v. 23). This righteousness of God is received freely by His grace (v. 24) and comes through the redemption that is in Christ (v. 24). When Christ died for sin on the cross, He not only secured the release of believers from slavery to sin (v. 24), but He also satisfied the wrath of God directed against the individual sinner because of his sin (v. 25). Furthermore, the cross not only establishes the righteousness of God in forgiving sin prior to the cross, but also provides righteousness for the one who believes in Jesus in the present (v. 26). Faith, thus, excludes boasting because it involves no merit on the part of the individual (v. 27). Therefore, Paul concludes that righteousness is obtained by faith apart from keeping the law (v. 28). However, far from making the law powerless, righteousness by faith renders the law valid (vv. 29-31).

(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.

(31) Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

3:21

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. Man lacks righteousness before God, but God has made provision for him. **But** introduces a statement in mild contrast to the thought in verse 20 that by deeds of the law no flesh will be declared righteous in the sight of God. **Now** is emphatic. Something has changed. **The righteousness of God** is *God's righteousness*. It belongs to Him and it comes from Him. *The* does not appear before *righteousness* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *righteousness*. **Without the law** is *apart from law*. Although the reference is to

Romans 3

the Mosaic law, the righteousness of God is also apart from any other kind of law as well. *The* does not appear before *law* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *law*. *Without law* has been placed in a position of emphasis in the Greek text, which reads literally, *But now, without law God's righteousness is manifested*. **Is manifested** means *has been revealed, has been made known, or has been shown*. Its tense indicates that its action has been completed in the past with its result continuing on, i.e. the righteousness of God was revealed in the past, and it remains revealed for all to see. **Being witnessed** is a participle used adverbially modifying *is manifested* indicating an attendant, accompanying, or additional circumstance or fact in addition to *is manifested*. Its ongoing action occurred at the same time as the action of *is manifested*. *Being witnessed* is understood in the sense of *and is being declared, and is being confirmed, and is being witnessed, or and is having witness borne*. **By the law and the prophets** refers specifically to the Old Testament Scriptures and includes all of it. The Hebrew Old Testament had three divisions: the law, the writings, and the prophets. The first and third divisions are specifically mentioned here, and there is no doubt that the middle division is included as well. God has made known His righteousness which had been mentioned throughout the Old Testament, and the Old Testament Scriptures are still giving testimony (or bearing witness) to it.

3:22

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. Verse 22 is in apposition to *righteousness* in verse 21 and is introduced by **even**, which is emphatic and understood in the sense of *indeed* or *in fact*. It is adding additional truth regarding God's righteousness. **The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ** makes specific *the righteousness of God without the law* from verse 21. It is another way of saying the same thing. **The righteousness of God** is *God's righteousness*. As indicated by the italics, **which is** has been supplied by the translators in reference to *the righteousness*

of God. **By faith** is *through faith* (i.e. *belief* or *trust*). *The* does not appear before *righteousness* or before *faith* in the Greek text in order to emphasize their respective qualities as *righteousness* and as *faith, belief, or trust*. **Of Jesus Christ** indicates that the object of this faith is Jesus Christ. Since faith is only as good as the object in which it is placed, faith, which has Christ as its object, will prove to be very valuable. It means *faith in Jesus Christ* or *faith placed in Jesus Christ*. **Unto all . . . them that believe** indicates that the righteousness of God is available for all who believe in Jesus. Believing is a prerequisite for obtaining salvation. **And upon all them that believe** indicates that salvation is not only *available* for all who believe; it is also *given* to all who believe. **For there is no difference** indicates that there is *no distinction* between the group represented by *unto all . . . them that believe* and the group represented by *upon all them that believe*. *The* does not appear before *difference* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *difference* or *distinction*. *Is no* has been placed in a position of emphasis in the Greek text, which reads literally, *For is not difference (or distinction), or Does not exist difference (or distinction)*. No distinction exists between them. They are exactly the same group of individuals, and they must all come to God on exactly the same grounds. All, whether Jews or Gentiles, have sinned. All who exercise faith in Jesus Christ, whether Jews or Gentiles, will obtain this righteousness of God. All, whether Jews or Gentiles, have come short of the glory of God. All who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles, are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ.

