

# EXPLANATION OF 45<sup>TH</sup> BIBLEBOOK

## ROMANS 3:21-31 (April A.D. 67)

### INTRODUCTION

In Romans 3:19-20, Paul concludes his teaching that no Gentile or Jew is righteous in God's eyes and that everyone stands condemned before God. He also concludes that keeping the law cannot attain righteousness.

In Romans 3:21-31, Paul teaches how righteousness can be attained.

'Righteousness' means to stand in the right relationship with the God of the Bible. Thus 'righteousness' describes the position or state of a believer. 'Righteousness' also means to do what is right in the eyes of the God of the Bible. Thus 'righteousness' also describes the growth process or life-style of a believer.

'To be justified' means that the God of the Bible has *declared* someone completely and perfectly righteous in his eyes and consequently *regards and treats* him as completely and perfectly righteous (forgiven, reconciled, accepted) forever. Justification is a judicial act of the sovereign God.

Paul has proved that it is absolutely impossible for godless and wicked Gentiles or even religious Jews to be justified by their personal merits or obedience to God's law.

However the gospel reveals the righteousness of God and the method by which God justifies (saves) people, namely, by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

### OUTLINE

(III) 3:21-31. God's method for justification (salvation).

- a. The nature of justification (3:21).
- b. The means of justification (3:22-23).
- c. The ground of justification (3:24a).
- d. The effect of justification (3:24b-25a).
- e. The purpose of justification (3:25b-26).
- f. The results of justification (3:27-31).

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The meaning of the word 'law'.  
The meaning of the word 'glory'.

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### EXPLANATION

(III) 3:21-31. God's method for justification (salvation).

a. The nature of justification (3:21).

**3:21.** But now apart from the law a righteousness of (not: from)<sup>1</sup> God has effectively been made manifest (clear)<sup>2</sup> (virp). continuously attested<sup>3</sup> (vppp) by the Law and the Prophets.

The nature of justification is that it is God's righteousness, not man's righteousness (3:21,23).

#### Righteousness is of God.

- Some people regard God's righteousness as righteousness that comes from God: righteous is thus something apart from God's nature, but nevertheless comes from God.
- Others regard God's righteousness as righteousness that is approved by God: righteousness is thus man's righteousness which God approves.
- And others regard God's righteousness as righteousness that avails with God and can therefore justify man: righteousness is thus man's righteousness or Christ's righteousness which wins God over.

**Righteousness is the nature of God and the sole possession of God.** The nature of justification is that it is *God's righteousness*, not man's righteousness (3:21,23). Justification of believers is therefore based on the righteousness which God accomplished and not on the righteousness which man tries to accomplish. However, the context makes very clear that God's righteousness here is nothing less than *the nature of God and the sole possession of God!* It is 'a righteousness of God' and not 'a righteousness of man'.

**Righteousness is apart from law.** Righteousness is "apart from law" (3:21b). The righteousness of God is contrasted with the righteousness of all people. It is a righteousness that is apart from even the best efforts of man to gain righteousness by keeping the moral, ceremonial and civil laws.

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<sup>1</sup> G: Genitive case

<sup>2</sup> G: phaneroó

<sup>3</sup> G: martureó

Even the most perfect human righteousness produced by trying to keep the law is never adequate enough to satisfy God's righteous indignation against the situation created by human sins, nor adequate enough to meet his absolute standard of perfection for human conduct.

**b. The means of justification (3:22-23).**

**3:22.** (namely) a righteousness of (not: from)<sup>4</sup> God through faith in Jesus Christ to all who continue to exercise faith (vppa)

(Romans 3:22b-23 is a parenthesis)

- [For there is no distinction (difference)(i.e. between those who are apart from the law of those who are under the law)<sup>5</sup>,

**3:23.** since all have once for all sinned (viaa)(cf. 5:12) and fall short<sup>6</sup> (vipp) of the glory of God] -

The means of justification is faith, not the works of man. Christ's righteousness is accepted by means of faith.

**The righteousness of God must be received by faith.** The means of justification is that man *receives* God's righteousness *by faith*. The righteousness of God is not a righteousness of man, and therefore, in order to attain this righteousness, man must *receive* it from God by faith. Man cannot earn, buy or steal righteousness from God. He can only receive it from God by believing in Jesus Christ.

The believer receives the righteousness of God "through faith"<sup>7</sup> (3:22a)(faith is the means of receiving righteousness) and not "on account of faith"<sup>8</sup> (then faith would be the ground or reason for receiving righteousness) Faith is *not* a kind of good work of man, which is then *the ground or reason* why God justifies the believer. The ground of justification is God's grace and not man's faith. Faith is nothing more than *the instrument or means* (the empty hand) by which a believer in Jesus Christ receives the righteousness of God.

