

(Rocky – Lesson 5 Handout – 02/16/2025) **JUSTIFICATION: BY GRACE-ALONE THROUGH FAITH-ALONE IN CHRIST-ALONE** – (Romans 3:21-31)

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteem Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities, and the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes, we are healed – Isaiah 53:4-5.

*(But) **THE LORD** was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief. When He makes His soul a guilt offering, He will see his (spiritual) offspring; He will prolong His days and the delight of **THE LORD** will prosper in His hand. Out of the anguish of His soul, He will see and be satisfied. By this knowledge of **THE RIGHTEOUS ONE, MY SERVANT** will **JUSTIFY** the many, and He will bear their iniquities – Isaiah 53:10-11.*

Having established in **ROMANS 3:1-20** THE UNIVERSALITY OF SIN AMONG ALL MEMBERS THE HUMAN RACE, in the final verses of **ROMANS CHAPTER 3**, PAUL *reintroduces* A THEME he began in CHAPTER ONE – viz., that in spite of THE FALLEN CONDITION OF MANKIND, God has provided A WAY OF SALVATION that He offers to us – NOT on the basis of the Mosaic Law, or any other kind of law code, or any system of works-righteousness – BUT solely by **GRACE-ALONE** through **FAITH-ALONE** in **CHRIST-ALONE**. THIS THEME WILL BE EMPHASIZED throughout the more extended section of **ROMANS 3:21 – 5:21**.

THIS THEME IS HIGHLIGHTED in the following chapters where PAUL sets forth **FIVE BIG IDEAS** that for now, I simply will cite before we treat them individually over the course of today's lesson.

PAUL'S FIVE BIG IDEAS THAT OUTLINE THE LATTER-HALF OF ROMANS CHAPTER THREE:

- (1)** That **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD** is qualitatively different from any righteousness that can be earned on the basis of human merit ...
- (2)** That **JUSTIFICATION** is A JUDICIAL DECREE by which **GOD DECLARES SINNERS TO BE RIGHTEOUS ON THE BASIS OF CHRIST'S DEATH ON THE CROSS**, not because of anything man can do to earn it ...
- (3)** That **THE FREE GIFT OF JUSTIFICATION** is attained **BY GRACE-ALONE THROUGH FAITH-ALONE IN CHRIST-ALONE** ...
- (4)** That this **GIFT** is a product of **GOD'S IMMEASURABLE GRACE**, not man's efforts, and ...
- (5)** Though **SALVATION** cannot be attained by keeping **THE MOSAIC LAW**, still the Law has value when understood in its proper context ...

DEFINITIONS OF PERTINENT THEOLOGICAL TERMS USED IN TODAY'S PASSAGE:

JUST / JUSTIFICATION – (**δικαίωω** – pronounced *dikaiōō* = 'to justify, to declare someone righteous') – We have defined this term already; in our passage it means, 'to declare someone righteous.'

SIN – (**ἁμαρτάνω** (pronounced – *hamartánō* = 'to commit sin') – This term is commonly translated 'to sin' in the New Testament. Its root meaning is 'to miss the mark' or 'to fall short.'

*[Think of an archer shooting an arrow at a target. Missing a target usually results in disqualification, and that is the sense in which we should understand this term.] Sinners consistently 'miss the mark' by failing to meet God's standard of Absolute Righteousness, disobeying His commandments, and failing to perform with regard to His revealed will. *This term calls attention to human imperfection and underscores our need for redemption.**

REDEMPTION – (*ἀπολύτρωσις* – pronounced *apolútrōsis* = ‘**redemption**’) – This word typically carries the idea of *liberation* or *deliverance* by means of ‘*the payment of a ransom.*’ The *result* of *redemption* is *deliverance* from the bondage of sin, and *the restoration* of a broken relationship with God. The means by which redemption occurs is *the substitutionary death of Christ on the Cross.* By the Cross sinners are *liberated* and *restored* to a pre-fall relationship with God.

