A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD

Text: Romans 3:21-26
Belgic Confession Art 22
Theme: Believers are justified and redeemed by grace and through faith in Jesus Christ.
Purpose: To help you understand how God has made us righteous and redeemed us through Jesus.

When you are dealing with a problem or working through an issue you come to a point where you get to the heart of the matter, the essence of the issue, the real substance of the subject at hand.
In these verses in Romans we come to the heart of this letter because they deal with the subject of justification by faith.

John Calvin described justification by faith as "the main hinge on which salvation turns". Thomas Cranmer, who was the primary author of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, said that justification is "the strong rock and foundation of Christian religion". Martin Luther, who launched the Reformation, believed that justification is "the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge of all kinds of doctrines."

So today we are dealing with a most important subject.

This righteousness that comes from God is necessary because of human sin. In the first three chapters Paul has demonstrated that all mankind are sinners: “Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin” (v 9); “There is no one righteous, not even one” (v 10); “the whole world [is] held accountable to God” (v 19). He summed this up in 3:23 where he wrote; "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Every one of us has sinned, we have missed the mark, we have fallen short of God's standard and have failed to love and serve him as we ought.

The Jews thought they could solve this problem by obeying the law. They thought that if they tried very hard they could keep the law of God and so make themselves right with him. Many people today have the same idea.
But Paul said this is impossible. Far from being able to save us the law actually shows us how bad we are, it makes us conscious of sin, it silences us before God (v 19f).

Having demonstrated that we cannot save ourselves Paul moves on to the next major section of this letter where he describes how God has saved his people.

"But now", in vs 21, indicates a progression in the argument: it is impossible to make yourself right with God but now God has provided a righteousness, "apart from law".
The Jews demonstrated that they could not be saved though the Old Testament law and so now, in this New Testament time, God has provided righteousness for us through Christ.

1. A RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM GOD THROUGH CHRIST

This is a "righteousness from God". It is God’s initiative. We cannot save ourselves and so God must act, he must step in, he has to save us.

Righteousness describes both who God is and what he gives: he is righteous in himself, that is, he is good and true and right and holy; and he gives us this righteousness, he gives us a right standing before himself and the law.

It comes by grace (v 24); it is a result of God’s favour, his mercy, his kindness to us. We don’t deserve his kindness and we can’t earn this righteousness; so it comes to us as a gift from God, by grace.
The law and the prophets had testified about this (v 21). God had always planned to save people in this way and the law and the prophets had spoken about this, although it was not so clear during that Old Testament period.

But in the New Testament time this had been made known; that we “are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (v 24).

The word 'redemption' was used of the people of Israel who were redeemed out of Egypt. They were redeemed from the house of slavery (Deut 7:8).

Later on this described how the Lord would redeem his people out of exile and bring them back to their own land. The Lord described himself as their Redeemer (Is 41:14) and promised to redeem them (43:1) and spoke about how "The ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads" (Is 51:11).

Redemption in the Old Testament also described someone who was liable to punishment by death but who could be set free by the payment of money (Ex 21:30).

In the first century, when Paul was writing, it was used to describe a payment of money to release slaves who were prisoners of war. If someone paid for them then they would be released, set free; they were redeemed or ransomed.

We use the word ransom in the same way today. If a rich businessman is kidnapped those who took him will demand a ransom for his life. They will tell the family; "If you pay us $1m you will get him back."

God’s people have been redeemed through Jesus Christ. We were slaves to sin and to Satan and Jesus has paid for our release. We should not press the illustration too far because the New Testament does not tell us that a payment was made to anyone in particular. It certainly was not made to Satan as some have suggested.

But the Scriptures do tell us the ransom price, which was the precious blood of Christ. Jesus has bought us so that we belong to him and he did this by shedding his own blood, which we remember regularly in the Lord's Supper. Jesus paid for us. He bought us as his very own. He paid the ransom price so setting us free.

In verses 25 and 26 Paul explains that “God presented him (that is, Jesus) as a sacrifice of atonement”. The NASB and ESV use the word "propitiation". The Greek word describes a turning away of God's wrath by the payment of a sacrifice. On the cross Jesus took God's wrath on himself and died in our place, so turning away God’s wrath from us.

Isaiah prophesied about this when he wrote; “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” (Is 53:5).

This gives us a solid basis for assurance of salvation. If you believe in Jesus and trust in his death on the cross then he has paid for all your sins; there is nothing owing. It has all been paid. Not by you or your efforts or your goodness or your work - no, it was all paid by the precious blood of Jesus shed on the cross.

We have seen that God has provided a righteousness for us through the Lord Jesus.

2. Through this, secondly, God DEMONSTRATES HIS JUSTICE.

a. God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement...”to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished...” (v 25).
All through the old covenant the people of Israel sinned against God. In response they brought their animal sacrifices to the priests in the temple to make atonement for their sins. But “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4).