**The faith and the believers.** The faith that justifies is also not a general kind of faith in something religious, but *a very specific faith in Jesus Christ* and in his death and resurrection.

*Since the first coming of Christ "there is no difference" between Jews and Gentiles that become believers (3:22b). The righteousness of God is given to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ without any distinction of race, culture or degree of faith. The way of salvation is the same for all people, because there is no difference as to the state of their spiritual and moral depravity ("all have sinned")(3:23) and there is also no difference as to the means by which they are saved ("by faith apart from observing the law")(3:28).*

**The righteousness of God contrasted with the unrighteousness of man.** Verse 22b and 23 is a parenthesis which stands in a very significant relationship to both what precedes and to what follows. Verse 24 resumes the theme of verse 22a and expands it.

The righteousness of God is not only contrasted with the righteousness of man, but also contrasted with the unrighteousness of all people. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God". There is not a single human being who possesses God's glory, that is, God's holiness or righteousness or faithfulness or love. All human beings have lost their state of perfection, have lost God's glorious characteristics and consequently have lost God's approval!

Therefore, the righteousness of God stands in absolute contrast to both the righteousness of man (his attempts to gain righteousness by keeping the law) and the unrighteousness of man (his sins). The righteousness of God is never produced by people. It is the possession of God only and is characterised by God only. God is the only Author of righteousness, the only Possessor of righteousness and the only Giver of righteousness. Therefore it is a righteousness of which God approves and a righteousness that avails with God.

**The righteousness of God prophesied and fulfilled.** Already the prophets in the Old Testament testified about the righteousness of God (3:21c) that would be established through the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ<sup>9</sup>. This righteousness of God is now revealed in the New Testament.

**c. The ground of justification (3:24a).**

**3:24a.** being justified (vppp) freely (as a gift)<sup>10</sup> (adverbial use of the accusative case) by his grace<sup>11</sup>

The ground of justification is the grace of God, not the merit of man. Justification (salvation) is God's sovereign free and gracious gift.

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<sup>4</sup> Genitive case

<sup>5</sup> G: diastole

<sup>6</sup> G: hustereó

<sup>7</sup> G: dia pisteos, through the means of faith

<sup>8</sup> G: dia pistin

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 53:5-6

<sup>10</sup> G: dórean

<sup>11</sup> G: charis

**God's grace fulfils God's righteousness.** The death of Jesus Christ on the cross uniquely enhances the gracious character of God's act of justification. *God's mercy and grace (his love) does not overrule or cancel God's righteousness and holiness, but rather fulfils the demands of God's righteousness and holiness. God exercises his mercy and grace (his love) towards unrighteous people without setting aside his holiness and righteousness!*

The cross of Jesus Christ deals with man's greatest problem: 'sin', and with the greatest consequence of man's sin: 'separation from God'<sup>12</sup>. Jesus Christ took the sins of those who believe in him onto his body onto the cross and thus took it away from them<sup>13</sup>. And Jesus Christ died on the cross once in history to bring those who believe in him to God and thus to reconcile them with God<sup>14</sup>. *The cross of Jesus Christ is the only place in the universe and in the history of mankind where God's mercy and love are perfectly reconciled with God's righteousness and holiness!*

**God's grace imputes God's righteousness.** The ground of justification is that God *in sovereign way gives (imputes, ascribes) his righteousness freely by grace to people who absolutely do not deserve it.* This is the most important part of Paul's doctrine of justification. There is nothing in human beings or done by human beings that constrains God to act or compels him to justify human beings. As a matter of fact, everything human beings are and do compels the righteous God to judge and condemn them. The wonderful message of *the gospel (the Good News) is that God's justification of sinners is completely determined by who God himself is (righteous and merciful at the same time) and what God himself does (giving his only Son to die as a sacrifice of atonement for sins and giving his righteousness freely to his people) in the exercise of his free and sovereign grace.*

Some religions teach that God is merciful and that he simply forgives man's sins without dealing with those sins! Such a 'god' may be merciful and loving in human eyes, but can certainly not be righteous or holy! Those religions deny that Jesus Christ died on the cross.