PROPI TIATION – (*ἱλασμός* – pronounced *hilasmós* = ‘**propitiation, appeasement**’) – This word appears in **ROMANS 3:25** and a derivative of it (*ἱλαστήριον* – pronounced *hilastérion*) appears in **HEBREWS 9:5** where it is translated ‘**MERCY SEAT**’ (*the lid of THE ARK OF THE COVENANT on which the High Priest, once per year on YOM KIPPUR, would sprinkle the blood of THE PASSOVER LAMB.*)

Since the word ‘*propitiation*’ can mean ‘*appeasement,*’ it is a fair question to ask why so many Bible translators chose this less common term rather than simply saying: “*Whom God chose as an appeasement in His blood through faith.*”

The word ‘*propitiation*’ is a Latin derivative, and though in some cases ‘*appeasement*’ is a legitimate translation, it does not carry the full weight of the Latin term ‘*propitiare*’ that also means ‘*atonement.*’ The translators wanted to *avoid* the idea that the death of CHRIST was simply ‘*the pacifying of an angry deity,*’ which was a common, pagan understanding of sacrifice – (*They wanted to avoid the ‘THROW THE VIRGIN INTO THE VOLCANO’ imagery.*)

Propitiation, on the other hand, carries the sense of *a Righteous God’s Wrath being justly satisfied through a substitutionary sacrifice* – which fits with **ROMANS 5:8-9.** *Theologically speaking, God’s wrath is not like human anger; it is a righteous response to sin demanded by His Absolute Righteousness.* Propitiation reflects God’s initiative in dealing with sin – and it is more precise than simply pacifying an angry god.

THE NIV, which is not my favorite translation, in this case renders this verse, “*God presented Christ as ‘a sacrifice of atonement’ (*ἱλαστήριον*) through the shedding of blood, to be received by faith*” – and though this is not the best translation, it is a better rendering of *the idea* expressed by the Greek term.

PAUL used the term propitiation to describe JESUS CHRIST whom God sent as an atoning sacrifice for sins. *Specifically, THE CROSS satisfied GOD’S PERFECT JUSTICE and turned away GOD’S WRATH from mankind, exacting it instead against JESUS CHRIST on the Cross.* In the Hebrews passage, the reference to ‘**THE MERCY SEAT**’ links the two testaments highlighting JESUS as the ultimate fulfillment of the Mosaic Sacrificial System.

EXPANDING PAUL’S FIVE BIG IDEAS FROM ROMANS CHAPTER THREE:

(1) THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD is *qualitatively different* from any righteousness that can be earned on the basis of human merit ... So it is important to understand what PAUL means by ‘**THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.**’

GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS A DIVINE ATTRIBUTE. As such, it is **AN ABSOLUTE QUALITY OF GOD’S NATURE.** This is attested throughout Scripture and there are scores of verses that can be cited to support this contention, for example:

I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing CHRIST JESUS my Lord, for whom, I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain CHRIST, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in CHRIST, the righteousness which

*comes from God on the basis of faith – **Philippians 3:8-9** – [See also Matthew 5:20, Psalm 145:17, and Galatians 2:16.]*

(2) JUSTIFICATION IS A JUDICIAL DECREE by which **GOD DECLARES SINNERS TO BE RIGHTEOUS ON THE BASIS OF CHRIST'S DEATH ON THE CROSS**, not because of anything man can do to earn it.

Having shown the impossibility of earning righteousness by keeping the Law ... PAUL now explains that **the only righteousness that is *acceptable* to God** is a righteousness that *originates with God (not with man)* ... and it is a righteousness that is **imputed to the believer, NOT** on the basis of **MERIT**, but on the basis of **GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST**. So when PAUL refers to **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD**, he is referring to this specific kind of righteousness. It is **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD** that is part of His Divine Nature. It is **A RIGHTEOUSNESS** that reflects **GOD'S ABSOLUTE MORAL PERFECTION**, and it is **THE STANDARD** by which He governs the world and by which He will judge the world.

