

Romans 3:21-26 by Wayne Barber

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Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work " Jensen's Survey of the NT "				

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Romans 3:21-26:

The Detail of God's Good News, Part 1

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

In Romans 3:21 we are getting back to the good news. It has been bad for a while. From 1:19 through 3:20 it wasn't good at all. In verses 20-23 of chapter 3 there are several things involved now in the good news. The first thing that is involved is my acceptance by God. We need to look at that. Verse 20 tells us: "because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." Now I know something from that verse. I know that I can never earn my acceptance before God. Justification means that my charges have been dropped. They will not be dropped on the basis of my good works. I am guilty and remain guilty. As long as I try to work my way to heaven, it will never, ever work.

No man will be accepted by God on the basis of his works, no matter how good he thinks he is. God is a holy and just God. He knows the hearts of all men. He knows that we are depraved. Because of Adam's sin, Romans 5 tells us, sin entered the world and death by sin. So, therefore, every man born of man and woman is born with a depraved heart, a depraved nature. Whatever he does and calls good, God says is as filthy rags in His eyes.

If you stop at verse 20 you have man hopelessly and helplessly separated from God and there would not be one single thing he could do about it. There would not one church he could join that will help him out. There would not be one good deed he could do that would ever earn acceptance with God.

But oh, the good news comes back in verse 21. Paul gives us a backdrop. He starts off talking about the good news and says, "Wait a minute. I don't think you appreciate this. Let me tell you the bad news. The bad news is the desperate condition of man." Then he goes full circle and comes back around and says, "Now, let's talk about the good news one more time. I want you to see how good it really is."

Verse 21 says, "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." God has done something to allow man to be once again brought into His family to be acceptable in His sight. The righteousness of God has now been manifested and it is apart from the Law. Oh, those are good words. In other words, not by Law, but by another way, God's righteousness is brought to light.

Now realize this, the righteousness of God is not based on our doing right. It is based on what God does. It is not based on what we do. I think it might be good to go back to 1:17 and remember where we first saw the term or the phrase "the righteousness of God." Paul is talking about the good news of the gospel and he says, "For in it [the good news] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'"

He breaks away from that and then comes back to it in 3:21. Let's see if we can remember what the righteousness of God is. By the way, the phrase is used 35 times in 30 verses in the book of Romans. I am realizing more and more that we cannot give some simple definition to the righteousness of God. As a matter of fact, the more you get into it, the more the aspect of the character of a holy God comes into play. A definition begins to grow and grow as you get into the word.

Let's look at three things we already know from our text. First of all, the righteousness of God involves the standard by which God governs. We first saw it in verse 17. The word is *dikaiousune*. It is the word righteousness. In other words, that is the righteous standard that God demands. Righteousness measures to that standard. It is that which fulfills the claims of that particular standard that God has. The righteousness of God is that which stands the test of His judgment. Now obviously it is the character of God, for God Himself is the standard.

When you speak of the righteousness of God, you have to think of it as the holiness of God. It is the standard of His character. It is what He requires. No man can work it up. It is that which is imparted. It is an acceptance by God by being conformed to that standard that only God can impart and impute to all men. Law is taken out. That is Paul's point. If you want to be acceptable to God, if you want to measure to that standard, you cannot get it by working for it. It has to be imparted by God Himself. Hebrews 7:18 says, "For on the one hand, there is the setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness." The Law tells man that he will never be acceptable to God based on what he is doing because the Law stands as God's standard of conduct that no man can obey. So this righteousness of God involves the standard by which He governs.

The second thing I am discovering about the righteousness of God is it involves the sensitivity with which God governs. In other words, the compassion, the love. You have to realize God has every right to kill mankind. He has the standard. Man doesn't meet up to it. He is righteous and has every right within that righteousness to snuff out man's life. As a matter of fact, He could have done that with Adam and Eve. But He didn't do it. He chose not to do it.