3:23

For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God is a reason there is no difference. **For** is understood in the sense of *because*. **All have sinned** is *all sinned*, and it has been translated in a way which emphasizes the result of its action. It indicates that all persons without exception have committed sin. **And come short of** is *and are lacking*. Its present tense indicates continuing action. What all are lacking is **the glory of God**. **The glory of God** is *God's glory* or *the glory which*

Romans 3

belongs to God. God is holy; and a certain glory, therefore, belongs to Him. Man is not holy because of sin; and, therefore, he is lacking this glory which is characteristic of God. **Glory** is understood in the sense of *majesty, magnificence, or splendor.*

3:24

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. **Being justified** is a participle, but what it is to be connected with is not as clear as one might hope. It seems best to connect it with *unto all and upon all them that believe* in verse 22. All of those who believe in Jesus are being justified freely by his grace. This is necessary because all the ones being justified freely have committed sin, thereby necessitating this justification by faith. The tense of *being justified* indicates continuing or repeated action. One by one as each person believes the gospel, he is justified. Hence, believers as a group are continually being justified even though each believer is justified only one time. *Being justified* means *being declared righteous*. Not only will a believer be declared righteous, but he will also be treated as righteous from then on. God the Father is pictured as a judge before whom each believer appears. He renders His verdict; and in the case of each believer, He declares this believer to be righteous or just. Although the believer is not actually righteous because he still has sin in his life, God treats him as righteous because he has, by faith in Christ, accepted God's provision of righteousness. Hence, he is said to be justified. He is not declared innocent because he is not innocent; he has sinned. He is also not merely acquitted because this would suggest that he was not guilty in the first place, when in fact he was guilty. Nor is he condemned, which would be what he really deserves. He is justified or declared righteous by an omniscient God Who knows all about him. **Freely** is used in the sense of *as a gift, without payment, or gratis*. **By his grace** indicates the means by which this justification comes to pass. It is by means of the grace of God which is unmerited or undeserved.

Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus indicates the channel through which God extended His grace to the sinner. **Redemption**

originally meant the buying back of a slave or captive, making him free by payment of a ransom. It is used in the New Testament of the release from slavery to sin by the payment of the blood of Christ as a ransom for sin. It is not just any redemption; it is specifically **the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.** **In Christ Jesus** means the redemption that is found in the person and work of Christ Jesus.

3:25

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. **Whom** is a reference to Christ. **God hath set forth** means *God has displayed publicly* and refers to the crucifixion. **To be a propitiation** is used in the sense of *as a propitiation*. **Propitiation** means *that which propitiates* or *that which expiates*. It means that the wrath of God which had been directed toward the sinner has been removed. The believer thus stands forgiven and at peace with God. *The* does not appear before *propitiation* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *propitiation*. The same word translated *propitiation* in this verse is used to translate *mercy seat* in Leviticus 16:14 in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It refers to the cover of the ark of the covenant. **Through faith in his blood** indicates how one receives this propitiation. It is given to those who exercise faith in what the Bible teaches regarding the blood of Christ which was shed in order to atone for sin. **To declare his righteousness**, where **his** refers to God the Father, is literally *a proof (or sign) of his righteousness*. *The* does not appear before *proof* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *proof* or *sign*. **For the remission of sins that are past** refers to God's act in forgiving sins which were committed prior to the time of the actual crucifixion. **For** is *because of* or *on account of*. **Remission** is *letting go unpunished* or *passing over*. **Sins that are past** is *the sins (or transgressions) that have happened before*. The punishment demanded as a payment for sin was not fulfilled until the crucifixion. God temporarily overlooked *the sins that are past* knowing that Christ would eventually come and die

Romans 3

for sin. Had Christ not eventually come, God would not have been righteous in failing to punish sin. **Through the forbearance of God** is *in the forbearance of God* where **forbearance** means *tolerance*.

3:26

To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness is a reaffirmation of what Paul has written in the previous verse for the sake of emphasis and explanation. To declare is *for* (or *for the purpose of*) a proof (or a demonstration). *The* does not appear before *proof* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *proof* or *demonstration*. As indicated by the italics, *I say* has been supplied by the translators. At this time is *at* (or *in*) the present time and refers to the time of the cross, the time when God . . . set forth Christ (to be) a propitiation through faith in his blood. What He (i.e. God the Father) was declaring, demonstrating, or proving was his righteousness. Righteousness refers to God's character. It is one of *uprightness* in His judicial correctness. He is perfect in every way. There are no flaws in His character. The reason God set forth Christ to be a propitiation through faith in His blood is that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. That may be understood as showing purpose in the sense of *in order that* or *for the purpose that*, or it may be understood as showing intended result in the sense of *so that* or *with the result that*. He might be just, where he is God the Father, is *He might be righteous*. God would not have been righteous if He had overlooked sin forever. His holiness required that He punish sin, and He merely delayed the punishment until the time of the crucifixion. And connects *just* with *the justifier*. His eventual punishing of sin in Christ not only enabled God the Father to be righteous; it also enabled Him to be the justifier of the one who places his trust in Jesus. God the Father, and no one else, is *the One Who justifies*. To *justify* is a *judicial declaration of righteousness*. *The* does not appear before *justifier* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as

justifier. Not everyone is justified, however. It is only **him which believeth in Jesus**, literally *the one of faith* (i.e. *belief* or *trust*) in (i.e. *placed in*) *Jesus*. *The* does not appear before *faith* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *faith*, *belief*, or *trust*. Just as everyone who, for his salvation, has placed his faith in Christ's atonement for the sins of all humanity has been justified or declared righteous, everyone who has not believed in Jesus has not been justified or declared righteous.