PAUL will define this further in **VERSES 25-26**, but here **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD** stands in contrast with **THE UNIVERSAL SIN** that characterizes the human race – and something has to give!

In the Scriptures, **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD** is both a reflection of His divine nature and the basis for His actions in history. God is perfectly just, and wholly consistent and fair in all that He does with respect to His creation. So in a primary sense – **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD** is one way we are able to understand who God is – but in another sense – **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD** is the standard against which fallen man is judged.

(3) THE GIFT OF JUSTIFICATION is attained by **FAITH-ALONE IN CHRIST-ALONE** ... The Scriptures teach that **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD** is revealed in the Gospel. Two very important verses we discussed in our first lesson on Romans assert this:

*For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes ... (then PAUL says): for in it **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IS REVEALED** – **Romans 1:16-17**.*

VERSE 21 also affirms this by the use of the Greek term **φανερῶ** – (*pronounced 'phanerōō' = 'to make manifest, to reveal'*) – The fact that God's Righteousness '*has been made manifest*,' confirms that the knowledge of God's Righteousness is not something man discovered through philosophy or any other intellectual endeavor; *rather*, this knowledge is the result of divine revelation. The verb **φανερῶ** is written in **THE PERFECT TENSE**, **THE MIDDLE VOICE**, and **THE INDICATIVE MOOD**, so let me explain what this means:

- **THE PERFECT TENSE** indicates a completed action with results that extend both into the present and into the future. *This suggests strongly that God's Righteousness has been revealed in the past and that it continues to be evident today.*
- **THE MIDDLE VOICE** identifies *God as solely responsible* for the manifestation of His own Righteousness, *and ...*
- **THE INDICATIVE MOOD** indicates that this manifestation occurred in space-and-time as an indisputable fact of history.

And notice, **GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS is 'apart from the Law.'** It is *independent* of THE MOSAIC LAW or any other law code man can devise. Instead of being *a source* of righteousness, THE MOSAIC LAW, along with the divine messages proclaimed by the Prophets, *bear witness* to God's Righteousness but *they do not produce* God's Righteousness.

At the end of VERSE 23 and in VERSE 24, PAUL contrasts THE HUMAN CONDITION AFTER THE FALL with JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.

(4) JUSTIFICATION is a product of **GOD'S IMMEASURABLE GRACE**, not man's efforts.

VERSES 27-28 – Approach the issue of the human response from the negative side of the question: 'What should man's response to the Cross **NOT** be'? Of course the presumed answer is: '**MAN'S RESPONSE SHOULD NOT BE PRIDE OR BOASTING.**'

This underscores the indisputable fact that **JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH** is **A NON-MERITORIOUS ACT** on man's part that eliminates any grounds for pride or self-righteousness.

JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH excludes the possibility of man taking credit for his own salvation. *We do not 'save ourselves' any more than the universe 'created itself.'* Both our salvation and the Creation require a Creator.

This is what the author of Hebrews meant when he wrote: "*Fixing our eyes on JESUS, the author and the finisher of our faith*" – *Hebrews 12:2^A*. With respect to saving faith, **JESUS** is called '**THE AUTHOR.**' This is in effect calling Him '**THE CREATOR OF OUR FAITH.**' He also is called, **THE FINISHER** of our faith, a way of saying '**JESUS** not only initiated our faith but He will bring it to the conclusion that is promised in **ROMANS CHAPTER EIGHT**:

For those whom He foreknew¹, He also predestined² to become conformed to the image of His Son³, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers. And these whom He predestined, He also called⁴; and these whom He called, He also justified⁵; and these whom He justified, He also glorified⁶ – Romans 8:29-30.

