

## ***FPFWC Christian Development***



### **Standing in the Faith**

May 2024

Spring Quarter

**May 4, 2024**

## **Lesson #1 – Justified by Faith**

SCRIPTURE TEXT – Romans 3:21-30

### **ICE BREAKER –**

1. Why is it important to know that Christ has removed our guilt and what does that mean for the believer?
2. How does a commitment of our whole self to God reflect true faith?

***Key Verse – “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: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.—Romans 3:22–24***

### **LESSON BACKGROUND**

Paul’s letter to the Romans was written in about AD 58, most likely from Corinth during his third missionary journey. He had not planted the Roman church, and the letter’s origins are something of a mystery. It could be that believers who were present at the first Pentecost brought it back from their Jerusalem pilgrimage to their home in Rome (Acts 2:10). The nature of the church in Rome was influenced by an edict, issued by Emperor Claudius in about AD 49, that had forced Jews living in the city to leave (18:2). The Roman historian Suetonius tells us that Claudius “banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus,” the word *Chrestus* likely referring to *Christ*.

This experience probably fostered a certain division within the Roman church between Gentile and Jewish believers, with each group contending that it had a better claim of salvation in Christ than the other (compare Romans 11:13–24). The expulsion of Jews from Rome resulted in Gentile Christians being in the majority in the church there, if they had not been the majority already (1:5–6, 13). Their majority status seems to have continued even after the death of Claudius in AD 54 allowed Jews to return to the imperial city (compare Acts 18:2 with Romans 16:3–5). Much of Paul’s letter was therefore directed specifically to the Gentile believers there (11:13).

Paul hoped to visit Rome soon, so his letter served as an introduction of himself and the gospel he would teach in Rome and abroad, God willing. Part of Paul’s purpose in writing to the Roman Christians was to inform them of his desire to meet them (Romans 1:11–15) and to gain support for his planned travel to Spain (15:23–28). But the body of the letter is all gospel, making Romans perhaps the closest thing in the Bible to a systematic exploration of Christian doctrine. Our lesson today cuts straight to the heart of the matter: what is required for salvation.

## LESSON COMMENTARY

### **Righteousness Is Credited to Believers by God (3:21–26)**

**3:21–26. But now** (v. 21) introduces a significant transition in the argument of Romans. After delineating the sorry spiritual condition of humankind, Paul began a discussion of how one can become right with God. The key is not found in securing one's own righteousness by keeping the law, but in God imputing and crediting His own moral excellence and virtue; see the comments on "righteousness" in 1:17) to those who have faith in His Son.

**But now** carries a temporal sense, "But now, after the cross." For **the righteousness of God**, see 1:17. This **righteousness** has always been **apart from the Law** (cf. the example of Abraham in Rm 4, drawn from Gn 15). The Jewish people had misread the OT, wrongly prioritizing the law as the means for righteousness before God, and had neglected the importance of the Abrahamic Covenant for that. While this righteousness comes **apart from the Law**, it was **witnessed by the Law and the Prophets**; that is, the Hebrew Scriptures contain a predictive element pointing toward God's bestowal of His righteousness to those who have faith (see some of the verses Paul will refer to: Hab 2:4; Gn 15:6; Ps 32:1–2; and Jr 31:33–34; Ezk 36:25–27; Is 53:4–6). God's **righteousness** is **through faith in Jesus Christ** [lit., "faith/fullness of Jesus Christ"; Gk. *pisteos Iesou Christou*] (v. 22), which could mean either the believer's "faith in Jesus Christ" (objective genitive, the traditional view) or "the faithfulness of Jesus" in dying on the cross (subjective genitive). The second view is not objectionable, but it is not required by the syntax. The traditional view is preferable. Usually *pistis* (faith) refers to one's reliance upon another, and only when the context is explicit should the idea of "faithfulness" be ascribed to it. Also, several passages have a similar construction using the word "faith" followed by a member of the Godhead in the genitive case, where one's faith is directed toward the divine one, but not indicating the "faith of" the one who is divine (cf. Mk 11:22; Ac 3:16; Php 1:27; Col 2:12; 2Th 2:13; Jms 2:1; Rv 2:13). This suggests that the phrase **faith of / in Christ** should be understood as having Jesus as the object of faith. In addition, the strong contextual evidence supports the view that this refers to the believer's faith in Jesus Christ (Rm 3:22c, 26, 27, 28, and throughout chap. 4; Gl 2:16). **For all those who believe** is not a redundancy if "faith in Christ" is an objective genitive, for this phrase gives the additional point that individuals from all people groups (Jews and Gentiles, **for there is no distinction**) can be saved by faith. The lack of **distinction** relates not only to salvation by faith in Christ, but to the consequences of sin as well (v. 23). **Fall short** means "lack" (1Co 1:7; 8:8). The **glory of God** is sometimes connected by Paul both to God's revealed perfections and to His immortality (Rm 1:23; 2:7–10; 5:1–5; 1Tm 1:17), so that lacking **the glory of God** here probably refers to God's immortal splendor forfeited by Adam and his descendants because of sin. But according to Early (intertestamental) Judaism, Adam possessed a special glory of his own as one made in the image of God, a special glory that he lost at the fall (*Apoc. Mos.* 20:2; 21:2, 6; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 56:5–6; *Gen. Rab.* 12.6.1), and which God will restore to the righteous in the future (CD

3:20; 1QS 4:6–8, 14–15, 22–23; 4 Ezra 2:39; 7:97–98; 8:51–52; 2 Apoc. Bar. 51:3, 10; 1 Enoch 108:12–15; Rm 8:30). The emphasis, however, is upon *God's* glory.

