

God's Solution For The Bad News

Text: Romans 3:21-31

Series: Book of Romans [#04]

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Theme: **By Grace You Have Been Saved Through Faith.**

Introduction

The Bible gives us the *good news*. God created us to have a personal relationship with Him forever. God loves us. But the Bible also gives us the *bad news*. We saw that last time in Romans 1:18–3:20. Because God is holy and just, He reveals His righteous wrath or anger against all sin. And, all of us are sinners.

How can the *good news* and the *bad news* be reconciled? If God simply overlooked our sin, He would not be holy and just. If we are on our own to meet God's standard of perfection, there is no hope for us. God does not use comparative standards, accepting those who are *better* than others.

Curtis is returning to his mission base in Hawaii in January. That's a great time to return ~~the~~ coldest month of the year here. So, let's all go to Hawaii with him! Since flying all of us there would be expensive, we will rent some nice buses and travel to Vancouver. There we can get properly outfitted, including GPS units, and then get into the Pacific Ocean and have a group swim to Hawaii! Crazy? Yes! That's crazy! Some of us may swim faster, more consistently or farther than others, but not one of us can swim from Vancouver to Hawaii.

So it is with trying to please God by what we do. Some of us may *swim* faster, more consistently or farther with good works, but no one can *swim* to perfection. So, it would seem, we are on the horns of a dilemma. Either we are condemned to having no certainty with God if He overlooked our sin, because He then would not be holy, just and consistent; or, if He is just, we would be condemned to everlasting punishment for our sin. We lose either way. We are gored by one horn or the other.

But there is a solution to this dilemma. God sets it out through the apostle Paul in the section of Romans we are looking at today, 3:21-31. God's solution for the bad news is, to use the words from Ephesians 2:8, "*By grace you have been saved through faith.*" This solution was in the plan of God before He created us and the universe. And God worked it out perfectly in time.

God's Plan From Eternity.

We begin with God's plan from eternity. After Christ came God told us in the New Testament that He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4); that every believer's name was written in the book of life from the foundation of the world

(Revelation 13:8; 17:8); and also that the everlasting kingdom we will enter has been prepared for us from the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34). But God also revealed this plan before Christ came.

This is seen in the witness of the Old Testament. Look at verse 21. “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.” The phrase “the Law and the Prophets” refers to all of what we call the Old Testament. Paul reminds us that Christ coming into the world was not a change or a new plan.

The first witness is in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. After God created Adam and Eve He told them not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they did, they would die (Genesis 2:17). When they disobeyed God, when they sinned, He confronted them and pronounced judgment. In 3:15 God’s judgment to the serpent was

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”

Satan would bruise Christ’s heel, would cause Him to suffer, but Christ would deal the death blow to Satan when He died on the cross.

The thread of this plan of God continues throughout the Old Testament. Think of just a few examples.

- Psalm 22 pictures Christ’s crucifixion.
- Isaiah 53 pictures Christ as the sin-bearing Suffering Servant.
- Psalm 16 speaks of Christ’s resurrection (cf. Acts 13:35).
- Isaiah 52 tells of Christ’s exaltation (52:13).
- This is just the beginning. There are prophecies that He would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14) and be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Some have counted over three hundred Old Testament prophecies of Christ.¹

Being saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus has been God’s plan that originated in His own eternal council, and is witnessed in the Old Testament.

That this is God’s eternal plan is also seen in God’s forbearance in executing full, final judgment on sin. In verse 25 Paul tells us God demonstrated His righteousness in Christ and His sacrifice “because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.” God, the apostle Peter wrote, “is patient... not wanting any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

God created us to live with Him. Our sinfulness and sin brings death to that. While God in His justice could condemn us forever when we entered this world as sinners and, just as certainly, when we committed our first sin, He is patient and withheld that full, final

judgment. To maintain His holiness, God could and did exercise this forbearance because of His plan from eternity to have God the Son, Jesus Christ, satisfy His righteous demands and wrath against sin..