#### d. The effect of justification (3:24b-25a).

**3:24b.** through the redemption<sup>15</sup> that (was accomplished) in Christ Jesus,  
**3:25a.** whom God once for all designed. (presented, publicly displayed, offered)<sup>16</sup> (viam) to be, by (the shedding of) his blood, an expiation and propitiation<sup>17</sup> (i.e. a wrath-removing sacrifice), (effective) through faith<sup>18</sup>,  
[Rephrased translation: By the shedding of Christ's blood (by his death on the cross) God once for all presented (offered) Christ as a sacrifice of expiation and propitiation that is effective through faith.]  
The effect of justification is the redemption of the sinner and the propitiation of his sins. The ransom redeems the sinner from the slavery and bondage to sin. The sacrifice of atonement saves the sinner from God's wrath.

#### The effect of justification is to redeem unrighteous people (3:24b).

- *Jesus Christ is the Mediator of God's grace.* Redemption came by Jesus Christ only. The emphasis on God's free and sovereign grace (3:24a) does not exclude the Medium through which God's grace has come into operation. Believers are justified freely by God's grace "through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (3:24b). The Mediator of God's grace is Jesus Christ and his completed work of salvation on the cross. The ground of justification or salvation is God's grace, expressed in Christ's death on the cross. *God's grace is never cheap grace, distributed to people without a price. God's grace is costly grace, offered to people at the payment of the most costly price, namely, the life of his own son, Jesus Christ.* Thus, justification by God's grace means that justification is completely free for man - it cost man absolutely nothing and it cannot be earned, bought or stolen. In contrast, justification by Christ's redemption means that justification was very costly for God – it cost God the highest price: the life of his Son!
- *Jesus Christ paid the ransom to God.* 'Redemption'<sup>19</sup> means the buying back of a slave or a captive, making him free by the payment of a ransom. The ransom<sup>20</sup> is the price paid to set a slave free. The ransom paid to redeem the lost people is nothing less than the life of Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ gave his life as a voluntary self-sacrifice<sup>21</sup> "in the place of" or "for the benefit of" many<sup>22</sup>. The ransom is paid, not to Satan, but to God the Father (3:24-26) to satisfy his righteous requirement.

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<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 59:1-2

<sup>13</sup> 1 Peter 2:24

<sup>14</sup> 1 Peter 3:18a

<sup>15</sup> G: apolutrósís

<sup>16</sup> G: protithémi

<sup>17</sup> G: hilastérion

<sup>18</sup> G: dia pisteós

<sup>19</sup> G: apolutrósís

<sup>20</sup> G: lutron

<sup>21</sup> John 10:18; 1 Peter 1:18-19

<sup>22</sup> Mark 10:45; John 10:11; 2 Corinthians 5:21

- *Jesus Christ is the Redeemer, the embodiment of redemption.* By his death and resurrection from the dead Jesus Christ himself has become and now is the righteousness and holiness and redemption of every Christian<sup>23</sup>. God's grace provided Jesus Christ as the redemption of sinners. 'Christ ransomed, that is, liberated believers from the slavery or bondage to sin by paying the price of dying on the cross.

Christ is not simply an agent who procured redemption, but rather the embodiment of redemption. He did not simply pay money as a ransom, but paid with his own body and blood<sup>24</sup>. He gave himself as a living sacrifice and that became the ransom!

- *Redemption can never be separated from the Redeemer.* What Christ accomplished cannot be separated from his Person. The redemption of people enslaved by sin cannot be separated from the Redeemer, from the One who paid the ransom price to redeem them. That is why it is *impossible to redeem people without a Redeemer*<sup>25</sup>! Jesus Christ is the Redeemer, the Mediator of redemption. Whenever a person believes in Jesus Christ, he is effectively redeemed, that is, liberated from the slavery or bondage to sin.

### **The effect of justification is to propitiate God's holy and righteous anger against sin (3:25a).**

- *The sacrifice of atonement expiates and propitiates. The 'sacrifice of atonement'<sup>26</sup> is a sacrifice that atones or expiates (i.e. pays the penalty for sin) and propitiates (i.e. removes God's righteous indignation against sin). 'The sacrifice of atonement' is better called 'the sacrifice of expiation and propitiation', because Jesus Christ paid the penalty, satisfied or appeased God's holy and righteous anger (indignation) against sin, turned God's wrath away and removed sin itself. It was a substitution sacrifice, a sacrifice in the place of sinners that became believers. It reconciled God's righteousness with God's mercy.* By his death Jesus Christ became that sacrifice of atonement.

God's perfect holiness and righteousness demanded that all sins (unholiness and unrighteousness) in the history of the world had to be punished and that all people in the history of the world had to live perfect righteous and holy lives. Because no one in the history of the world except Jesus Christ lived an absolute perfect holy and righteous (sinless) life, only he qualified to be the sacrifice of atonement that could ransom people.