Specifically, **VERSE 27 distinguishes works-righteousness from imputed righteousness.** PAUL says, '*boasting is excluded,*' and he says this exclusion is the result of how righteousness is measured. It is measured by the nature of how it is attained, so PAUL refers *hypothetically* to two ways righteousness *might* be attained:

¹ The Greek term translated 'foreknew' is προγινώσκω (proginoskō). This term has a *causal nuance* that suggests a translation such as 'for those whom He chose, these he also predestined.' Therefore, *predestination is based on sovereign electing grace (election) not on God looking down the corridors of time to see who would believe and who would not believe.*

² *Predestination is the result of 'marking out beforehand.'* The thing to which predestination refers is a transformed life in Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul states, "we are 'God's workmanship,' created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

³ The phrase, 'to become conformed to the image of His Son' refers to the *progressive sanctification* discussed earlier in our lesson. Though *justification* (being declared righteous through the process of imputation) is complete the instant we believe the gospel, 'being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ' (progressive sanctification) is *a process* that occurs over time.

⁴ This call is 'an *efficacious call*' by the Holy Spirit – i.e., *a call that produces a predetermined result.* It is not the universal presentation of the gospel that is made to all men; this is *the call that summons the elect to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.*

⁵ Once again, recall that justification occurs when 'God declares a sinner to be righteous when he believes the gospel.'

⁶ '*Glorification*' is the final stage of the sanctification process. Paul wrote the verb 'glorified' in the Aorist Tense which usually is translated as an English Past Tense (as it is here). Though the actual act of glorification is yet future and will not occur until we die or when we are changed in the manner explained in 1 Corinthians 14:42-43, Paul is so certain that God's promises are assured, that he cites '*glorification*' as if it already has occurred. (*Glorification is an eschatological term.*)

(A) – (Hypothetically) it might be attained through works-righteousness, which he calls ‘**THE LAW OF WORKS**’ — Or ...

(B) – (Again hypothetically) it might be attained through the process of imputation, which he calls, ‘**THE LAW OF FAITH.**’

Immediately PAUL rejects the one and advocates for the other; *he rejects THE LAW OF WORKS* and *he accepts THE LAW OF FAITH* as the only way righteousness can be attained.

PAUL consistently holds to the position stated in VERSE 28: “*For we maintain that a man is justified by FAITH apart from THE WORKS OF THE LAW.*”

The premise is simple:

IF SINNERS COULD BE JUSTIFIED BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW (which they can't), THEN PEOPLE COULD BOAST THAT THEY THEMSELVES PLAYED A ROLE IN THEIR OWN SALVATION.

Let me add something to that premise:

IF SINNERS COULD BE JUSTIFIED BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW (which they can't), THEN JESUS NEVER WOULD HAVE GONE TO THE CROSS.

The fact that He did go to the Cross makes any other way of salvation unworthy of consideration.

- It certainly eliminates THE MOSAIC LAW as A PLAN OF SALVATION; THE MOSAIC LAW is *not* A PLAN OF SALVATION ... it is A PLAN OF CONDEMNATION.

SALVATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH is a humbling reality. It is a testimony to *our inability* to save ourselves, *and ...* it is evidence we are completely dependent on **JESUS CHRIST** (A) *for our relationship with God,* (B) *for the forgiveness of sins,* and (C) *for any hope of spending eternity in the presence of our savior.*

THE LAW OF FAITH NEGATES ANY HUMAN CLAIM TO MERIT BEFORE GOD.

VERSES 29-30 – Put forth an interesting rhetorical question: “*Is God the God of the JEWS only*”?

PAUL asks this question in order to establish *the inclusivity of the Gospel.*

Since only the JEWS received THE MOSAIC LAW, if salvation comes through keeping THE LAW, would not then the Gentiles, who do not have the Law, be excluded?

On the contrary, PAUL says God is the God of all people, and both JEWS and GENTILES will be judged according to the same standard – **THE LAW OF FAITH.** *There is one way only that leads to Justification.* Whether JEW or GENTILE, all men are judged in the same way according to the same criterion. *(This will be further developed in Chapters 6 & 7.)*

★ Again, PAUL is affirming *the inclusivity of the Gospel*; SALVATION is available to JEWS *and* GENTILES, and it is offered on the same basis to both groups.