There is something more about the righteousness of God. It is not only a standard that He has, it is not only one that only He can impart to man, but the fact that He wants to impart it, the way He goes about imparting it, shows us the love and compassion of this God. The righteousness of God shows the sensitive nature that God has towards His creation. You have got to see that because God, out of His love for you and me, provided a way that we can be acceptable to a standard we could never have earned or worked for. He is a God of love.

There are two things that bear witness to this—the Law and the Prophets. That is in our text: "But now the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested being witnessed by the law and the prophets." Let's see how they witnessed the fact of God's merciful character, God's loving gracious character. In His righteousness you not only see His standard, but you also see His mercy and His love of what God wants to do to bring man back to where he can be acceptable once again.

The Law bore witness to this, I think, by the sacrificial system. The sacrificial system shows all of us that God is a merciful God. You see, the moral law was the Ten Commandments. The ceremonial law involved the sacrificial system. Man couldn't meet up to the moral law, so God, through the sacrificial system, provided a way that man could still fellowship with Him and still walk in His presence. That is the mercy of God. God didn't need to do that. This is the heart of God. When you talk about the righteousness of God, you are seeing the character of a loving God who wants His creation back on the level that He can fellowship with them again. And the Law bears witness to this.

But not just the Law. The Prophets also bore witness to that fact. The fact that there would be a lamb to come, that the Son of God would one day come, the Messiah, the anointed one, the one who would take away the sins of the world. Jeremiah 23:6 says, "In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely." God is not through with them, is He? There is going to come a day

when Israel and Judah will be saved and dwell securely, "and this is His name by which He will be called, 'The Lord our righteousness.'" Not the law our righteousness, but the Lord our righteousness.

The righteousness of God also has to do with the seriousness with which He governs. Not only the standard, not only the sensitivity, but the seriousness with which He governs. Look at Romans 3:22-23. We must understand that God, being a Holy God, judged His own Son with our sin upon Him. He had to do that. That is why Jesus cried out, "Father, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" I mean, you see the seriousness here of His standard. He didn't wink at sin. He dealt with it in a very serious manner. It says in verse 22, "even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Sin is serious to God and the cross proves it. You will see this in some other verses that we are going to look at. This is the good news. Jesus Christ came to die for our sins. Jesus, as a man, met the demands of the Law. As He lived here, He conformed perfectly. He didn't miss it a bit. Therefore, He qualified to take our place on the cross. He was our substitute. As a man, the God-man, He went to the cross. He took our sins upon Himself. He became the propitiation, as we will look at in a few moments, the satisfaction. He appeased God by what He did. He became our substitute on the cross.

Zechariah 13:7 says, "'Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man, My Associate,' declares the Lord of hosts. 'Strike the Shepherd.'" In Isaiah 53:5-6 we read: "But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall upon Him."

You have to see the seriousness of sin. God didn't just take His standard and set it aside. God said, "Sin has to be paid for. Out of my love for you I will send My only Son to this earth. He will take your sins upon Himself and demonstrate to the world the righteous character of a Holy God." The loving nature of God is that He wants His creation back in fellowship with Him and the only way is based on what Jesus Christ has done for you and me.

In verse 22 the term "righteousness of God" seems to refer to man's acceptance now in God's eyes. How can man once again be accepted in God's eyes? By his faith in Jesus Christ. Whether you see it yet or not, that is good. That means I can't work for it. Where I have gone wrong, God can forgive me. If I place my faith into what Jesus Christ has done, that is the basis of my being acceptable in God's eyes. That is good news. God says, "I have done it for you in the Lord Jesus. You place your faith into My Son. I accept you on the basis of what He has done, not on the basis of what you can do for Him. It is through faith in Jesus Christ."

Now let me ask you a question. What do you think faith is? I think faith is a little bit different than trust. Now trust obviously is involved. It leads us into a life of trust. But when I hear the word "trust," it sounds like my trusting God is based on what I think He might do for me. In other words, something He will do.