- *The requirements for a sacrifice of atonement.* A sacrifice of atonement would have to meet God's demand for punishing sins and for perfect righteous and holy living. A sacrifice of atonement would have to be the following:
  - a human being, because the blood of an animal cannot make atonement for sins<sup>27</sup>.
  - a sinless human being, because a sinner would need atonement himself<sup>28</sup>.
  - a sinless human being that is *willing to die*, because otherwise he would be a victim<sup>29</sup>.
  - *God's choice for a sacrifice of atonement*, otherwise what he accomplished would not be God's work<sup>30</sup>.
- *The term 'by the blood' of Jesus Christ.* This term does not teach that 'blood' is a magic substance or that there is some kind of magic power in blood. The 'blood' is a symbol of 'life'<sup>31</sup> and 'the shedding of his blood' is a symbol of willingly giving his life by dying as a sacrifice of atonement for sins. 'The shedding of blood' is thus the symbol of the sacrifice of atonement, which is the means by which all the sins of believers are forgiven<sup>32</sup>, the means by which believers are perfectly purified<sup>33</sup> and the means by which believers are reconciled to God (5:9-11).
- *The term 'God presented' Christ as a sacrifice of atonement.* This may mean that *from all eternity God planned, purposed or designed Christ to be the Saviour through his sacrifice of atonement*<sup>34</sup>. Or it may mean that *within the history of this world God publicly displayed or set forth Christ for himself as the sacrifice of atonement*<sup>35</sup>. The intention is the same, namely that God the Father is himself the One who provided redemption: planning it in eternity and working it out in history. It is a perversion of truth to say that God had to be won over by Christ's intervention, because God actually planned, purposed, designed in eternity that Christ should be that sacrifice of atonement in history.
- *The cross is the perfect reconciliation of God's righteousness with God's mercy.* Because God is holy and righteous, he must punish sin. And because God is loving and merciful, he himself provided the means of punishing sin and saving people.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 2:4-7

<sup>24</sup> 1 Peter 1:18-19

<sup>25</sup> cf. Isaiah 43:10b-11; cf. John 14:6; Acts 4:12

<sup>26</sup> G: 'hilastérion'

<sup>27</sup> Hebrews 10:3-4

<sup>28</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26-27

<sup>29</sup> John 10:17-18; Matthew 16:53

<sup>30</sup> Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:20

<sup>31</sup> Leviticus 17:11

<sup>32</sup> Hebrews 9:22

<sup>33</sup> 1 John 1:7

<sup>34</sup> Acts 2:23a; Ephesians 1:9,11; 1 Peter 1:18-20

<sup>35</sup> Acts 2:23b



e. The purpose of justification (3:25b-26).

**3:25b.** with a view to<sup>36</sup> the demonstration (proof)<sup>37</sup> of his righteousness (justice), because of the passing over (letting go unpunished)<sup>38</sup> of sins committed **beforehand**<sup>39</sup> (vpra)

**3:26.** in the forbearance (patience, pause before dealing with something)<sup>40</sup> of God.

(God did this) with a view to<sup>41</sup> the demonstration (proof) of his righteousness (justice) **at the present time**, with the purpose (that he might)<sup>42</sup> be (vnpa) righteous and the one who *continually* justifies (vppa) a person through faith in Jesus.

[Rephrased translation: God did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had treated past sins with indulgence. God did this to demonstrate his justice in the present time, namely, that he is (completely) just and the (only) One who justifies the person who has faith in Jesus.]

The purpose of justification is the demonstration (proof) of God's absolute righteous (just) character, because he did not leave sin unpunished. God's righteousness is his inherent righteousness that cannot be violated by anything and must be vindicated in the justification of sinners.

**The purpose of justification is to demonstrate God's perfect righteousness *before* Christ's first coming (3:25b).**

During the Old Testament period (the period of preparation) people could have argued that God was unjust, because he let all nations go their own way<sup>43</sup> and he overlooked their ignorance with regard to God and God's will<sup>44</sup>. In the Old Testament period God showed his forbearance (patience) by passing by the sins that occurred. He did not punish people immediately and he did not punish them according to what their wickedness and ignorance deserved. He even justified believers like Abraham and David without punishing their sins<sup>45</sup>. Thus, God had left the sins committed beforehand (during the Old Testament period) unpunished.

However, God's forbearance during the Old Testament period may not be interpreted as indifference towards sin. God's suspension of punishment may not be interpreted as forgiveness of sin. The Bible teaches: "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness"<sup>46</sup>! Without the punishment of sins there is no forgiveness!

