

Romans Lesson 5 Articles

3:21–24 At the very beginning of Paul’s letter to the Romans we encountered the theme that runs throughout the entire epistle. Paul stated that he was not ashamed of the gospel because in it is revealed a righteousness from God that is completely dependent upon faith (Rom 1:17). After building a case against all people, showing their universal sinfulness and therefore their universal need of salvation, Paul then spelled out the only way for them to be brought into a right standing with God.

From a human standpoint—and by nature people are legalists—the plan was radical. It excluded anything and everything that people by themselves might do to attain righteousness. The righteousness God provides has its origin in what God did, not in what people may accomplish. It is received, not earned. It depends upon faith, not meritorious activity. God justifies the ungodly, not the well intentioned. What makes the “good news” news is that no one would have come up with a plan that excluded their own contribution toward a future salvation. **This central theme is now expanded in what is generally acknowledged to be the most theologically important segment of the entire New Testament.**

No one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by keeping the law, the conclusion reached in 3:22. “But now” (v. 21) introduces God’s answer to our basic dilemma. The expression is perhaps less temporal than sequential. God’s remedy for our lack of righteousness was enacted at a specific time (on the cross). Here, however, the emphasis falls on the qualitative difference between God’s remedy and our attempt to bridge the gap. We want to earn; God will only give. God’s way of providing righteousness has nothing to do with human performance. It is “apart from law.” Yet both the Law and the Prophets (the literature of the OT) testify to it. The Old Testament itself pointed to a work of God yet future that would provide humans a way of atonement. The righteousness of God comes to us through faith in Jesus Christ. It belongs to all who believe in him.

Many hold that the final clause of v. 22 and all of v. 23 form a parenthesis that explains why the righteousness of God comes to all who believe. It is because there is no difference between Jew and Gentile.⁸ Both have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. No one can stand before God on the basis of personal merit. All have sinned and in so doing have fallen short of “God’s glorious ideal” (Montgomery). In Jewish thought humans lost their share in this glory when they broke their relationship to God, but that relationship is to be restored in the age to come. The original intention was that people reflect the glory of God (cf. Gen 1:26). By eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve sacrificed their relationship to God and determined the essential nature of everyone born into the human race (Gen 3). The redemption provided by Christ enables us to be brought back into a personal relationship with God. Apart from the work of Christ we are unable to affect that restoration.¹

⁸ A. Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. C. C. Rasmussen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1949), 152–53.

Montgomery H. B. Montgomery, *The New Testament in Modern English*

¹ Mounce, R. H. (1995). *Romans* (Vol. 27, pp. 113–120). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.