But my faith is not based on what I think He will do for me. My faith is based on what He has already done for me. That has to be the bottom line of our faith. You've got to come to the end of yourself. You've got to realize what you can't do and that you've got to place your faith into that which Christ has already done for you and for me. It is to cast your full weight upon something. It is to put everything, rest everything based on that which Jesus Christ has done for you and me.

Paul says in verse 22: "for all those who believe; for there is no distinction." Notice, he didn't just say "for all." He said "for all those who believe." Belief is the key. It's faith, putting faith into Jesus Christ. If there is no belief, then it doesn't function. What am I trying to get across? It is for anybody at any time when God reveals Himself to their hearts, when they place their faith in Jesus Christ. Nobody is excluded. It is for all who are willing to believe and cast themselves fully upon that which Jesus Christ has done for them. There is no distinction. This is the whole point that Paul is trying to bring out.

Verse 23 goes on: "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Paul is trying to show both Gentile and Jew that they are in the same need of this truth. Only when you place your faith into that which Jesus Christ has done for you can you ever be acceptable to God. Only then can you ever find your righteousness in Christ Jesus. Coming short of the glory of God has the idea of failing to obtain the divine favor, have fallen short of the true recognition of God.

Let me tell you what men do. Suppose I went down to the Florida Keys and I took some of you with me. We were going to see who could jump the closest to Cuba. Now Cuba is about 90 miles from that area. Let's just say we all lined up. I jump about a foot, and you all laughed at me. Here comes the next fellow. He jumps a foot and a half and just laughs at me. He says, "I jumped further than you did." The next guy jumps three feet and says, "I beat you both." Finally the last man comes up to the line. He jumps 27 feet. I mean, whew, did he jump out there. He says, "Look, guys, I jumped farther than all of you." We begin to compare with each other. But in relationship to Cuba, we have all fallen short of the goal of getting to Cuba.

It is the same thing in the Christian life! You may be the most religious person you have ever known. Nobody is as good as you are. But, on the goal of reaching the righteousness of God and being accepted by God, you are far short of the goal. You might be

better off than the Gentiles—that is what the Jews were doing. They were saying, "Look how much better we are than they are!"—but they didn't look at the goal. The goal is being acceptable to God, and you can't do it based on how far you can jump or how good you can be.

There has to be a bridge somewhere and that is the Lord Jesus Christ who says, "The only way you will ever be acceptable in God's eyes is based on what I did for you on the cross." When you believe, when you are willing to cast your full weight upon that which He has done for you, that is the basis of your salvation.

That is the good news. We come to Him and He now is the basis of our acceptance before God. The good news of God involves my acceptance with Him. I want you to know something; I was not justified on the account of my goodness. I was justified as a sinner. And don't you ever forget that. What I do now does not take away from my acceptance in Jesus Christ. What I don't do now doesn't take away from it. I am acceptable based on what Jesus did for me period! And when I cast my full weight upon that, then I am in a right standing with God. It's nothing I have done. It is based on everything that He has done for me. That is good news.

Secondly, our acquittal before God is involved in the good news of God. The word "justified" means to have all the charges dropped. Look at verse 24: "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." For two chapters I am condemned. I am desperate. I am guilty. Alright. What do I do now? God says, "The charges can be dropped based on the fact of the redemption that is through the Lord Jesus Christ." Now understand what we are saying here. Justify means the charges are dropped.

You say, "I know I have done wrong." That is right. But God justifies and drops the charges based on the redemption of His son. Now the word "redemption" there is the word that means to pay the ransom for someone, to pay what another person owes. Everywhere this word is used in the New Testament it denotes deliverance effected through the death of Christ from the wrath of a Holy God and the merited penalty of sin.

Listen to some of the verses about our redemption. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." These are the verses you want to cling to because the charges can't be dropped unless somebody pays the penalty. Redemption means He has paid the penalty. Colossians 1:14 says, "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Hebrews 9:15 reads, "And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance." This word "covenant" is *diatheke*, which means it is only in effect if one dies. He has made out his will, but it only comes into effect when he dies.