Some may misunderstand this and think there is no big deal, no need to rush to come to God. Remember the warning here in Romans back in chapter two, starting at verse 4,

“do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds.” (2:4-6)

Then, some believers may misunderstand God’s patience with their sin and think that since they are forgiven and going to heaven, their sin really isn’t a big deal. In the second chapter of The Revelation, Jesus spoke to the church at Thyatira (2:18-29). He commended them for their deeds which were increasing, for their love, faith, service and perseverance. But He called them to account for tolerating one of their own teaching falsehood. Jesus said, “I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality” (2:21), and then went on to pronounce His judgment.

When we looked at the book of Exodus recently, we noted the Tabernacle and sacrificial system. God put that in place to deal with the sin of people of faith looking forward to the perfect, once for all time, once for all sin sacrifice of His Son. God’s delaying the time of executing full, final judgment on sin is part of and reveals His eternal plan.

God’s Provision In Time.

God’s solution of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ was His plan from eternity which He provided in time. As we look at God’s provision in time, let’s start by considering the solution God provided. There are a number of ways we could summarize God’s solution as we see it here and elsewhere in the Bible. At this point, we are zeroing in on three of the key words here that are essential to correctly understanding God’s gracious solution.

The first word is propitiation — that is, God’s righteous anger at our sin is satisfied, and turned away. Propitiation is not a familiar word to most people today. But we see it here in chapter 3. Let’s pick it up at verse 24. “being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith” (24-25a). The word propitiation appears only in a few of our contemporary English versions. Some versions use words that are more readily understood, while others choose language that avoids dealing with God’s righteous anger. The latter is the reason behind the word expiation, or the wiping away of sin, being used at this point in some versions.

The word translated propitiation means to remove wrath or anger. Here, of course, it refers to satisfying, turning away, removing God's righteous anger at sin. As I have noted several times today and last time, God cannot just ignore or wink at sin and still be holy and righteous. The New Living Translation's reading of the first part of verse 25 catches the meaning of propitiation here fairly well, "For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's anger against us." (25a, NLT)

Several other references help clarify and amplify this.

- 1 John 2:1, "He Himself [Christ] is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."
- Again 2 chapters later, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10)

God's provision of our salvation is grounded in the fact that Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, satisfied, turned away God's anger at our sin. There was and is nothing any person could do to achieve this. Only God could and, in His grace and mercy, did accomplish this.

A second key word essential to understanding God's solution for our sin is redemption—which describes the believer being bought out of slavery to sin. Look at verse 24 which tells us we are "justified as a gift by His [God's] grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." There are a number of New Testament words translated redemption or redeem. One means to buy something in the market place. A variation of that means to buy something and take it out of the market place. Another means to ransom or pay the price to set free. We find it in Titus 2:14,

"[Christ] gave Himself for us to redeem [ransom] us from every lawless deed and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds."

Redeemed from sin to be Christ's people who actively, eagerly serve Him. The apostle Peter uses it in his first letter, chapter 1,

"... you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." (19-20)

The word used here in Romans 3:24 is an intensified form of that word, with the emphasis on being ransomed or redeemed from something or someone. Another example is in Ephesians 1:7 which tells us "we have redemption through His [Christ's] blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace."

To be redeemed, Paul writes in Romans chapter 6, is

- "to be freed from sin" (6:7),
- to be those who no longer have to or should be presenting ourselves to sin but to God

and righteousness (6:13),

- to be those who, having been freed from sin, no longer have it as our master (6:14).

So, to sum up, to be redeemed is to be purchased out of slavery to sin; to be purchased by the blood of Christ; to be purchased for freedom from sin and to serve Christ, our Redeemer.

A third key word essential to understanding God's solution for our sin is justification— or God's judicial act of declaring one who believes in Christ righteous at the point in time when he or she believes. This word in Paul's day meant to declare a positive or favorable verdict. It's background is the courtroom where the verdict declares the person not guilty or acquitted.

