

The Good News

Week 6 - Romans 3:19-31

Objectives:

- To explore the purpose and limitations of Old Testament Law-keeping
- To view the beauty of justification by faith in Christ alone
- To contemplate our response as receivers of God's righteousness

Martin Luther has been quoted as saying this passage is the very center, or heart, of all the Bible. In a way, it can be seen as a climax in the story God is telling through the scriptures. Certainly, this moment has been building during the entirety of Paul's letter to the Romans up to this point!

? Think of the climax of a favorite movie or book. What makes that moment powerful or memorable? What kind of a response does it provoke in the viewer/reader?

Limits of the Law

This passage summarizes the state of the human condition under the law. Without a clear picture of who we are as humans in relation to God's righteous standard, we cannot grasp the good news of the gospel. We are meant to feel the intensity of our hopeless condition apart from Christ here.

Read Romans 3:19-20 ESV:

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

? Summarize this passage in your own words. What is Paul communicating in these verses?
Possible answers: No one can point to their own works according to the Law and count himself/herself blameless. Every human is accountable and guilty before God.

? According to Paul, what is the purpose of the Law?
Possible answers: to make us aware of our sin and the need we have before our holy God.

"The gospel, or Good News, is that God has intervened in our history in order to reestablish his lordship over a created world that has rebelled against him." -Douglas Moo

? How have you attempted to make yourself acceptable to God by doing good works, either in the past or recently?

Possible answers: Answers will vary.

The Sweetest BUT in All the Bible

Romans 1:18-3:20 buries us. We are all tried and found guilty under these verses, dead in our transgressions. Romans 3:21 is the great release after the buildup of pressure, where the light of the gospel breaks through the darkness of our sin.

Leader note: The phrase “righteousness of God” can be confusing. It may be helpful to define it for the purposes of your discussion as a status that is given as a gift by faith to believers in Christ.

Read Romans 3:21-26 ESV:

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Leader note: “Propitiation” means averting the wrath of God by the offering of a gift. It refers to the turning away of the wrath of God as the just judgment of our sin by God’s own provision of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. ¹

? How have believers been made righteous?

Possible answers: Christ has fulfilled the Law perfectly on our behalf. He is both the “just and the justifier,” fully satisfying the wrath of God and the penalty of all human sin. This event is called “justification.” Hope CC has explained this in the past to be like a “Jesus Jacket”: at the moment of justification, believers exchange their own marred, sin-soaked “jacket” for the clean, spotless one belonging to Christ.

? What value does the Law hold for the believer now that Christ has been the propitiation on our behalf?

¹ Duncan, Ligon. “Propitiation: Concise Theology Series.” The Gospel Coalition, 2023.
<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/propitiation/>

Possible answers: The Law still reveals our sin to us and our need for salvation that we cannot achieve on our own; displays the beauty of Christ and his fulfillment of all the Law's requirements; now we get to obey out of joy from our salvation rather than trying to obey the law in order to earn salvation.

? After all of the bad news conveyed in the previous chapters and verses of Romans, what response does this passage elicit in your heart?

Possible answers: Answers will vary.

Justification and Obedience

Read Romans 3:27-31 ESV:

²⁷ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

? What does Paul mean by “the law of faith?” Why does this law exclude boasting?

Possible answers: Law of faith is the principle that our righteous status is through Christ and cannot be earned. No one can boast in their own righteousness because it doesn't exist – Christ is the only righteous person who has or ever will exist.

? How might it have been difficult for the original recipients of Paul's letter to accept that God will justify both Jews and Gentiles? What parallels can we draw to this idea today?

Possible answers: The Jews would have seen themselves as the chosen people of God, the ones who knew how to do all the right “dos” and stay away from all the right “don'ts.” In their eyes, the Gentiles were lawless and unclean. The idea that God justifies both equally through Christ likely would have chafed. Christians today may be tempted to view non-Christians or certain groups of people as irredeemable; a Christian may also struggle to accept that their sin has been covered by the cross and they are truly, fully justified.

? Which law does verse 31 command that we uphold?

Possible answers: These are God's righteous standards for how we should live; now that we are justified through Christ (a one-time event) we are to submit to being sanctified (a life-long pursuit). We don't keep God's commands in order to earn his favor; instead, we uphold them out of obedience and joy from the security of our salvation.

For Discussion and Accountability

? Have you responded in faith to the truth outlined in Romans 3:19-31? If yes, how has your justification changed your life? If not, what's holding you back?

? How are you tempted to believe you can earn a righteous status before God? How can we help you to remember that you are justified by faith in Christ alone?

? In the life of the believer, the gospel falls between two extremes: license (I can do whatever I want because of grace) and legalism (I have to do all of the right things in order to keep God happy with me). Which of these extremes are you most tempted toward? How can we encourage you to remain in the safety and truth of the gospel, which states that we are free to obey God because of Christ?