

Romans (3:21-24)

Justified Freely

PART 11 – SEPTEMBER 12, 2004

BUT NOW!

There's a joyful boldness that comes from knowing that we are pleasing, and acceptable, and right in God's eyes.

The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion. – Proverbs 28:1 NIV

But when I'm crabby or careless and I expose my corruptness, I don't feel confident, I feel condemned. Guilt trumps boldness. And Paul hasn't been helping; for weeks now he's been telling us over and over, in every possible way that we're all sinners. And then he capped it off (last week) with this ultimate conclusion:

There is no one righteous, not even one ... – Romans 3:10 NIV

So, if only the righteous experience a king-of-beasts boldness, and no one is righteous, aren't we left kind of ... hopeless? How do I quell the daily condemnation of my own conscience? Paul's letter is about to pivot on two crucial words: BUT NOW!

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. – Romans 3:21-24 NIV

BUT NOW! We are offered a *gift* of righteousness that will impart a King-of-Kings boldness to those who receive it and embrace it ... like a drowning man seizes and clings to a life-ring!

I'm going to accuse you (*Rom. 1:1-3:20*), and you yell back: **BUT NOW!**

- There is no one righteous, not even one! [BUT NOW!]
- They have all together become worthless! [BUT NOW!]
- There is none who do good, not even one! [BUT NOW!]

It couldn't come through man; it had to come: "*from God*"

And it had to come: "*apart from law*"

Religious rituals and animal sacrifices are impotent to restore the glory of God, desecrated and defamed by sin. BUT NOW! The One before whom we stand guilty and condemned has Himself become the restorer of His own glory on our behalf.

Then Paul says: *“to which the Law and the Prophets testify”*

The “Law and the Prophets” was another way of saying the Old Testament. And it is filled with prophecies about the Messiah. Like this one in Isaiah 53:

... He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed ... my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. – Isaiah 53:4-11 NIV

God’s gift of righteousness comes by a power far more potent than OT law offered; but that very law taught this would be so.

It: *“comes through faith in Jesus Christ”*

All of the world’s religions can be divided into Three Groups:

- A. Those that say sin simply doesn’t exist
- B. Those that say salvation must be earned
- C. Christianity

Only Christianity offers the radical concept of the cleansing of sin and the clothing of salvation by faith alone.

And it is offered: *“to all who believe”*

Two Points about Belief:

- A. We must believe *about* as well as *in* Christ. I believe *about* Hitler; but I’m sure not a Nazi! The difference is a confident commitment that results in action.
- B. A little bit of sincere belief goes a long way. Some believers fear they don’t have enough faith. Don’t put faith in faith. All you need is a “mustard seed” amount. Put what you have in Christ, act on it, and it’ll grow.

Then Paul adds: *“There is no difference”*

He means between Jewish and Gentile believers. He’s challenging that tension in Rome again. Yes, the Jews have privileges as God’s chosen people (3:1-2) but *not* where it concerns salvation.

Because: *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”*

- “Have sinned” is past tense (those sins we have committed).
- “Fall short” is present tense (the sins we are committing).

And you know what? I disappoint *myself* and fall short of my *own* standards, let alone God’s glorious ideal. Have you ever seen “Clean Room” (where they make computer chips and spacecraft) with air systems that filter out micro-dust?

Reason would tell you not to enter if you’re covered in mud. It’d be just as unreasonable to approach an unadulterated, uncontaminated, perfectly pure and holy God, covered in sin.

Paul pointed out something interesting about God’s glory, back in Romans 1:23:

[Mankind] exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. – Romans 1:23 NIV

I fall short of God’s glory when I reject it as the supreme value of my life, and trade it for things shamefully inferior.

THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL

Now we get to verse 24, the heart of the New Testament. This is like coming to the core of a nuclear reactor. This is where we find the power to live as boldly.

[We] are **justified freely** by his **grace** through the **redemption** that came by Christ Jesus. – Romans 3:24 NIV

Look at those four incredible words!

1. *Justified* means: declared not guilty.

Q: Ever have a nightmare where you’ve committed a crime? I have this recurring dream that I’ve murdered someone, and I have to face up to the crime.

Imagine yourself standing before a judge, 100% guilty, waiting for the verdict - knees trembling - and the judge says, “You’re acquitted.” “Why?” “The charges have been dropped.” Justification means there is absolutely, no longer, any case against you. It is forgiveness *plus* righteousness.

- It is *jus- if-I’d* never sinned!
2. And, we are *justified freely*; it’s a gift.

But remember, the gift is only free to the receiver. The giver has to pay for it or it has no value. "Here, I got you some dirt ... it was free!" Justification is a free gift – but it's not a cheap gift. It came through the incalculable cost of Calvary. And yet, it's offered apart from the law. There's no way that we can earn it.

Q: Why would God do that?

3. Because it's *by His grace*.

A poor widow lived in a wealthy Kingdom. One cold day she stopped her cart outside the royal kitchen for the aroma. The princess saw her and asked the chef to package up a month's supply of food. When the old woman realized what was happening, she emptied her purse of two tiny coins and tried to give them to the princess. With enough indignation to keep the woman from insisting, the princess said: "My father is much too rich to sell; and you are much too poor to purchase! You may take it for free or not at all."

Q: Why is a gift so costly, offered so freely?

A: Because our Father is much too rich to sell; and we are much too poor to purchase.

It would simply be beneath His grace. You may take it for free, or not at all.

Q: And by what right can He simply declare us clean?

4. "Through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus"

The word "redemption" was used two ways in Paul's day:

- A. As the purchase price to free a slave
 - B. As the ransom for a kidnapping victim
- Either way, it means: Liberation through compensation

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." – Mark 10:45 NIV

Ever see a movie where a hostage negotiator trades him/herself for one of the captives? That's what Christ has done. He Himself has fulfilled the penalty of our sin that the Law (and reason) demand.

A street preacher yells at a passerby, "You redeemed?!" The man nods. The suspicious preacher says, "When were you redeemed?!" The man replies, "About 2000 years ago ... but I've only just been aware of it for five and a half!"

Christ has redeemed us – everyone. He's paid the price. And God is willing and wanting to transfer His righteousness to anyone and everyone who will simply put their trust in Jesus.