One day I stood before God and the judgment of God was upon me. He said, "You are guilty, and nothing you can do can ever release you from your guilt. But then let me tell you the good news. I have done for you what nobody could have ever done. I can accept you only based on the fact of your faith in the Lord Jesus." That is the whole message of the gospel, the good news—my sins can be acquitted, the charges can be dropped.

Verse 25 goes all the way back to the picture of sin in human history: "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed." Now when you look at the sins of all of human history, it would almost appear to be a scandal. Was a Holy God just passing over sin? Certainly we see the judgment of God all along the way, but we never see anything quite as serious as what happens on the cross.

It says, "But now," God in His own time has made a decision. God says, "I am going to show them how holy I am and how serious sin is. I am going to send My own Son to show them my love for them. I am going to let Him die on the cross publicly before others as a propitiation in His blood through faith."

The word "propitiation" is *hilasterios*. It has basically three meanings: to appease, to satisfy, to regain favor. The shedding of Christ's blood on the cross appeased God. It was the justice of God being carried out on the cross. If you ever want to know how serious sin is, look at the cross. It is an ugly thing. He died naked on the cross. When it talks about His being crushed and inflicted and wounded for our transgressions, that is not half of what He went through when He was on the cross.

The word "expiate" also has the idea here in the word "propitiation." Expiation means to pay the penalty for someone else. In other words, He expiated us: He paid a penalty that we owed. It is also the word for Mercy Seat. That is what grabs me. In other words, when I want to approach God, looking at the Old Testament, Jesus Christ is my High Priest. Jesus Christ is the sacrifice. It is His blood that is thrown on the Mercy Seat. He is the Mercy Seat. I find my fellowship with God, my acceptance with God based completely on that which Jesus Christ has done for me. His blood shows the horrible price that He paid for sin.

Why didn't God let Him have a heart attack? Why didn't He die in a chariot wreck? Why didn't He fall off of a donkey somewhere or just die? No, He had to die a cruel, wicked death to bring out the picture of how holy God is, but how loving God is and how

righteous He is to give man a way now that he can once again be acceptable in God's eyes. By putting our faith into what He alone has done, we can be acceptable once again in God's eyes. So my acceptance is based on the good news of God, but my acquittal is also involved in the good news of God. God drops the charges when I come and by faith trust Jesus Christ as my Savior. When I put all of my weight upon Him, then He acquits me and drops all the charges that are against me.

Verse 26 says, "for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." What is Paul saying? He proved Himself to be just by sending Jesus to die on the cross. That satisfied the penalty which the Law had executed. He satisfied it. He proved Himself to be just. He dealt with sin and proved Himself to be a loving, just God. Now He is the only one who can justify you and me, drop the charges, and bring us into the kingdom. It is all based on what Jesus Christ did for you and me.

Look at the words of this hymn:

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood. Died He for me who caused His pain. For me who Him to death pursued. Amazing love! How can it be that Thou my God should die for me.

He left His Father's throne above, so free, so infinite His grace. Emptied Himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race. 'Tis mercy all immense and free for all my God, it found out me.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night. Thine eye diffused a quickening ray. I woke, the dungeon flamed with light. My chains fell off, my heart was free. I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread. Jesus and all in Him is mine. Alive in Him my living Head and clothed in righteousness divine. Bold I approached the eternal throne and claimed the crown through Christ my own. Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou my God should die for me."

The good news is that God loves us in spite of all we have done. That is what Ephesians is talking about when it mentions the length, the breadth, the depth, and the height of God's love. God can touch you. He has already done it. He doesn't need to do anything. He has already done it. He is asking you to place your full weight upon that which He has already done for you. Good news. Good news. There is no other way to be acceptable with God except through His Son, Jesus Christ, placing your whole weight upon Him based on everything He has done for you.