When used of the believer it refers to God's declaration that we are righteous. The emphasis of this word is not on *being* righteous, but *being declared* righteous, a declaration of what we objectively are in Christ. The old definition of justification, "just as if I had never sinned", is not fully adequate. Justification is, again, God's judicial act of declaring a sinner who believes in Christ righteous at the point in time he or she believes.

In this section of Romans Paul tells us God's righteousness has been revealed in all who believe in Christ (21-22), who are "justified as a gift by God's grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (24), who is the propitiation so that, verse 26 tells us, God "would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." It is on the basis of this declaration by God because of what Christ has done that we are accepted and have peace with Him. As we read later in the first verse of chapter five, "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

These three key words are far from the total picture, but they are critical to accurately understanding God's provision of the solution for our sin, understanding Christ's work at the cross, understanding our salvation:

- Propitiation, God's righteous anger at our sin is satisfied and turned away by Christ.
- Redemption, Christ bought us out of slavery to sin by His blood to serve Him.
- Justification, God has declared us righteous when we accepted His provision by placing our faith in Christ.

God has provided the solution. How do we benefit from it? The vaccine for the H1N1 virus has been provided. But just being available does not mean anyone, let alone everyone benefits from it. It has to be received, and the health authorities have laid down the procedures for receiving it.

So now we turn to how God's provision, His solution, is received. Remember the core truth here is summed up in Ephesians 2:8, *By grace you have been saved through faith*. We begin with the reality that the solution, salvation, is received by God's grace. Verse 24, again, tells us we are "justified as a gift by His [God's] grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

All of 1:18–3:20 has hammered nail after nail into the coffin of anything within a person, or anything he or she can do, being able to obtain salvation. The last verse of that section, 3:20, “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.” Righteousness, the next verse tells us, is apart from the Law. Or it could read “apart from law”—apart from the Old Testament Law and also any other standards and works we might devise and follow. Later, in 11:6, Paul tells us that if there is any place for our work in salvation then grace no longer is grace.

King David knew this truth. Turn back to Psalm 51.

“Be *gracious* to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You are justified when You speak and blameless when You judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”
(1-5)

He knew he was a sinner by his actions and nature, and had to rely on God’s grace.

Let’s stop and think about the meaning of God’s grace. The familiar, brief definition is unmerited favor, or God’s unmerited favor to us in Christ. Let’s expand that a bit. God’s grace is giving to us what we do not deserve, what we have not earned and cannot earn, what we never can repay, based on His character and what Christ has accomplished when He died on the cross for us. God’s grace of salvation is offered to all without distinction to who or what we are. Verse 22 tells us it is “for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.”

Salvation is totally, completely, all by God’s grace. Verse 24, “being justified as a *gift* of His *grace* through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” Twice in Ephesians 2 Paul wrote “by grace you have been saved” (5, 8), and then went on to say “it is the gift of God; not as a result of works...” (8b-9)

It is not just our salvation, but all that we have and will have in our relationship with God is by His grace. It is, 5:2 tells us, God’s “grace in which we stand.” Our position, our relationship, our service, our future all is by God’s grace. And so, the apostle Peter wrote that we are to stand firm in God’s grace (1 Peter 5:12) and to grow in it (2 Peter 3:18). In the first chapter of John’s gospel the apostle tells us that grace and truth are realized through Jesus Christ (17), and that we all receive “grace upon grace” (16). There is a continuous, never ending flow of God’s grace to us. There is a limitless, inexhaustible supply of God’s grace for us.

Understanding highlights of God’s grace like these, it is no wonder that John Newton wrote, “Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost

but now am found, was blind but now I see.” Whether we see ourselves like this or not, all of us are hopeless, helpless wretches before Holy God until we are saved, are transformed by His amazing grace. *By grace you have been saved through faith.*

Now we turn to the second element in receiving God’s salvation solution, we receive God’s salvation through faith. Faith is important in this section. Our own futile efforts to please and reach God are contrasted not only with God’s grace but also with our faith. This is reinforced by Paul using the word faith eight times and the verbal form believe one time in these eleven verses. Follow along in your Bible and mark these nine words as I read them.

