

## Lesson 9: Surprise Verdict

### Romans 3:21-30

<sup>21</sup> But now apart from the Law *the righteousness of God* has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even *the righteousness of God* through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being **justified** as a gift by His **grace** through the **redemption** which is in Christ Jesus; <sup>25</sup> whom God displayed publicly as a **propitiation** in His blood through faith.

(1) *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

(2) <sup>26</sup> for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> Where then is boasting? It is excluded.

By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.

<sup>28</sup> For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

<sup>29</sup> Or is God *the God* of Jews only? Is He not *the God* of Gentiles also?

Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup> since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

NASB

### The Righteousness of God Revealed in the Gospel (3:21-25a)

We are finally getting to the good news. The bad news is really, really bad. The man stands on trial. The prosecutor has done his job well. The law of God's court is clear. "By the works of the law no flesh will be justified in God's sight, through the law comes the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20)." The man has made a feeble defense. His family and supporters hang their heads. The judge's decision is clear. By all the rules of goodness and justice the man should be declared guilty, then condemned to punishment. The man is me.

I can imagine back when boys sold newspapers on the street corner. "This just out. Read all about it, read all about it! Surprise verdict! Guilty man freed of all charges. Declared righteous in the court. Family rejoices. The opposition vows an inquiry into the judge's ruling. Get the news here. Read all about! Surprise verdict!"

It's really shocking. It runs contrary to all the evidence that we have seen in chapters 1, 2 and 3. Is it a travesty of judgment? Or is there some deeper law of justice at work? How do we get from so clearly guilty to innocent? How is the news good? This is Romans 3:21-30. This is one of the most important texts in the New Testament about the gospel of Jesus Christ. We get the details of what happened on the cross elsewhere. Here we are told how it works. How is it that the cross of Jesus Christ saves sinful man from the justice of God without God himself being guilty of unrighteously ignoring sin. This is a critical passage in our Bibles; one we must not underestimate. It is also a passage loaded with theological terms, especially in the first half. So, I am going to divide the text into two parts 21-25a and 25b-30. In the first part we will consider five important theological words or phrases that help us understand how it is that the gospel saves. Then we will conclude with the second part of the text. So, the first part, five terms, these are going to be (1) the righteousness of God, (2) grace, (3) justified, (4) redeemed and (5) propitiation. Five theological words all in the first part. We are going to go through that.

So, let's read the first part, 21-25a.

[Read Romans 21-25a]

#### Righteousness of God (3:21-23)

In Paul's thesis for Romans in 1:16-17, he declared that the reason he is not ashamed of the gospel is that it is power for salvation and the reason it is God's power for salvation is that in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed. That is our first theological phrase: righteousness of God For a discussion on the different meanings of righteousness of God go back to that lesson on 1:16-17, the third lesson of our introduction, the thesis lesson.

The most important part of that discussion is to recognize that righteousness of God can be something that applies to God and something that applies to man. And Paul uses it both ways in the first four chapters of Romans. He is either talking about the righteousness of man or the righteousness of God. N. T. Wright offers a

helpful illustration as long as we recognize the limits of the illustration. He points out that in a courtroom the righteousness of the judge is different from the righteousness of the defendant. A judge is shown to be righteous if he is upright, fair, and just in his judgment. He is righteous if he takes no bribe and shows no bias. A defendant is righteous in court if he is innocent. Either he is innocent before the court or he is found guilty and is able to pay his fine, then he is declared righteous in the eyes of the court. So, you are either innocent or you pay the fine.

The way this illustration has been taken too far is to point out that these two types of righteousness, that of the judge and that of the defendant, and to say that they are so completely different that it is impossible for the judge to give his righteousness to the defendant, and in that conclude that it is impossible for God to take his righteousness and give his righteousness to man. If we take this illustration, which is helpful, too far to say that it is not possible for the righteousness of God to be applied to man then we are missing out on an essential teaching that is coming in this passage, which is that the righteous status of God is something received by faith. It has to be able to apply to man if we receive it. The mistake is in limiting God's role to that of a judge. It is helpful in the illustration, but God is not just a judge. God also became man and lived a righteous life and died on a cross. So, it might be right to say the righteousness of the judge does not apply to the defendant. But that is not the righteous substitution. The righteousness of God that applies to the defendant is the righteousness of the second Adam who fully lived out a human life, who died on a cross, who rose again, who is eternal. He becomes our substitute and that is the righteous status that is credited to us.

It can be hard to get our minds around the full range of meaning in Paul's one phrase the righteousness of God. We see the range through these chapters. Consider this. The righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel by the righteous decision to demand payment for sin, by righteous character lived out as a man, by righteous action in the cross and by righteous status offered freely to the sinner.

How does this work? Let's follow the text to see.

Verse 21 starts, "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested..." This is that language from back in 1:16-17, "The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes ... for in it the righteousness of God is revealed (or manifested, or made known)." The "But now apart from law" implies two things that are true. First, the Law has never fully manifested to us how it is that the righteous action of God will save mankind. Paul does say, it is witnessed to "by the Law and the Prophets." The mystery is hinted at or foreshadowed. It is just not clearly manifested. The Passover lamb described in the Law of Moses witnesses to the need of a true lamb of God to take away the sin of the world (Exodus 12:12-13). Or in an example from the Prophets, Isaiah indicates that the glorious Messiah will also be the suffering servant, "pierced through for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities (Isaiah 53:5)." And though we might get all that now. As we look back we understand. The lamb of God is Jesus. The suffering servant is Jesus. But nobody clearly saw in the Old Testament how God is going to do this. They did not see that God himself was going to come as a man and die on a cross in order to satisfy justice. "But now apart from Law," we see it. It has been made known to us by the witness of the apostles in the New Testament. We have a new manifestation of the gospel that explains how it works through Jesus on the cross.

Second, not only is this righteousness manifested or made know apart from the law it is also a righteousness of God that comes to man apart from the doing of the law. The law holds up a vision of the righteous character of God. When you look at the law you can see the righteousness of God that he calls us to live out. But it is a righteousness we cannot obtain. "But now apart from law," a different righteousness of God has been made known clearly known. There is another option. Another way. Which is a good thing because the righteousness of God described by the law was never fully attainable. This righteousness apart from the law is not new. That would be a mistake to think there was a righteousness of the law for Old Testament saints and now there is a righteousness by grace for New Testament saints. That is not right. Paul is going to argue in chapter four that this way is the same way that Abraham was declared righteous. The way of grace is not new. The way of grace has always been the way at least since the fall of Adam and Eve. The way is not new. What is new is that the way has now finally been accomplished. Before it was promised. God would make a way. Trust that God will make a way. What way? We do not know. There is going to be a way. It is something to do with sacrifice, something to do with a lamb. I do not know. But he is going to make a way and we have to trust him. Now the way of grace is both made known and also accomplished. It has been completed in Jesus Christ. The new way is not just a promise, now it is a reality.

Verse 22 tells us how this righteousness of God comes to be applied to a human being. It has been made manifest. And it is through faith in Jesus that it applies to us. Faith is a central term in this crucial passage of

Scripture, being mentioned eight times in ten verses. It sounds here in verse 22 like Paul is even being redundant about it, “the righteousness of God through *faith* in Jesus Christ for all those who *believe*.” Why add for all those who believe? It sounds like the same thing twice. It is for faith to those who believe. But he is not saying the same thing twice. In the restatement he adds that phrase, “all those.” That is where we should put the emphasis on the second part of the verse. We should say it like this, “The righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ not just for some, not just for Jews and not just for Gentiles but for all those who believe.” Just as all men, every single one, has “sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” so also the potential to receive the righteousness of God is open to all those who would believe.

### **Justified (3:24)**

Our next theological term is justified. This is a term we have been using a lot already. In fact, I have titled this section of Romans from 1:18 through 4:25 “God Justifies by Faith.” There is good reason for that. It would be wrong to say all of Romans is about justification by faith. All of Romans is about the righteousness revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. So, it is broader than justification. Paul uses the verb to justify 15 times in Romans. Nine of those uses are in this section. All of the other six uses are in chapter 5, which serves as a transitional passage from this section to the next. After chapter 5 the verb justify does not appear in Romans. We can safely say that justification is a major theme of this first section, chapters 1-4. The same is also true for the word faith. Paul uses faith 60 times in Romans with over half of that, 34 times, in the first four chapters. That is not to say that faith is not important through the whole letter. It is simply to point out that this first section of Romans places particular emphasis on that fact that God justifies human beings by faith.

We have already used the term a lot, but we have not yet defined it precisely.

In English the word “justify” and the word “righteousness” look and sound like two very different words. Justify and righteousness, no connection there. In Greek the two words come from the same root δίκαιος (righteous). So, justify is δικαίω and righteousness is δικαιοσύνη. You can hear the δικαί in both. The verb justify means to make or declare righteous. Here in Paul’s courtroom context the meaning is not to make righteous but to declare righteous.

There are two ways for a defendant to be declared righteous. Either the judge finds that the defendant is not guilty of any crime or the judge finds that the defendant has paid the penalty for his crimes. In either case, the person is declared to be in the right in the eyes of the court, that is to be justified.

We are certainly not innocent, so the first does not apply. But then we also cannot pay our penalty and still be in relationship with God. According to Romans 6:23, the penalty of sin is death, not just physical, but spiritual, resulting in separation from God. If the penalty the court demands is my separation from God, I cannot pay that penalty, being separated from God and also be in relationship with God. I cannot pay my own penalty.

That leads us to the next important theological word. Grace.

### **Grace (3:24)**

Grace is a very religious word that every Christian is familiar with. What does it mean? Verse 24 says that we are justified “as a gift by God’s grace.” That gives us the definition. Grace is a gift that we receive. It is something God does for us. That does not at all mean it is cheap or inexpensive. The gift may come at an extremely high price but if it is offered by grace it is offered free of charge to the recipient.

This moves us a step further along. We are declared righteous not because we are innocent and not because we have paid the price, but as a gift of grace, someone else has paid the price on our behalf.

That brings us to our fourth word, the word redemption.

### **Redemption (3:24)**

The word redemption means to buy back, to buy back a slave. This is less of a legal word like justify and more of an economics word. Our modern English uses the word when you pawn something. So if you have ever seen Pawn Stars, if you pawn something and you want to get it back you have to redeem it. You have to buy it back. In the legal context here, a payment must be made to the court for our sin. There is a price set on our freedom. God can only justify or declare you righteous if your debt is paid. But you cannot pay your own debt. The price is eternal death.

This idea of redemption has some biblical richness, going back into the Old Covenant. God created an analogy for us in the Mosaic law. He described his deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt as a redemption (Exodus 6:6; 15:13; Deuteronomy 7:8; 19:26; 13:5; 15:15; 21:8; 24:18). His people were forced into bondage, and God redeemed them. God adds on to this idea as the Israelites prepared to leave Mount Sinai. There is a story in Numbers 3:40-51. God told them that they owed him for every first-born son that he did not kill when the angel of death passed over Egypt. Which is interesting. You remember that their first-born sons were killed in the last plague, but the first-born sons of the Israelites were not killed because the Jews were told to sacrifice a Passover lamb and put the blood above the door. When the angel of wrath passed over, he saw that the blood covered the Israelite household and so, the first-born's life was not taken.

But in Numbers chapter 3 God has a further lesson to teach. There is further symbolism he wants to add to redemption. The blood of the lamb did not really protect the first-born sons of Israel. The sacrifice was symbolic, but not effective. God added on an additional symbol to make his point. He told the Israelites that you need to set aside all the men from the tribe of Levi as payment for all these first-born sons. One man for one man. The Levites would be the substitute. There was a bit of a problem with the plan, since there were 273 more first-born Israelite sons than there were Levite men. But since it was only symbolic anyway, God let them get out of it with a financial payment for the excess number of first-born sons (Numbers 3:40-51; 8:17-18).

What God did here was to invest the word redemption with theological meaning. God is the one who rescues out of slavery. God redeems with his righteous power, but he also demands payment, a life for a life.

Who can pay our debt? What does verse 24 say? We are "justified as a gift by God's grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Notice that it is not quite correct to say here that Jesus pays our debt for us. It is more correct to say that Jesus is the payment of our debt. I guess it would be fine to say both. Jesus pays, and he pays by offering up himself as a sacrifice of atonement.

This brings us to our final theological term.

### **Propitiation (3:25b)**

The NASB translates verse 25, "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith." The NIV has, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement." And the NET Bible has, "God publicly displayed him at his death as the mercy seat." So, English Bibles are giving us three options for translating one word. We have propitiation or sacrifice of atonement or mercy seat. So, how do we understand this.

The word Paul uses here *hilasterion* (ἱλαστήριον). It is not really a Geek Word. It is just spelled out in the Greek from a Hebrew word used in Leviticus 16:15 to describe the cover over the ark of covenant. The word does not mean cover. Sometimes it is called the mercy seat. But it really refers to the sacrifice of atonement that took place in connection with the ark. Atonement carries both the meaning to cover over sin and to satisfy the wrath of God against sin. That's what propitiation means. To propitiate means to satisfy or turn away the wrath of God.

The sacrifice of atonement described in Leviticus 16 took place once a year to atone for the sins of Israel. One goat was released into the wilderness and that symbolized God removing sin from the camp. A second goat was sacrificed, and its blood taken into the holy of holies. That was the innermost room in the tabernacle of God, the most holy room where the high priest only entered on this one day for this one sacrifice. The holy of holies symbolized the throne room of God with God's presence above the ark of the covenant looking down on it. The ark contained the covenant law of God, placed there by Moses. As God looked down on covenant he judged his people Israel. And he judged them unfaithful. They were covenant breakers.

On that day, when the high priest came in, he sprinkled the blood of the second goat on the mercy seat. It made a covering over the law. And God looked down and he saw the blood. He saw the

people deserved death. But he saw that a death was paid. As a result, the holy and just wrath of God was propitiated, satisfied, atoned for, paid.

Did the blood of the goat truly pay for the sins of men? No. Neither did the lamb of the Passover nor the trade of one Levite for one first-born Israelite, neither does baptism, neither does the Lord's Supper. Our rituals teach us and point us to the true sacrifice, which is Jesus Christ.

To take our place and pay for our sin, we need a man for a man. But no man can pay for my sin, because he has got to pay for his own sin. We need a sinless man. But one sinless man would pay only for the sins of one other man. If we are all going to be saved, we need an infinite man. We need a man who is God. We need Jesus. For we are "justified as a gift by God's grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith."

That is what happened on the cross. The blood of bulls and goats and lambs has always been symbolic, never effective; always reminding us that death is owed, and death must be paid, and God would find a way to pay it.

How is the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ? It is revealed by our God who will not declare a man righteous unless that man's sin has been paid for, and so, he offered himself as payment for man's sin. That is the gift of grace. Priceless. Yet, offered without price. That is the righteousness of God revealed – his righteous character leading to a righteous judgment followed by a righteous action, in which he is the righteous sacrifice, resulting in righteousness being credited to sinful man by grace through faith.

### **Two Questions of Covenant**

Now we can answer our two questions of covenant that I raised in the last two lessons. The first question is, "What makes me acceptable to be in relationship with God?" I asked you to think about this in terms of grace, what God does, and law, what we do. What percentage would you give to grace and what percentage would you give to law in answering this question, "What makes me acceptable to be in relationship with God?" In our last lesson, the middle of chapter 3, Paul made quite clear what percentage we are to attribute to law: 0%. "By the work of the law no flesh will be declared righteous." Now we have the percentage for grace: 100%. That is the answer to the first question of covenant. We are declared righteous and made acceptable to be in relationship with God 100% by the free gift of grace that he offers to us and 0% by our own moral or religious works.

Someone might say that the law has a role because, as verse 20 says, the law reveals our sin. That's a good point. The law has a role. But that agrees with my answer. The question was about our doing the law. How much of our doing the law contributes to our righteousness or acceptability in the eyes of God? And that is 0%.

Either we take the moral, religious defense by which we show ourselves good enough. Or we take the grace defense. The moral defense says, "I will pay the penalty of my own sin." But that lowers the holiness of God and lowers the penalty of sin, as though some good works, prayer, sacrifice, Bible reading or taking the Lord's Supper could somehow pay for my sin against an eternal and holy God. The moral defense always fails. It reminds me of that proud or tragic song of the twentieth century, "I Did It My Way." Yes, you did. And so are lost forever.

We have been given another option, a second defense, the grace defense. "Lord God, I am guilty. I have no hope of paying the penalty of my sin. I believe that Jesus paid that penalty for me. I accept your gift of grace. Please count me righteous based on what Jesus has done, not on what I deserve." Is that the attitude of your heart? Do you have that faith? Is that what you believe? Do you see that? Has God opened your eyes to see that? Listen again, and if this is the attitude of your heart, you need to say this to God, because the grace of God, the status of righteousness comes by an act of faith, an act of will, when you receive what he is offering. He is offering it. He is holding it out to everybody. But if you do not take it, you do not receive it, then it is not true of you. If you do not receive grace,

you are standing on your own moral, religious defense. But when you say that will not work and are willing to receive his grace, then his righteousness applies to you. Let me read it again, and if this is the attitude of your heart say this to God. And if you are not sure whether you have said it to God, then say it to God. Be sure. Here it is. Listen to this.

“Lord God, I am guilty. I have no hope of paying the penalty of my sin. I believe that Jesus paid that penalty for me. I accept your gift of grace. Gratefully, I accept it. Please count me righteous based on what Jesus has done, not on what I deserve. Amen.”

Upon receiving the gift of grace through faith, you are declared righteous. 100% grace, 0% law.

There is no wiggle room here. We are tempted to add things to grace. We feel like we have got to do something to make ourselves acceptable. The human heart wants to make it grace plus. Paul comments on that idea later in Romans 11:6. I will quote it here just to be clear right now, “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.” You cannot have grace plus. Grace plus anything else is law. The only right answer in the court of God is 0% law, nothing I do, and 100% grace. It fully comes from God. Which of your sins did Jesus not die for? What sin did he not cover? Is his substitution, his sacrifice for you incomplete? If you have received the gift of grace, then he has paid for every sin 100%. That is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any other answer is a misunderstanding or rejection of the gospel of Jesus.

Now on to the second question of covenant. “Having been accepted by grace into relationship with God, how do I please God?” This is the heart of the one who has saving faith. Faith is seeing God and receiving the gift of grace he has offered. Faith moves the believer to respond. So, the believer asks the second question of covenant from a grateful heart, “How do I please you? In other words, how do I show my love to you as my heavenly Father, how do I worship you as my God, how do I serve you as my King?”

This question is admittedly is a lot messier than the first question. That is because the first question occurs in a legal context. There is a right and wrong, black and white answer. 100% grace and 0% law. No wiggle room. The second question is asking how we live in relationship with our gracious God. And relationship is always messier. I do not even like answering this question in percentages, but since I am the one who told you to answer it that way, I have to give you an answer. So, I will give you what I call the marriage conference answer. Pleasing God with our lives involves 100% grace and 100% law. That is, God gives 100% of himself; you give 100% of yourself. I know that sounds like cheating, and it is bad mathematics, but that is what we are going to go with, because any idea like a 50 – 50 idea in relationship never really works. Because each person never feels like the other person is ever giving their 50%. Even if we make it 80 – 20 or 10 – 90, we never really feel like the other person is living up and it becomes a business relationship or a legal relationship. Then we are going to have to get the lawyers involved again to prove who has done what, but let’s be done with the lawyers. This is family relationship. This is love relationship we are in now with God. He is our father. He is our king. He is our God. How do we live out that relationship?

We can be sure God gives 100% of himself. What God gives is complete. It is not always in the way we want, and not always in a way that is obvious, but always in the way that is best, good and truly loving. Then on our side, for our part, we never give 100%. God is calling us to press ahead, to be involved in who he is creating us to be, to pursue him with all our mind, heart, soul and strength. All we have. Not to earn relationship, but to express relationship and to experience relationship.

We cannot do this in our own flesh. That is one of the messy things. So, when I use the word law here, if I mean by law that this is something that we accomplish out of our own strength, then I am wrong. You can critique me. I should not have said it. I would be wrong. Law does not mean I do it out of my human flesh. But by law, what I am trying to express is obedience to command. That there are things God has called us to do. We are called to participate. It is what Jesus says in John 14 that is we really love God we are going to obey his commandments. We have to figure out some way to get the commandments into our life of grace. Otherwise we can’t make sense of the sermon on the

mount or Romans 12 – 14 or all the dos and don'ts in the New Covenant. There are two mistakes we can make. One mistake is to say that grace leads to no law. In the sense of no obedience to commandment. We are so happy about being free that we give no place to the dos and the don'ts. Another mistake that we can make is to create a new Christian law, something that feels and smells and tastes very much like Old Testament religion. Maybe not so serious or so ritualistic, but we are creating all these dos and don'ts that you have to do to live up to in order to be accepted. But there is a narrow path between the two, a living in the grace of God. a living out the grace of God, the new way of the Spirit. How this works is messy. It is relationship after all. It is going to be messy. I will not go into it more now, because Paul addresses this whole issue in Romans 5 – 8. So, we will get there. And we will spend a lot of time there. How to we live out grace, very important.

First, we need to conclude chapter 3, and then we are going to have to move into chapter 4 where Paul gives his precedent, his support for this surprise verdict in chapter 3. Let's finish out chapter 3.

### **Implications of God's Righteousness Revealed in the Gospel (3:25b-30)**

We are going to conclude with some implications of the gospel that Paul highlights in the second half of the passage, 25b-30. The gospel of grace presents a very serious problem. It is the problem of the righteous judge. If God freely forgives us of our sin, does that make him unrighteous? Does God have the right to forgive the evil man without requiring payment or restitution from that man. Is it allowable for God to offer us grace freely? There was a famous twentieth century book called *Sunflower*, written by Simon Wiesenthal where he raises this question, "Who has the right to forgive an evil man?"

#### **Simon Wiesenthal's Sunflower**

In the book, Wiesenthal describes being taken one day from his prison camp to work in a German hospital. As Wiesenthal was working a nurse came up and asked, "Are you a Jew?" He said, "Yes." And she motioned him to follow her. She led him to a room and instructed him to enter. Lying alone was a man whose face was completely bandaged.

Wiesenthal went over to the man who then took his hand. The sick man whispered, "I have not much longer to live. I know the end is near. My name is Karl. I joined the SS as a volunteer. I must tell you something dreadful."

Wiesenthal began to worry that he would be missed and only wanted the nurse to come back. But the soldier clung to his hand and continued with his story. He described growing up in Germany. His father was a social democrat and his mother was very religious. She brought him up in the church. But when he joined the Hitler Youth he stopped going to church. His mother and father became nervous around him, not knowing if he would repeat to the Hitler Youth what they said. After completing his training his company was sent to Ukraine to fight the Russians.

In one city we were taken to a square full of Jews. Karl explained, "There were a hundred and fifty of them or perhaps two hundred, including many children with anxious eyes. A truck arrived with cans of petrol which we unloaded and took into a house. Then we began to drive the Jews into the house. I would not believe it possible to crowd them all into it."

The story sounded too familiar to Wiesenthal so he stood up to leave. Karl, his body shivering, pleaded, "Please stay, I must tell you the rest."

"Another truck came full of more Jews and we crammed them into the house. We removed the safety pins from hand grenades and threw them through the windows. We heard screams and saw the flames eat their way from floor to floor. We had our rifles ready to shoot down anyone who tried to escape. I saw a man with a small child in his arms and a woman jump from the building."

Karl fell silent. Exhausted. Wiesenthal stood to go, but Karl gripped his hand fast. Karl explained how later a bomb had nearly hit him sending shrapnel through his eyes, face, and body. He was blind and dying.

Karl continued “I am left here with my guilt. In the last hours of my life you are with me. I do not know who you are. I only know that you are a Jew and that is enough.”

“I want to die in peace. I have longed to talk about it to a Jew and beg forgiveness. I know that what I am asking is almost too much for you but without your answer I cannot die in peace.”

What did you think Simon Wiesenthal did? Actually, Wiesenthal wrote the book to ask that question what should he have done? In the book there is a second section which has all these letters of different people offering answers. Who has the right to forgive a wicked man.

In asking that question it is first posed to human beings, but it rises up to the court of God. A man who has done such despicable evil, does God have the right to forgive such an evil person. How does God remain just if he forgives this person freely by grace without demanding that person to pay anything? Well, I am Karl. I may not feel it that way. Certainly, I do not feel it. I do not feel my sin the way I feel Karl’s sin. But I know God feels my sin. My sin rises up before God. And does he have the right to forgive me? Is it just of God to offer me righteousness as a gift by faith?

That is what Paul has just shown us that the gospel of Jesus Christ reveals the answer to this question. And only the gospel of Jesus provides an answer to this question. How is it that holy God can extend love to man while remaining fully righteous in his judgment?

The gospel declares that man’s sin can be paid for by God himself. The king can die for men. The cross is where love and justice kiss. God has paid the penalty. God has remained just. God can offer salvation freely as a gift, and in fact, it cannot be offered any other way because there is no other way that man will be able to live up to it and receive it. It is by grace or not at all.

Paul concludes this section 25b-30 with a few implications of the gospel. I will just comment on them as I read the text.

**The 1st implication of the gospel is a vindication of God’s forgiveness of Old Testament believers (3:25b).**

So, 25b, he has just described the gospel and God has displayed Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement.

“<sup>25b</sup> This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed.”

You see, in the past, from Adam all the way up to the disciples God had not paid for the penalty of the sin of believers. The blood of the animals did not pay for it. None of the rituals actually paid for it. But they still had to trust God. They had to cry out to the grace of God and trust in God for their salvation. They just did not know what the payment was going to be. But God made a promise, “I am going to pay.” And God was good on his promise. We do not see the righteousness of God. It is not revealed until the cross. He has not paid the price, yet. But at the cross he paid the debt of every single one of his people, everyone he has given freedom to, given grace to, that he has forgiven of their sin, he made good on that debt. He took their debt himself, and he paid it on the cross. So, everyone in the past was looking ahead to the payment being made.

**The 2nd implication of the gospel is a vindication of God’s forgiveness of New Testament believers (3:26).**

“<sup>26</sup> for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time.”

So, God also has to show himself right for the people now who would believe in Jesus, “so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” And he does. So, from now on, all of us who get accepted as his children, who get accepted into his family, that are declared righteous by him, all of us. God has paid our penalty on the cross. We look back to the payment. The saints of the Old Covenant looked ahead to the payment. We look back to the payment. The price is paid. God is just. He is proved righteous in his grace.

**The 3rd implication of the gospel is the undermining of religious boasting (3:27-28).**

Then there is another implication. This one applies to us. “<sup>27</sup> Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. <sup>28</sup> For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”



Religion always creates pride. Human religion creates pride. I have attained the righteousness of God. It also creates judgment on those who have not attained to the righteousness of God. It also creates doubt and insecurity in us because we are not sure if we have attained to the righteousness of God. But when we are moral, we can boast. But verse 27, where then is boasting? It is excluded. Who can boast over the other man. Which one of you paid the penalty? Which one of you lived up to God and became acceptable based on your righteousness? Which one of you? Which one of you is the good servant that stands out above everybody else? Nobody? Where is boasting? There is none because we are all on the same playing field. We all receive it by grace.

**The 4th implication of the gospel is that it is available universally to all people (3:29-30).**

And then finally, the final implication in verses 29-30 is that it is for everybody. “<sup>29</sup> Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup> since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.”

It does not matter what country you are from, it does not matter what ethnicity you are from, it does not matter what sex you are, it does not matter what class you are, God is one. It is a free gift. It is available to everybody who would receive it by faith.

And this is where we will end today. And the question for you is, “Have you received the gift of grace?” Have you done that. If not, you need to go have a conversation with God. And if you have, “How is your heart doing? Do you see how priceless this gift is that God has given you? Do you see it? Priceless? Reflect on the amazing grace, the amazing price that has been paid for you. It is truly, truly wonderful what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.”

## Reflection Questions

1. What are one or two new ideas that stand out to you in this passage? Or if not a completely new, what are one or two ideas that stand out to you more clearly or in a new way?
2. What are one or two ideas in this passage that move you emotionally? Either you are excited about them or intrigued or bothered?
3. Why did Jesus Christ have to die?
4. How is the first question of covenant answered in this lesson and what do you think or how do you feel about that answer?

What percentage would you assign to the role of grace and law in answering the first question of covenant, “What makes you acceptable to be in relationship with God?”

What percentage is grace, God’s part?

What percentage is law, your part?

5. How is the second question of covenant answered in this lesson and what do you think or how do you feel about that answer?

What percentage would you assign to the role of grace and law in answering the second question of covenant, “How do I live out my relationship with God in a way that is pleasing to him?”

What percentage is grace, God’s part?

What percentage is law, your part?

6. In your experience concerning Christian community or other religious community, what are some of the circumstances that lead to religious or moral boasting? What are some possibilities of what is going on in the heart that leads to religious or moral boasting?
7. How might you apply the message of this passage to your heart and mind to eliminate moral or religious boasting?