God presented Jesus Christ by his death as a sacrifice of atonement (expiation and propitiation) to prove his righteousness with respect to punishing sins committed *before* his first coming.

**The purpose of justification is to demonstrate God's perfect righteousness *after* Christ's first coming (3:26).**

- *The cross is the sacrifice of expiation and propitiation for many.* At his first coming (the period of fulfilment) Jesus Christ died on the cross and shed his blood. He gave his life as a ransom "for many"<sup>47</sup>. He laid down his life "for his sheep"<sup>48</sup>. His death was the punishment for the sins of his people. By finally providing a ransom, a sacrifice of expiation and propitiation (a sacrifice of atonement) in Jesus Christ, God punished the sins of all people who were justified by faith during the Old Testament period and he punished the sins of all people who are being justified by faith during the New Testament period!

God presented Jesus Christ by his death as a sacrifice of atonement (expiation and propitiation) to prove his righteousness with respect to punishing sins committed *after* his first coming. God showed that he was both righteous and merciful through the sacrifice of atonement of Jesus Christ. God is completely righteous because he punished all the sins of believers *once for all* in history through the death of Jesus Christ. And God is completely merciful by justifying believers and reconciling them to himself. God showed that he is perfect in character: he remains perfectly holy and righteous by punishing sins and he is perfectly merciful and love by saving sinners!

- *The cross is the heart of the gospel and the centre of history.* After the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, no one can ever say that God is unjust! Satan can no longer accuse believers that their sins are not atoned for<sup>49</sup>! The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is the ground of justification of believers in both the Old Testament period and the New Testament period! The death of Jesus Christ proves that God was completely just when he left the sins that were committed by believers *before* the coming of Christ unpunished. It also proves that God is still completely just when he leaves the sins that are committed by believers *in the present time* unpunished! *The merits of the ransom price*

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<sup>36</sup> G: eis

<sup>37</sup> G: endeiksis

<sup>38</sup> G: paresis

<sup>39</sup> G: proginomai

<sup>40</sup> G: anoché

<sup>41</sup> G: pros

<sup>42</sup> G: eis + infinitive

<sup>43</sup> Acts 14:16

<sup>44</sup> Acts 17:30

<sup>45</sup> Genesis 15:6; Psalm 32:1-2

<sup>46</sup> Hebrews 9:22

<sup>47</sup> Mark 10:45

<sup>48</sup> John 10:11

<sup>49</sup> Revelation 12:10-11

and the sacrifice of expiation (atonement) and propitiation, which Jesus Christ brought on the cross, reaches backwards to the creation and forwards throughout all the ages to the second coming!

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the centre of God's dealings in the history of this world! That is why throughout the New Testament the heart of the gospel is "Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected"<sup>50</sup>.

- *Only the cross perfectly reconciles God's righteousness with his love.* When God justifies believers, they are not justified on account of their own character or good works. They are justified on account of what God once-for-all time in history did in Jesus Christ! They are also not justified by an act of God in which he sets the righteous demands of the law aside, as some political and religious leaders on earth do.

Believers in Jesus Christ are justified by the completed work of salvation of Christ in their place, in which the righteous requirement (the law) of God for the condemnation (punishment) of all sins and for salvation (justification and sanctification) of believers has been perfectly met! Only the death of Jesus Christ on the cross perfectly reconciles the righteousness (justice) of God with the exhibition of his love (mercy) to the sinner.

f. The results of justification (3:27-31).

**3:27.** Where<sup>51</sup> then is boasting? Once for all locked out (excluded, eliminated)<sup>52</sup> (viap)! By what kind<sup>53</sup> of principle (law)? (By the principle) of works (by trying to keep the moral, ceremonial and civil laws)? No! But by the principle (law) of faith!

**3:28.** For we continue to maintain<sup>54</sup> (vipn) that a man is always justified (vnpp) by faith (the dative case emphasises the instrument) apart from the works of the law (the keeping of the moral, ceremonial and civil laws).

**3:29.** Or is God only (the God) of the Jews? Not also of the Gentiles? Yes, also of the Gentiles,

**3:30.** since<sup>55</sup> there (is only) one God who will certainly justify (vifa) the circumcision (the Jews) by faith<sup>56</sup> and the uncircumcision (the Gentiles) through that same faith<sup>57</sup>.

**3:31.** Do we then nullify (invalidate, make ineffective)<sup>58</sup> (vipa) the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold (establish, make it stand)<sup>59</sup> the law.

The results of justification by faith is that it excludes justification by works and all boasting of people in God's presence. It establishes the God of the Bible in his true nature as the God of all people and as God who uses the same method of justification for all people. And does not set aside God's moral law, but confirms the correct use of the moral law (cf. 7:7-13; 13:8-10). Although people are not justified by the works of the law, they are nevertheless not set free from the (moral) law.

**The result of justification is to make believers humble (to exclude boasting) (3:27-28).**

- *The genuine justification by God excludes the pretended self-justification by man.* Here the word 'law' means 'principle, system, method or order of things'. All boasting of moral people about their good works and of religious people about their religious works (of trying to keep the moral, ceremonial and civil laws) is excluded by the perfect righteousness which Jesus Christ earned for believers. The perfect accomplishment of Christ excluded all boasting about the imperfect accomplishments of people themselves! The principle (law) of *genuine justification* by faith in the completed and perfect work of salvation of Jesus Christ excluded the principle (law) of *pretended justification* by doing the works of the moral, ceremonial and civil laws.
- *The justification by faith excludes the justification by works.* Two things are contrasted, each excluding the other. The system (of the Jews) in which the law (the trying to keep the moral, ceremonial and civil laws) is the method of justification is excluded by the system (of the Bible) in which faith is the method of justification. Justification by works is grounded on what a person is and does, while justification by faith is grounded on what God in Christ is and does! Works of the law (the trying to keep the moral, ceremonial and civil laws) congratulates itself, while faith in Jesus Christ renounces itself. Works of the law (the trying to keep the moral, ceremonial and civil laws) boasts about its own accomplishments, while faith glories in the accomplished work of salvation of Jesus Christ. The principle of faith totally excludes the principle of works as a means of justification.
- *The meaning of justification by faith.* 'Justification by faith' means that God *graciously reckons* the righteousness of Jesus Christ to the undeserving believer. It means that God *declares* the believer completely and perfectly righteous and *regards and treats* the believers from then on as completely and perfectly righteous in his eyes.

<sup>50</sup> John 1:29; 10:17-18; 11:51-52; 12:31-32; Acts 2:23-24,36; 3:13-15,18; 4:10-12; 5:30-31; 7:52,55; 8:32; 10:39-43; 13:27-35; 26:22-23; 1 Corinthians 1:23-24; Revelation 12:11

<sup>51</sup> G: pou

<sup>52</sup> G: ekkleió

<sup>53</sup> G: poios

<sup>54</sup> G: logizomai

<sup>55</sup> G: eiper

<sup>56</sup> G: ek pisteós

<sup>57</sup> G: dia té s pisteós

<sup>58</sup> (G: katargeó)

<sup>59</sup> G: histémi or histanó



**The result of justification is to prove that only the God of the Bible justifies people (3:29-30).** Deuteronomy 6:4 proves that the first thing the Jews believed was that there is only one God. If there is only one God, then he must be the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles! And if he is the God of all people, then there is only one way in which he justifies people. That way is not by the law, but by faith. He will justify the Jews *by faith* and the Gentiles *through faith*. The future tense does not refer to the final judgement day, but to every case of justification to be accomplished now and in the future.

*There is no difference between the words 'by faith' (1:17; 4:16) and 'through faith' (3:22,25)<sup>60</sup>, because Paul uses these terms indiscriminately to signify the same thing.*

**The result of justification is to confirm the law (3:31).**

- *The moral law cannot justify anyone.* Some people regard Romans 3:31 as introducing chapter 4 and then the word 'the law' refers to the whole Old Testament. However, Romans 3:31 naturally belongs to chapter 3 and the word 'the law' refers to God's law of commandments which demands obedience of all people (as Paul later teaches in Romans 7:7-13 and 13:8-10)(the moral laws). In Romans 3:20, Paul said, "no human being will be justified by the works of the law (by trying to keep the moral, ceremonial and civil laws)". In Romans 3:21 he said, "God's righteousness has been manifested apart from law (the keeping of the moral, ceremonial and civil laws)". In Romans 3:27 he said, "The law (principle or method) of the gospel is faith and not the works of the law (the keeping of the moral, ceremonial and civil laws)." And in Romans 3:28 he said, "A man is justified by faith apart from works of the law (the keeping of the moral, ceremonial and civil laws)."
- *The moral law makes people aware of their need for justification.* The irresistible question is then, "What about the law?" Paul is referring to the moral laws, because the ceremonial laws have been fulfilled, cancelled and abrogated and the civil law of Israel has been superseded by the Kingdom of God. Has the law (the moral laws), in the sense of God's commandments which demands obedience of all people, been made useless?"

Paul emphatically answers "No!" Paul anticipated this question and answers it without further elaboration. Christians do not nullify the law (the moral laws) by their faith. They rather uphold the law (the moral laws). Paul's complete argument about the function of the law (the moral laws) follows later in Romans 7:7-13 and 13:8-10.