- Verse 22, “the righteousness of God through *faith* in Jesus Christ for all those who *believe*.”
- Drop down to verse 25 where Paul continues the thought of being justified as a gift he started in verse 24 with the phrase “through *faith*.”
- Verse 26 tells us God is just and “the justifier of the one who has *faith* in Jesus.”
- In the next verse (27) Paul speaks of “a law of *faith*.”
- Verse 28 says that we are “justified by *faith* apart from the works of the Law.”
- Verse 30 tells us God “will justify the circumcised by *faith* and the uncircumcised through *faith*.”
- And the last verse (31) says that we do not “nullify the Law through *faith*.”

Remember our theme verse links grace and faith, “by grace you have been saved through faith.” Martin Luther believed in the importance of faith so strongly that he added the word *alone* to verse 28 in his German translation.² If we followed that in the NASB it would read, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith *alone* apart from works of the Law.” Now, adding the word *alone* is not justified in the text, but it underscored the importance Luther placed on faith and his rejection of all the ascetic and ritualistic works that had polluted the message of the gospel.

Faith. Let’s be clear on what Paul, on what God means. Faith simply is believing. It is not, however, just knowing the good news of the gospel nor yet just agreeing with it. It means to place your trust, your confidence in Jesus Christ, God the Son, as your Savior from sin and death to life and holiness. This faith is the vehicle, the channel of receiving God’s gift of salvation.

Last year I mentioned the Grand Canyon Skywalk. It is a horseshoe that projects seventy feet from the rim of the Canyon. The other side of the Canyon at that point is three miles away. Standing at the edge of it, people say you have a great view—ask Henry and Frieda, they have been there. Oh yes, there is one other small detail—the skywalk’s floor is glass. You have to walk out that seventy feet on clear glass with only air between it and the Canyon floor several thousand feet below.

I know these facts. I accept that they are true. But I'm not sure I would have enough *faith* to take that seventy foot walk. For perspective: the distance from the front of this platform to the back of the sanctuary is about 52 feet. So, that skybridge walk to the edge is almost 1½ times this distance.

God chose every believer before the foundation of the world, He draws each one to Himself as the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, enlightens the truth of the gospel to him and gives him the ability to trust God. We don't understand all the details of this. What we can understand is that we can rely on God's faithfulness to what He has said He will do for us. We don't know why God has showered his grace on us, but we can say, in the words of the old hymn based on Paul's statement in 2 Timothy 1:12, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day." We can understand and take up our responsibility to respond to Him in faith.

This is God's solution for the bad news. "*By grace you have been saved through faith.*"

Conclusion.

As we wrap this up and go to God for a few moments to reflect on this truth and respond to Him, can you say that you *have* been saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ? Have you consciously, deliberately faced yourself as a sinner, separated from God, facing the His wrath against and judgment on your sin, and moved from knowing and agreeing with these facts to stepping out in faith and receiving God's gracious gift? If not, now is the time to do that. Talk with me, Pastor Tyler or someone else here about this today.

Then, for all of us who know we have been saved by God's grace through faith, thank God for His amazing grace to you, grace which He gives freely, but which is not cheap; grace which flows through Christ's great sacrifice of His precious blood for us. Then take a look at your last week. Have you been a good and faithful servant of Christ by both living and presenting God's solution to sin in Jesus Christ to people around you? Determine to make a conscious effort to evaluate each day of this next week in terms of your thankfulness to God for His grace and your faithfulness in sharing it with others.

¹ e.g., Morris, Henry, *Science And The Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press), 1986.

For one list see <http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/messiah.htm>

² “So halten wir es nu / Das der Mensch gerecht werde / on des Gesetzes werck / alleine durch den Glauben.” <<http://enominepatris.com/biblia/biblia2/B045K003.htm>> Accessed 28 October 2009. [The English word “alone” is “alleine” in the above quote.]

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