



9.
'Immense and free'
Romans 3.21-26

Background

The passage is not a long one – indeed, in the original it is a single sentence – but it is rich in its concentrated truth: and rich, too, in the good news it articulates! Luther wrote – *'Take heed to what is here. It is the central and most important passage of the epistle, and indeed the entire Scripture.'*

The apostle compresses here into six short verses God's answer to our desperate plight. And it has been precisely to highlight how altogether sufficient and satisfying His provision has been that Paul has elaborated at length in the previous couple of chapters on the gravity of our predicament as human beings.

No matter who we are, and no matter how we might try and excuse ourselves, our deepest need lies in the solemn fact that *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* None of us makes the grade.

So how does the righteous God address that lack of righteousness in His creatures without compromising his own righteousness? ***This***, says Paul, is how – in one of the most compact and condensed theological statements you will find. It repays careful study, for here you have the core of the gospel provision God has made for us in Christ: a righteousness provided by Him, which satisfies the demands of the righteousness exhibited by Him.

Three key words are used by Paul in this passage, each one an abstract word conveying profoundly important truths, and each affording a different perspective on the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first is **'justification'**, a word drawn from the law-courts, which has to do with the verdict pronounced over a person – guilty or not guilty, rotten or righteous, condemned or absolved. The second word is **'redemption'**, a word drawn from the slave-markets, which has to do with the payment made that released a person from slavery. And the third word is **'propitiation'**, a word drawn from the temple, which has to do with the turning aside of the wrath of a holy God. Together, they highlight the comprehensive nature of Jesus' work on behalf of His people. The moral guilt of sin is removed: the spiritual power of sin is broken: the relational effect of sin is undone. Or putting it differently, your status is restored, your freedom is recovered, your relationship with God is renewed.

Read the whole passage (it's not long!) and start with **'days' (1), (5) and (7)**.

1) Monday 4th March – right with God

Read [Romans 3.21](#)

“.. *apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known ..*” (Rom.3.21)

How do we get right with God if none of us produce a righteousness of our own in terms of God’s law? Answer – a righteousness which God provides in Christ, which doesn’t depend on *our* fulfilling the law, but on *His* having fulfilled the law for us.

In a culture which stresses the importance of ‘feeling good in yourself’ far more than ‘getting right with God’, how is that latter emphasis of the gospel best communicated?

If a righteousness has been provided for us ‘apart from the law’, does that mean that the law of God doesn’t really matter now?

In what ways do ‘the Law and the Prophets testify’ to this righteousness provided for us in Christ?

How would you answer someone who said that the Old Testament was largely irrelevant and that we should concentrate on the New Testament?

Prayer: [Eternal Light](#), *Eternal Light! How pure the soul must be, when placed within Thy searching sight, it shrinks not, but with calm delight can live and look on Thee!*

2) Tuesday 5th March – the gift of God

Read [Romans 3.22](#)

“.. *this righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ ..*” (Rom.3.22)

A ‘righteousness’ which both fulfils the precepts and exhausts the penalties of His law has been secured by God in and through His Son, the Lord Jesus. This righteousness is *given* by God (not earned by us), *grasped* by faith, and available to all.

When and how did you reach the point where you ceased striving to earn the favour and forgiveness of God, and were glad to receive *His* righteousness?

What is involved in the ‘faith’ through which this righteousness is given?

Prayer: *Almighty God, how grateful I am that You have not spared Your own Son but have been pleased to give Him, at such cost, that sinners such as I might live.*

3) Wednesday 6th March – no difference

Read [Romans 3.22](#)

“.. *there is no difference between Jew and Gentile ..*” (Rom.3.22)

Neither pedigree or performance count for anything: your 'position' won't do you any more good than your piety. In the end of the day, no matter who you are, no matter what your credentials, the only 'righteousness' you'll ever have is one you *receive*.

Once you've come to faith it's easy to slip into thinking that your standing before God depends on your performance: how do you avoid that?

Read [Luke 18.9-14](#) and [2 Cor.8.1-7](#): when is it valid and helpful to compare yourself with others, and when is it unhelpful and unhealthy?

Prayer: *God be merciful to me a sinner.*

4) Thursday 7th March – falling short

Read [Romans 3.23](#)

".. all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God .." (Rom.3.23)

A short verse, but a key one. The sooner we own it the better. Universal in its scope and definitive in its message, the basic truth about us is stated starkly: our best efforts both miss the mark and fall short of what's required. None of us make the grade.

Why are people so reluctant to accept this truth and so slow to recognise the consequences of it?

Why is the fact that we 'fall short of the glory of God' such a serious matter?

Prayer: *Oh how shall I whose native sphere is dark, whose mind is dim, before th' Ineffable appear, and on my natural spirit bear the uncreated beam? Have mercy!*

5) Friday 8th March – amazing grace

Read [Romans 3.24](#)

".. all are justified freely by His grace .." (Rom.3.24)

Justification has to do with the removal of sin's guilt (we're declared right with God): redemption involves the breaking of sin's power (we're delivered from that slavery). Both justification and redemption are secured for us by Jesus and offered to us freely.

Read [1 John 1.6-10](#): how would you answer those who say (a) sin doesn't matter, (b) sin doesn't exist, and (c) sin isn't me?

What means does the Lord use to make us aware of our guilt, and our consequent need of His justifying grace?

Being justified removes the guilt of our sin, from as it were a legal or moral standpoint – but the experiential 'stain' of sin can sometimes be harder to remove: is that deep, inner cleansing by Christ something different?

Through what He did in His life, death and resurrection, Jesus has *freed us from sin*: how is that 'freedom' experienced in the life of the believer?

Prayer: You have looked upon my misery, O Lord, and seen my hopeless plight! How grateful I am that You have parted the heavens, come down, and met me in my need!

6) Saturday 9th March – propitiation

Read [Romans 3.25](#)

".. a propitiation by His blood .." (Rom.3.25 - ESV)

The wrath of God against all sin is very real and very right. The averting of that anger is what's involved in the work of 'propitiation': and only the death of the pure and perfect Jesus could secure that for us. 'This is My body which is for you: take and eat.'

How would you answer someone who objected to the very notion of the 'wrath of God' on the basis that He is the God of love?

'The shedding of His blood' sounds very brutal to modern ears: why is 'the shedding of blood' so significant and necessary?

Prayer: You left Your Father's throne above, so free, so infinite Your grace: emptied Yourself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race. How immense Your mercy!

7) Sunday 10th March – the righteous God

Read [Romans 3.25-26](#)

".. He did this to demonstrate His righteousness .." (Rom.3.25)

God has made provision for sinful people in the gift of His Son and the righteousness He has secured. That righteousness is both *retrospective* and *comprehensive*: the sins of the past are covered, and the wages of sin are paid in full. God is righteous!

How does what Paul says in v.25 help answer those who point to the way that godless people seem to 'get away with it' and prosper?

The good news of Jesus wasn't known by those who lived before He came: does that throw any light on the fate of those who today have never heard?

Read [Micah 6.8](#): in what ways are we able both to act justly and to love mercy?

What difference does it make to you knowing that God is absolutely righteous in all that He does?

Prayer: You are righteous in all Your ways, O Lord, and faithful in all You do: thank You for the promise You have mercifully made that You watch over all who love You.