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### The meaning of the word 'law'.

The word 'law' has several different meanings in the letter to the Romans and in the Bible.

a. The 'law' is the commandments, prohibitions and regulations contained in the Bible (3:10-18).

There are three kinds of such laws in the Old Testament, which cannot be completely separated from one another, but can be roughly distinguished as follows:

**The moral laws of the Old Testament period (continued in the New Testament period).** The moral laws are God's holy and righteous requirement for how his people must live as righteous (saved) people during the Old Testament period.

They are especially *expressed* in the Ten Commandments, but also in the other moral commandments and prohibitions in the Bible. They have never been abrogated. They are continued during the New Testament period.

**The ceremonial laws of the Old Testament period.** The ceremonial or ritual laws were God's requirement for how his Old Testament people should approach him in worship and prayer.

They were expressed in laws concerning the holy places (tabernacle and temple), the holy people (priests and Levites), the holy times (Sabbath and festivals) and the holy actions (circumcision, sacrifices, gifts, etc)

With the first coming of Jesus Christ there was *a change of law*<sup>61</sup>. Jesus Christ *fulfilled* the law, including these ceremonial laws<sup>62</sup>. He *cancelled*<sup>63</sup> and *abrogated*<sup>64</sup> the ceremonial laws. The ceremonial laws are no longer valid in the New Testament period and may not be re-introduced into the New Testament Church<sup>65</sup>! During the New Testament period God seeks people who worship him, not with rituals and ceremonial laws, but in spirit and in truth<sup>66</sup>.

**The civil laws of the Old Testament period.** The civil laws were God's righteous requirement for how the society of Israel, his Old Testament people, should be regulated.

During the Old Testament period God's requirements how the national and political state of Israel should function contained laws about possessions, taxes, wars, handling diseases and sexual violations.

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<sup>60</sup> Galatians 2:16

<sup>61</sup> Hebrews 7:12

<sup>62</sup> Matthew 5:17

<sup>63</sup> Colossians 2:14

<sup>64</sup> Ephesians 2:14-15

<sup>65</sup> cf. Galatians 4:8-10; 5:1-7

<sup>66</sup> John 4:23-24



During the New Testament period the state of Israel has been *superseded by the Kingdom of God* (cf. ‘the land’ in Genesis 15:18 with ‘the world’ in Romans 4:13 and ‘the new earth’ in 2 Peter 3:13. God’s Israel is *continued (on a higher plane where shadows have become realities) and enlarged to include* believers from all the other nations<sup>67</sup>. Therefore the civil laws of the state of Israel in the Old Testament have been superseded by the teachings of Jesus Christ about the Kingdom of God in the New Testament.

**b. The ‘Law’ is the Old Testament Scriptures or a part of it (3:19a,21b).**

This law is the Old Testament part of the Bible. The moral laws (i.e. God’s holy and righteous requirement for salvation and condemnation), the ceremonial laws (i.e. God’s requirements for approaching him and worshipping him during the Old Testament period) and the civil laws (i.e. God’s requirements for regulating the society of Israel during the Old Testament period) are expressed in commandments, prohibitions and regulations that are written in the Old Testament Scriptures. That is why the whole Old Testament Scriptures are often called ‘*the Law* (Torah) and the Prophets’<sup>68</sup>.

But the Old Testament Scriptures contain more than just laws. It also contains teachings, salvation history, religious poetry and prophecies. Romans 3:21b says that the ‘Law’ in this sense (i.e. the Old Testament Scriptures) *does reveal* a way of making people righteous or a way of saving people apart from ‘law’ (i.e. in the sense of man trying to keep the moral, ceremonial and civil laws).

**c. The ‘law’ is God’s holy and righteous requirement for all people (3:19b).**

This is the root meaning of the word ‘law’. *The law is God’s holy and righteous requirement for salvation (justification and sanctification) and for judgement (condemnation and punishment) of people.* This law is fulfilled for believers only by Jesus Christ and by no other!

God is a holy and righteous God. Therefore, on the one hand God requires that all sins must be punished and on the other hand God requires that all people must be perfectly righteous and holy and also live complete perfect, holy and righteous lives! This requirement of God is called God’s ‘law’ (3:19b) - God’s holy and righteous requirement. See Romans 3:19-20.

Whatever this ‘law’ (i.e. the Old Testament Scripture)(3:19a) says, it says to all people in the world, because all people in the world are “included in the law” (i.e. in God’s holy and righteous requirement)(3:19b). So the ‘law’ is not just the Ten Commandments cut loose from the rest of the Old Testament, but *the whole of God’s will*<sup>69</sup>, all God’s commandments, requirements and judgements found in the whole Old Testament. This law is not dead. God’s Spirit makes the words in the Bible alive so that it speaks to the heart, mind, conscience and behaviour of people<sup>70</sup>. One important function of God’s Spirit is to convince people of sin, righteousness and judgement<sup>71</sup>.

Romans 3:19b says that all people in the world are *included in* (not *under*) God’s law (i.e. in God’s holy and righteous requirement as expressed in especially the moral commandments and prohibitions in the Bible). The law acts:

- like *a judge*. It silences every argument against the God of the Bible and his revelation in the Bible and makes people responsible to give an account to the God of the Bible.
- like *a mirror*. It shows people how they really are, how God sees them and how sinful they really are. It makes them conscious and painfully aware that they are completely depraved.
- but cannot act like *a saviour*. It cannot and does not reveal a way of justifying or saving people in God’s sight. It cannot and does reveal a way of salvation (justification and sanctification).

The Old Testament Scriptures reveal that righteousness is an attribute of God, not of man; that this righteousness is required by the holy and righteous God of the Bible and that this righteousness can only be acquired by man by receiving God’s righteousness as a gracious gift by means of faith<sup>72</sup>. God’s righteousness can never be acquired by man trying to keep the ‘law’ (i.e. by man trying to keep the religious works of the moral, ceremonial and civil laws)!

**d. The ‘law’ may be a principle or system or method or order of things (3:27).**

**The meaning of the word ‘glory’.**

All people have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There are several uses of the word ‘glory’ in the Bible.

**a. Giving glory to God.**

In 1 Corinthians 1:31 we read, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” But in Romans 1:21 we read, “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him.” In these verses, ‘glory’ refers to the glory (praise, adoration, honour, thanks) which people owe God.

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<sup>67</sup> Revelation 5:9-10

<sup>68</sup> Matthew 5:17

<sup>69</sup> Acts 20:27

<sup>70</sup> Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

<sup>71</sup> John 16:8

<sup>72</sup> Genesis 15:6; cf. Galatians 3:6-9

However, this cannot be the meaning in Romans 3:23, because it does not say, “All have sinned, because they fall short of giving glory to God.” In Romans 3:23 it is not that we *fail to give* glory to God, but that we completely *lack possession of* God’s glory!

#### b. Inheriting future glory.

In Romans 8:18 we read, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” In 1 Corinthians 15:42-43 we read, “With the resurrection, the body that is sown ... in dishonour, will be raised in glory.” And in 2 Timothy 2:10 we read, “The elect ... may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.” In these verses, ‘glory’ refers to the future glory which believers will possess in heaven and on the new earth. Believers will possess eternal salvation, share in the glorious life of God, have glorious renewed spirits (with divine characteristics)<sup>73</sup> and have glorious resurrected bodies<sup>74</sup>.

However, this cannot be the meaning in Romans 3:23, because it does not say, “All have sinned and will *fail to receive* the future glory of God.” It does not use the future tense, but refers to a present reality: all natural people completely *lack possession of God’s glory!*

#### c. Possessing the glorious image of God.

In Genesis 1:27 we read that God created man and woman in his own glorious image. But after they had fallen into sin, we read in Exodus 20:18, “When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance.” The fall of man resulted in man and woman losing the glorious image of God. They lost the absolute perfection, which is the reflection of God’s glory. As a result man cannot approach God directly anymore, but stands afar, trembling when he realises the reality and nearness of God. This is definitely the meaning of Romans 3:23.

All people have sinned. As a result, they all have *lost the perfection of God’s glorious image*. They lack God’s holiness and righteousness. They lack God’s love and faithfulness. They have lost the sense of God’s reality and nearness. They also have lost their earlier privileges and blessings: the privilege to approach God directly and the blessing of God’s approval. People are unworthy of God’s praise and deserve only God’s condemnation instead. God hates all who do wrong<sup>75</sup>. God has holy indignation against the godlessness and wickedness of all people in their natural state<sup>76</sup>.

In summary, *all people in their natural state fall short of God’s glory. This means that all people in their natural state have lost their state of perfection, have lost God’s glorious characteristics and consequently have lost God’s approval and privileges.*

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<sup>73</sup> 1 John 3:1-3; 2 Peter 1:3-4

<sup>74</sup> Philippians 3:21

<sup>75</sup> Psalm 5:4-6; 11:5

<sup>76</sup> John 3:18,36; Romans 1:18