**Being justified** (v. 24) probably connects with v. 22b, and reiterates the bright side of the “no distinction” theme, while v. 23 looks at the dark side of it. The verb **justified** (*dikaioo*) was a judicial term for a judge declaring a person innocent of whatever charges were levied against him. A sinner is rightly charged with breaking God’s law. When a sinner trusts Christ for salvation, God declares him or her not only innocent of that charge (i.e., He “justifies” them, *dikaioo*), but as having kept the standard because of the relationship that is established with Him through Christ (Rm 8:4; 2Co 5:21). By God’s declaration, the sinner is “put right” with God and possesses the status of “righteousness” (*dikaiosune*, a cognate of *dikaioo*, “to justify”) on the basis of the favorable verdict rendered by the divine Judge. This is no legal fiction as is sometimes argued. When a judge declares innocent an individual charged with a crime, that declaration has a profound impact upon the one who was charged. **Grace** denotes the character quality of benevolence that leads a benefactor to bestow a favor upon another. **Redemption** means “the act of setting one free by paying a ransom,” used for paying a master the amount his slave was worth to purchase the slave’s freedom. The blood of Jesus paid the ransom for believers (see the comments on Eph 1:7). **Propitiation** (v. 25) usually involved a sacrifice that averted the wrath of a divine being, but the word was also used in the LXX for the “mercy seat,” the cover on the ark of the covenant onto which blood was sprinkled whereby sin was forgiven and wrath was turned away (cf. Lv 16:2, 13–15). Jesus’ bloody cross, not the mercy seat, remains the place where God’s wrath is appeased. **Faith** is “reliance upon a person, including what he says or does.” One is justified by God when he or she relies upon Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus died **to demonstrate** (or “prove”) God’s **righteousness** (see the comments on 1:17), which in vv. 25–26 refers more narrowly to His justice or fairness as part of His wider moral excellence. And it needed to be proven. If a judge did not condemn a guilty criminal but let him go free, or if he had the criminal’s pet collie go to prison in his place, the judge would be unjust, unfair, unrighteous. But in the OT, God both forgave sinners and determined to have animals sacrificed for sins (Lv 16; cf. the comments on Heb 9:15; 10:4). God would be unjust for doing this, except the death of Jesus safeguarded **His righteousness**. In the death of Jesus, God vented His wrath against sin, keeping **His righteousness** intact, and God applied the atoning work of His Son to OT saints. On that basis they were forgiven and **His righteousness** was upheld. All this is not only true for OT saints, but is relevant **at the present time** (v. 26). The death of Jesus allows God to remain **just** and yet forgive sinners who have faith in Jesus today (He remains **just** and is **the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**).

## **B. Righteousness Is Appropriated by Faith Alone**

**3:27–31.** In these verses, Paul presents the principles that flow logically from 3:21–26, and in chap. 4 he illustrates the principles with the concrete example of Abraham. The table at the top of the next page presents the connections.

It makes sense that if justification is a gift that springs from God's grace (3:22–26), then **boasting** in one's own ability to obtain it or maintain it **is excluded** (v. 27). The word **law** is puzzling, but here probably has a metaphorical meaning ("base, norm, standard, principle"), and probably does not refer to the OT law. In vv. 29–30, Paul bolstered his argument about one way of salvation by referring to monotheism. If justification is available only through the Jewish law, then God is the God of the Jews only, and the Gentiles are excluded from a relationship with Him. Since salvation is by grace through faith, the question arises: "Does faith render the law purposeless?" (v. 31). What Paul means by **we establish the Law** is disputed, but it is possible that faith is the sole avenue whereby one is able to experience all of God's promised blessings, blessings to which the law bore witness (3:21) but which could not be obtained on the basis of keeping the law (cf. 3:19–20; 4:13–15). While faith establishes **the Law**, v. 31 cannot be cited to support the idea that the law is still binding since it is not nullified by faith. Rather, faith does not nullify the teaching of the Pentateuch but actually establishes the law's teaching, which includes justification by faith as evident in the law's teaching concerning Abraham (cf. Gn 15:6; Rm 4:1–22).

**LESSON NUGGET – God's salvation is lawful.** But how can a holy God forgive guilty people? Is that lawful? If our judges did that, society would fall apart. But God the Law Giver and Judge obeyed His own law, died for us, and paid the penalty for our sins. The Judge is now the Savior! Have you shut your mouth, trusted Jesus Christ, and heard God say, "Not guilty"?

***Sources: Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Word for Today Bible, and The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary***