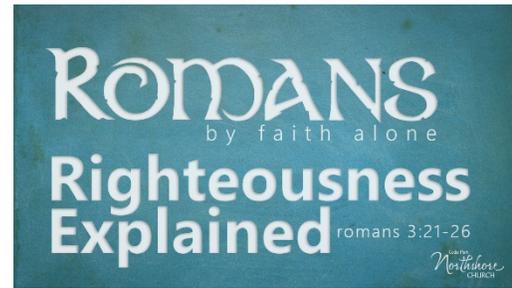


Romans: Righteousness Explained

This is our third message in our series from the Book of Romans that we're calling *By Faith Alone*.

I am going to conduct a few **experiments** today as it relates to these moments we share each Sunday: the sermon.



When it comes to preaching there are all sorts of approaches. There are some approaches that are more academic, while others are more related to everyday life. Some are shorter, while others are longer. Some produced by professionals (many more qualified than me), and other approaches that rely only on lay persons. Some are based in deeper research, while others are more spontaneous. Regardless of approach, the act of preaching is established in the Bible as a vital part of the life of God's people. Preaching the Gospel has always been a central and vital part of this church's life and must always be.

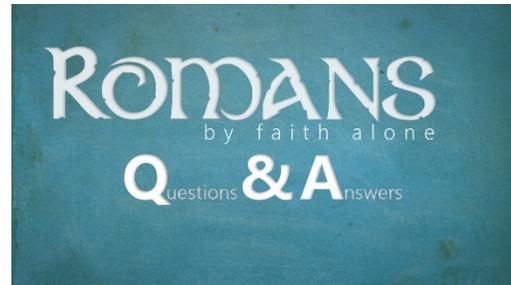
With that said, it is good to think about approach... so, like I said, I want to experiment a bit. Specifically I want try some approaches that might make these moments more of a dialog than merely a monolog... more of a conversation together rather than merely a speech. Not things we'll always do, or might never do again based on how it goes... just experiments.

This idea of more of a dialog is a significant part of our times. We no longer settle for merely a few authoritative sources that provide information to us via a talking head. Gone are the days of just a few national news organizations, for example, that simply tell us what is going on. These days we expect many streams of information, as well as ways to enter into those streams ourselves. When we watch the news or even sports, the television screen usually gives us several views into the information with scrollbars and information blocks and multiple boxes and such. And then there are the *second screens*, as we watch social media feeds on our phones and tablets simultaneous to what might be happening on the television screen.

So, for those *second-screener*s I offer this hashtag: **#NSromans**. If you use this hashtag on Twitter, you might even see your tweet on the screen. (Now if words like *hashtag* and *live tweet* and *second screen* sound like gibberish to you... don't worry about it; *this isn't for you*).



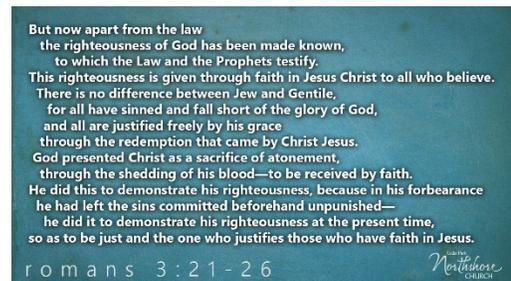
The other approach we will experiment with today is a **Q & A**. At the close of my message today, rather than giving time for a response in prayer (an altar call), I'm going to open the floor for questions related to today's message (as well as the other two messages in Romans). This isn't meant to be a game of *stump the pastor*, or a time to ask unrelated questions (for those who need to know if there were unicorns in the ark). Just a few minutes to consider the Scripture together as a community.



We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and it is vitally important to our lives. Furthermore, we believe that the Bible is for us **all**, to be read and understood and applied by us all... not merely by a few paid professionals. I'm glad you listen to what I have to say about it, and I'm glad that most seem to appreciate what I have to say about the Bible. But we are going to be at our best when God's Word is more than just a *monologue* from a few of us, but rather a constant *dialog* among all of us.

So, today, we turn to Romans 3, starting in verse 21. Let's stand and read it together:

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement,^m through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—



unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. ¹

The passage starts with this transitional phrase: **but now**. We are picking up where we left off last week, having our **sin problem** revealed by Romans 1:18 – 3:20. It is summarized in verse 23:

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God²

It is curious that English translations allow us to think of our sin problem as a mere **mistake** made sometime in the past. The original language used to write the passage had more tools as its disposal when it comes to tenses... Greek is often better than English for tenses. The more accurate translation would go something like, “all have sinned, continue to sin, and will likely sin again all the while continuing to come short of God’s glory.”

The lesson of the previous chapters is that sin is more than mere bad behavior, but it includes trusting in anything other than God for our righteousness. Our *sin problem* has everything to do with our efforts to earn favor with God through religion. We don’t merely need to repent from our bad behavior, we must repent of our righteousness. Everyone, Jew and Gentile or otherwise, sins and falls short of God’s demands.

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.³

I was an early adopter when it came to electronic Bibles. I first loaded a Bible onto my computer with 5.25” floppies. I had the Bible on my *Palm Pilot* long before there was an iPhone. I hardly ever use a printed Bible, opting for the power and convenience of electronic tools. But one of the downsides of not using a printed Bible is that we might forget that the Bible is **mostly** Old Testament. What do we think of that?

Verse 21 should guide our thoughts along these lines. If we merely took the first half, we might think that we can easily dismiss the Old Testament... since the righteousness of God has been made known apart from the law (the law that could not keep us from sin). But there is that last half of the

¹ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ro 3:21–26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ro 3:23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ro 3:21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

verse. The Law and the Prophets, Genesis through Malachi, testify to the righteousness of God.

The ***Gospel*** is **God's Plan**, period; it is not God's Plan B.

We err if we take that simplistic approach. God didn't arrive at the Gospel by *trial and error*:

- Starting with Adam and Eve in the Garden, and then kicking them out
- Getting a fresh start with Noah and the flood
- Instituting a people of God through Abraham, Isaac, and then Jacob (Israel)
- Trying to make it work with Judges and then Kings
- Then, finally, Jesus and the Gospel
- And, if somehow that doesn't work, maybe God will try again

No... God's plan was set before time began and all of His activity throughout history has pointed to the Gospel. So our Old Testaments are important, not because they are a mere history of an *old and discarded* plan of God, but rather because it testifies to the righteousness of God now revealed in the Gospel.

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,⁴

Once a people of God based on lineage and religious observance, now ***all*** are called to become the people of God through faith in Jesus.

Does that mean that the Gospel ***replaces*** the Law, and the Church ***replaces*** the Jews? I think it is more accurate to think in terms of the Gospel and the Church ***fulfilling*** God's one, ongoing plan.

Saying that the Church replaces Israel would be like saying that an oak tree replaces an acorn. The Law and the Prophets and even the historical People of God all testify to the righteousness of God... now fulfilled in the Church through the Gospel.

⁴ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ro 3:22). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ⁵

“Justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Now that is a mouthful.

Justified has the same root as justice. This is a legal term. It carries with it this idea of *imputed* righteousness... complete righteousness (fully-accomplished salvation) given to us by grace (not by our qualifications or work or sacrifice).

Redemption is a term associated with commerce. Someone had to be paid; Jesus paid the price.

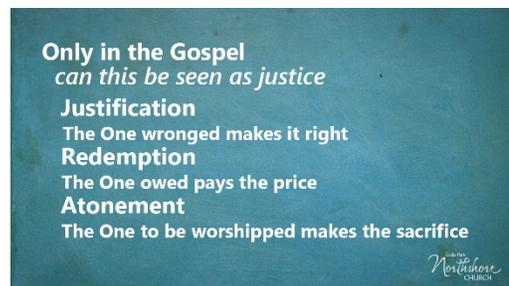
²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, ^m through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. ⁶

Atonement is a religious term. Hearing about atonement, the Jews would have immediately thought of the annual *Day of Atonement* specified in Leviticus 16. It involved the shedding of blood to pay for sin, as well as the removal of sin through the scapegoat that would be expelled from the camp. Jesus both paid for sin, removed it from our account, and works through the Holy Spirit to remove sin from our lives.

All of this (justification, redemption, and atonement) is received by faith alone.

Only in the Gospel can this be seen as justice.

- **Justification:** The One wronged makes it right
- **Redemption:** The One owed pays the price
- **Atonement:** The One to be worshipped makes the sacrifice



Yet this is our promise and sure hope. This is the Gospel. This is the justification, redemption, atonement, forgiveness, and full life that is our by grace... by believing in Jesus, and Jesus alone, for our justification, redemption, and atonement. Not merely believing in God. Or merely

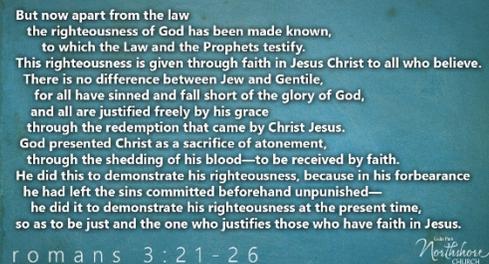
⁵ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ro 3:23–25). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ *The New International Version*. (2011). (Ro 3:25). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

believing that Jesus was and is real... but believing that our only hope for right standing before God, our only hope for forgiveness and removal of sin, is in Jesus.

That is what this final verse is getting at.

He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. ⁷



But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

romans 3:21-26

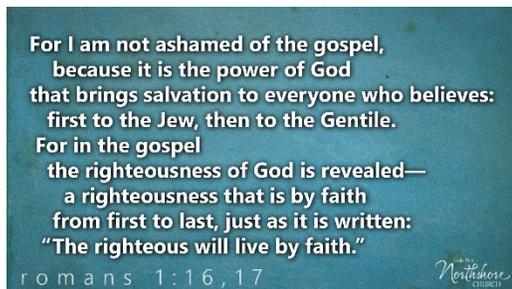
We are going to see, as Romans unfolds in the weeks ahead, that righteousness has **always** been a matter of **faith** alone... that even the sacrificial system established by the Law was powerless to truly accomplish righteousness before Our Holy God. The blood shed and sacrifices made merely foreshadowed the work of Christ. And any forgiveness granted by God was based on the salvation provided by God, through the person of the Son, Jesus Christ.

So... this is the Gospel. And we are called to believe, to set aside both our sin and **our** righteousness, and put all our hope and trust in Jesus.

¹⁷ For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” ^{n 8}

Father, grant us this grace and give us gifts of faith to truly trust this righteousness that is by faith from first to last. We want to be among those who are known for righteousness lived out only by faith. We believe. Thank You Jesus!

Like I said, I want to end today with a few moments of conversation. So I am looking for feedback and questions as it relates to the first three chapters of Romans.



For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”

romans 1:16,17



ROMANS
by faith alone
Questions & Answers

⁷ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 3:25–26). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 1:17). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.