3:27

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Verse 27 is an inference drawn from the fact that God has declared the one who believes in Jesus to be righteous. Then is understood in the sense of *therefore*, *consequently*, *accordingly*, or *so*. Where is boasting? reminds the reader that, if righteousness were obtained by means of the works of the law, there might be some room for boasting. However, since righteousness comes only by faith and is free, there is no room whatsoever for boasting. Boasting suggests *taking pride in something*. It is excluded (i.e. *it is shut out*) answers the question. The tense of *is excluded* indicates action which was completed as a whole in the past in the sense of *it was excluded* or *it was shut out*. It has been translated in a way which emphasizes the result of its action. Boasting was excluded by God by His provision of salvation by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Another question is raised and answered: by what law? of works? Nay. By what law? is *through what sort* (or *kind*) of law (or legal code)? *The* does not appear before *law* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *law* or *legal code*. It was not through any kind of law, the Mosaic law or any other law, that boasting was excluded. Of works suggests *through works*, *through deeds*, *through actions*, or *through accomplishments*, or through anything anyone could do to earn his salvation. Boasting was not excluded by works. *The* does not appear before *works* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *works*, *deeds*, *actions*, or *accomplishments*. Nay is *no* or *by no means*. It is a strengthened form of *not*. But

Romans 3

introduces a statement in strong contrast to the questions *by what law?* and *of works?* Rather, boasting was excluded **by the law** (i.e. *the principle* or *system*) **of faith** (i.e. *belief* or *trust*). **Faith** is the *law* (i.e. *principle* or *system*) which has excluded boasting by believers who have been declared righteous by God. *The* does not appear before *law* or before *faith* in the Greek text in order to emphasize their respective qualities as *law*, *principle*, or *system* and as *faith*, *belief*, or *trust*. Self did not and could not earn salvation in any way and, therefore, provided no reason for boasting.

3:28

Verse 28 summarizes verses 21-27 by stating, **Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.** **Therefore** is the same word translated *then* in verse 27. It indicates that an inference is being drawn and is understood in the sense of *accordingly*, *consequently*, *then*, or *so*. **We conclude that**, where **we** is Paul, is *we think that*, *we believe that*, or *we are of the opinion that*. **A man** is the generic term for *human being* and may refer to a female or a male. It is used in the sense of *man* or *humanity*. *The* does not appear before *man* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *man*, *human being*, or *humanity*. **Is justified** indicates that God the Father is declaring him to be righteous. **By faith** is *by means of faith*, *belief*, or *trust*. *By faith* and *is justified* have been placed in positions of emphasis in the Greek text, which reads literally, *We believe that by faith is justified man*. *The* does not appear before *faith* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *faith*, *belief*, or *trust*. **Without the deeds of the law** means *apart from the deeds of the law*. **Deeds** is *works*, *actions*, or *accomplishments*. **Law** suggests a *legal code*. *The* does not appear before *deeds* or before *law* in the Greek text in order to emphasize their respective qualities as *deeds*, *works*, *actions*, or *accomplishments* and as *law* or *legal code*. Keeping the law, specifically the Mosaic law, will save no one because no one has kept the law perfectly. Believing in Christ is the only means of salvation by which anyone may be saved, and all who exercise faith in Christ will be saved.

3:29

Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also. In verse 29 Paul asks two questions and then answers them. First, **Is he the God of the Jews only?** As indicated by the italics, *is he*, where *he* refers to God the Father, has been supplied by the translators. They might instead have supplied *is God*. **The God of the Jews only** implies *the God only of Jews*, which would exclude Gentiles. *Of the Jews* has been placed in a position of emphasis in the Greek text, which reads literally, *Of Jews (is He) the God only?* Paul answers this first question with his second question and his answer to his second question, **Is he not also of the Gentiles?** The structure of this second question anticipates a positive answer. It is understood in the sense of *He is also (the God) of the Gentiles, is He not? Yes, He is*. Lest there be any doubt, Paul answers further, **Yes, of the Gentiles also.** Although the Jews may have thought so, God is not the God of Jews exclusively. He is the God of Gentiles as well. *The* does not appear before *Jews* or before either use of *Gentiles* in the Greek text in order to emphasize their respective qualities as *Jews* and as *Gentiles*, *pagans*, or *heathen*.

3:30

Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Verse 30 provides the reason God is not only the God of the Jews but also the God of the Gentiles. **Seeing** is a conjunction which is used in the sense of *since indeed*, i.e. *in view of the fact that*. **It is one God** is *one is God* and refers to God the Father. *One* has been placed in a position of emphasis in the Greek text, which reads literally, *one is God*. As indicated by the italics, *it is* has been supplied by the translators. *One* is the number *one* rather than a shortened form of *someone*. **Which** is a reference to God and is understood in the sense of *Who*. **Shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith** indicates that faith is the means by which both the circumcision (i.e. the Jews) and the uncircumcision (i.e. the Gentiles) will be justified. **Shall justify** is *will*

declare righteous. **The circumcision** refers to Jews. *The* does not appear before *circumcision* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *circumcision*. **By faith** indicates the means by which God will justify Jews or declare Jews to be righteous. **By** is *by reason of, as a result of, or because of*. **Faith** is *belief or trust*. *The* does not appear before *faith* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *faith, belief, or trust*. **And the uncircumcision** is *and uncircumcision*, which represents non-Jews or Gentiles. *The* does not appear before *uncircumcision* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *uncircumcision*. **Through faith** is literally *through the faith*. **Through** is *via* and indicates the efficient cause which brings about the justification of Gentiles. The efficient cause is **faith** (i.e. *belief or trust*) in Jesus Christ's death on the cross and subsequent resurrection from the dead. *The*, which appears before *faith* in the Greek text, may be intended to particularize *faith* as referring to the faith exercised by Jews in the previous phrase, or to the particular faith placed in Jesus Christ as God's propitiation for their sins. Both possibilities are true. It is also possible that *the* before *faith* may be understood in a possessive sense as *their faith*. There are not two or more Gods involved who might justify people differently. There is only one God, and He will justify both Jews and Gentiles in exactly the same way. This way is by faith.

3:31

Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law. What effect does justification by faith have upon the law? Paul is probably anticipating this question on the part of some Jew. He had undoubtedly been asked this question on other occasions. **Then** introduces an inference drawn from the fact that Jews and Gentiles are both saved by faith. *Then* is understood in the sense of *therefore, consequently, accordingly, or so*. **Do we . . . make void?** is *are we invalidating?, are we making ineffective?, or are we making powerless?* **The law** refers to the Mosaic law. *The* does not appear before *law* in the Greek

text in order to emphasize its quality as *law*. *Law* has been placed in a position of emphasis in the Greek text, which reads literally, *Law, therefore, are we invalidating?* **Through faith** is the identical phrase found in verse 30. Here also, **through** is *via* and indicates the efficient cause which brings about the justification of those who believe. The efficient cause is **faith** (i.e. *belief or trust*) in Jesus Christ's death on the cross and His subsequent resurrection from the dead.

Paul's answer to *do we then make void the law through faith?* begins with **God forbid**. It is a paraphrase of a very strong negative reply to Paul's question. Literally translated, *God forbid* is *may it never be, may it never happen, or may it never come to pass*; and it is used in the sense of *absolutely not!, by no means!, or perish the thought!* It expresses utter abhorrence at the very idea. **Yea** is an emphatic translation of a word ordinarily translated *but*. It may be understood in the sense of *rather* in this verse. **We establish the law** continues Paul's answer to the question. **We establish** is literally *we are putting, we are placing, or we are setting*. When used figuratively as in this verse, it is variously rendered by *we are reinforcing its validity, we are upholding, we are maintaining, or we are validating*. **The law** refers to the Mosaic law. *Law* has been placed in a position of emphasis in the Greek text, which reads literally, *But (or rather) law we are upholding*. *The* does not appear before *law* in the Greek text in order to emphasize its quality as *law*. Far from rendering the law ineffective, faith validates it. The one attempting to earn his salvation by his good deeds will learn to his dismay that he has not fulfilled the law. By contrast the one who is justified by faith has realized that he is a sinner because the law has shown him that he is not perfect before God. He thus establishes the law in its proper use by acknowledging that he stands justly condemned before a holy God. He also recognizes that the demands of the law have been fulfilled by Christ's death on the cross for sin. Christ also established the law by obeying it perfectly and by enduring its penalty in His death upon the cross. When He shouted triumphantly, *It is finished*, the just demands of the law had been forever satisfied.