God passed by those sins of his people in the old covenant because he had planned to send his only Son as the fulfilment of those animal sacrifices. Jesus came and died on the cross, shedding his blood and by this “offered for all time one sacrifice for sins” (Heb 10:12).

b. By this sacrifice of atonement God demonstrated his justice, “so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (v26).

God could be “just” because sin had been paid for - Jesus had shed his blood for the sins of his people. By this God maintained his own character and his own justice.

But he could also justify those who have faith in Jesus. He did this by taking our sin and crediting it to Jesus. Jesus bore our sin; he took it on himself; he carried it for us (Is 53).

That doesn't mean that Jesus became a sinner. No, he remained righteousness because he had to be a perfect sacrifice.

It means that when God looked at Jesus he saw him carrying our sin. Because of that God could forgive our sin. He could pardon us because our guilt had been passed on to Jesus and Jesus had taken the punishment we deserved to bear. Sin had been paid for.

But God has done more: not only has God given our sin to Jesus so that he could forgive us, he has also given us the righteousness of Jesus. Jesus was a perfect man and he lived in perfect obedience to the law. God the Father took the righteousness of Jesus and he transferred that to us. Not only were our sins pardoned and deleted, but we were also given this positive righteousness.

So there has been a double transaction: our sin to Jesus and his righteousness to us. The Bible describes this as our being justified.

c. Justification is a complete work of God. There are no half measures in this. It is like being in court; the judge pronounces you guilty or not guilty; it is one or the other. So too in God’s court – you are either guilty or not guilty, accepted or not accepted, justified or condemned, a believer or an unbeliever.

There is a great comfort for those of us who believe. Sometimes we feel the weight of our sin, we know we fall far short of God's law, we know that we are spiritually blind and poor and feeble. At times like this you might wonder if God will forgive you, if he will accept you.

When you are tempted to doubt God's forgiveness then remember that God has declared you righteous on the basis of what Jesus has done. Your salvation does not depend on your good works, or law-keeping or efforts - it is based in what Jesus has done for you and on what God has said about you. God accepts you completely. He has declared you righteous. You are in a right relationship with him and that is complete.

We have seen that God provides a righteousness that comes to us through Christ. This righteousness demonstrates his justice.

3. Third, we see that this righteousness from God is RECEIVED BY FAITH. This is mentioned three times in these verses, in verses 22, 25 and 26.

a. Faith is not the ground or the basis of your righteousness. You are not made right with God on the foundation of your faith - that would be a weak foundation at the best of times. Some people have a strong faith while others have a faith that is weak. Your righteousness before God is not based on the degree of your faith or on the amount of your faith.
b. Rather faith is the **means** through which God gives us this righteousness. It is the **instrument** or the **channel** by which we receive what Jesus has done for us. Faith is the empty hand that reaches out for God.

What is faith? Faith involves knowing the basic truth about Jesus, being convinced that this is true, and resting upon Jesus, trusting in him, relying on what he has done for us.

c. This faith is a **gift from God**. The only way you can believe is if the Holy Spirit works in your heart and causes you to be born again so that you can believe in Jesus.
So you can't pat yourself on the back for your faith because it is a gift from God, from his grace, his favour, his mercy.

d. Faith is also something **you must do**; you are called to believe, commanded to have faith; you have a responsibility to trust in him.

If you do not yet believe turn to God in faith; believe that he died on the cross for your sins!

If you do believe then be assured that God has forgiven you all your sins and has made you right with him through faith.

This is the sum and substance of the letter to the Romans, it is the essence of the Bible, it is the heart of the gospel!

**Amen**
God’s righteousness is a gift to all who believe in Christ—there is no way to improve on the cross, it is God’s masterpiece. We simply receive to reign in life. Romans 5:17 New American Standard Bible (NASB). The phrase simply means that God has made the means for man to be righteous in His eyes through the blood covering of Lord Jesus Christ. When the Israelites were given the Passover, they were to kill an unblemished male lamb and anoint the lintels and door posts of their entrances with its blood. This ceremony was a demonstration that every person who entered into the way of God’s righteousness, did so by faith in the Passover Lamb, because their individual sins were covered as they chose to enter into the house of God. That the righteousness of God refers to a divine gift is clear from Philippians 3:9, where Paul speaks of the righteousness from God (τὴν εἰκ τοῦ θεοῦ δικαιοσύνην). The righteousness is not Paul’s own, deriving from his observance of the law. It is a righteousness from God himself, obtained by faith in Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:9, then, provides an important clue as to how we should interpret God’s righteousness in Romans 1:17 and 3:21-22. It refers to God’s saving righteousness, given as a gift to those who believe. The lack of the preposition from (ἐκ) in the texts in Romans is not deci