In the next chapter PAUL will use **ABRAHAM** as the prime example to prove his point. He will turn to **GENESIS 15:6**, where the text that says: “*Abraham believed in Yahweh and (the ABSOLUTE) Righteousness (of God Himself) was imputed to him.*”

- **RIGHTEOUSNESS** was imputed to ABRAHAM in **GENESIS 15**, but ABRAHAM was not circumcised until **GENESIS 17** – and THE MOSAIC LAW was not given to ISRAEL for several hundred years **AFTER** ABRAHAM was justified by faith-alone.

So a precedent was set regarding how men are justified long before THE MOSAIC LAW or THE RITE OF CIRCUMCISION were established among THE ISRAELITES.

This brings us to **the FIFTH and LAST BIG IDEA** PAUL makes in this chapter.

(5) Though **SALVATION** *cannot* be attained by keeping THE MOSAIC LAW, still the Law has value when understood in its proper context ...

VERSE 31 – Answers the question, ‘*Does THE LAW OF FAITH overturn THE MOSAIC LAW*’? PAUL’S answer is an emphatic **NO!** PAUL’S more complete answer is, **THE LAW OF FAITH UPHOLDS THE LAW.** For PAUL, it is a misconception to think that **FAITH** abolishes the Law. He claims the Law is *established* by **THE LAW OF FAITH.** There are three lines of reasoning that lead to this conclusion, and all three emerge from the idea that **FAITH** does not denigrate the Law but instead underscores its true importance:

(1) **FIRST** – *The Law establishes that the Moral Character of God cannot be violated with impunity.*

- The penalty for breaking the Law is **DEATH (Romans 6:23)** – *and though innocent Himself – JESUS died as a substitutionary sacrifice for every law-breaker. He paid the penalty required by the Law – and in so doing, He fulfilled the Law.*

(2) **SECOND** – According to **Galatians 3:24**, the Law served as our **TUTOR** to prove to us that – *no matter how hard we may try* – no man can keep the Law sufficiently to establish any kind of righteousness that is acceptable to God.

- This inability – *once recognized* – should drive sinners to **CHRIST** for the forgiveness of sins ... *and finally* ...

(3) **THIRD** – **The Law** – *having proved the flesh is weak and incapable of earning any merit with God that is based on works-righteousness* – **sets the groundwork for what God did in sending His Son to do what men could not do.** JESUS kept the Law perfectly, then He gave his life for those of us who could not keep the Law at all.

The Law points to the need for a righteousness only God can provide, and it prepares the way for **FAITH IN CHRIST**, who alone fulfilled the Law’s demands. **FAITH IN CHRIST** should not lead us to lawlessness, for when we recognize we no longer are under condemnation, obedience is the only logical and proper response.

APPLICATIONS:

So in sum, what should we take away from this passage?

(i) **THE GOSPEL IS A GOSPEL OF RIGHTEOUSNESS** – God’s Absolute Righteousness is available to us, for it has been revealed in JESUS CHRIST and by **FAITH**, we receive it when we put our **TRUST** in Him.

(ii) **JUSTIFICATION IS BY FAITH ALONE** – Salvation is a gift and we are justified by **FAITH**, *not* by **WORKS.**

(iii) **THERE IS A UNIVERSAL SCOPE TO THE GOSPEL** – The offer of salvation is for **JEW**s and for **GEN-TILES** alike – and it is God’s plan to bring all believers to Himself, whether from a **JEWISH** background or from a **GEN-TILE** background. *This does not negate the fact that God has two programs in play: one for ISRAEL and one for THE CHURCH.*

(iv) **THE ROLE OF THE LAW** – While **FAITH** fulfills the Law, the Law continues to point to the need for a savior. As such, it is our responsibility to share our **FAITH** with unbelievers when God opens the door for us to do so. <>>

For further study, see my series on Adam’s Sin, Atonement, and Imputed Righteousness:

<https://gracebiblechurch.org/adult-bible-classes/lessons/foundations/topical-lessons/>