



## Scotts Hill Baptist Church

SHARE THE GOOD NEWS • A CLEAR MESSAGE • ROMANS 3:1-31 •

### MAIN POINT

Sharing the Good News requires that we understand the clear message of the gospel.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Share a story from your childhood when you did something that damaged your home or room in some way. Did you admit fault? Did you try and fix the damage yourself?**

**What about now? Do you tend to try to fix things and make them right? Why or why not?**

**Do you tend to struggle more with guilt over your sinfulness, or do you attempt to “pay God back”? Share something from your life that supports your answer. What counsel could you give yourself?**

Paul got the bad news over with first in his letter to the Romans—we can’t fix our spiritual problem. We can’t pay God back or earn His favor. From 1:18 through 3:20 he painted a drastic, but accurate, picture of the spiritual and moral condition of the human race. Then in verse 21, he begins to paint a picture that is altogether different and superior. Our only hope of righteousness is in Christ alone.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 3:1-20.

**What two “absolutely not” questions/statements does Paul make in verses 1-8? In your own words, how would you describe God from these verses?**

**In your own words, how would you describe the condition of people from verses 7-20?**

**These verses seem hopeless for humankind; however, verse 20 offers hope in the midst of the hopeless situation. We cannot be justified by the law. We can’t earn our salvation—how is this a good thing?**

Thankfully, the story doesn’t end there. Just as Paul began chapter 3, pointing out God’s faithfulness and justifying righteous wrath, he later picks up those glorious truths again in verse 21. We cannot earn our salvation; yet God, in His faithfulness, provides the way of righteousness to us through His Son.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 3:21-26.

**What does verse 21 tell us God has provided for all people? As you look back at the previous few verses in Romans 3, why is what God has provided so crucial?**

**Which testimonies of the biblical prophets stand out to you the most and why?**

Paul stated what the Old Testament attests: God’s righteousness can be received only through faith in Jesus Christ. The apostle was speaking of a righteousness from God that He granted to people, not one earned by works. Nevertheless, justification is conditioned on placing one’s faith in Christ. Such righteousness is available to all who believe. By saying all who believe, Paul included both Jews and Gentiles.

**What motivated God to reveal righteousness? How did He do so?**

**“Justify” is a legal term meaning God declares the sinner not guilty. How does being declared not guilty impact your future? How does it impact you today?**

No one is without sin; we all have sinned. Furthermore, as sinners we continuously fall short of God’s standard for us. Essentially, this verse declares why people can be justified only through faith in Christ. Human sin was catastrophic in its consequences. Our only hope was for God to mercifully offer us a way of salvation in Jesus Christ, His Son. God never offered to sell salvation to people for a price. On the other hand, no human being could even begin to pay the equivalent value of eternal salvation. Thus Paul declared that

God acted to justify people freely by His grace. Not only can we never purchase salvation on our own, but we also are enslaved to sin. Because of this, we need to be purchased.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 3:27-31.

**If Jesus had not given us righteousness and we had to “work” to pay for it, what would that look like?**

**How does this passage explain the relationship between faith and works? In what area of your life have you experienced this truth?**

**Why do people, especially in a comfortable, prosperous societies, easily embrace a performance-based relationship with God? What effect does this have on society in general? On the church?**

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives..

**What do we learn about God’s character from this passage? In contrast, what do we learn about our character?**

**Is there a sin in your life that causes you to question if God sees you as righteous? How can you incorporate the truth of this lesson into your life to help combat those feelings this week?**

**Is there anything you might be doing subconsciously as a way to earn righteousness? What do you need to do differently to approach that area of your life appropriately?**

**Who in your life needs to be encouraged to accept God’s righteousness rather than trying to earn it or living with guilt? How can you help them this week?**

## PRAYER

As you close in prayer, ask that the reality of God’s gift of salvation by grace through faith in Christ will reach the depths of praise and gratitude in our hearts. Thank Jesus for descending to the depths of our need and taking upon Himself the penalty and punishment for our sins. Pray that God will give us such understanding and humble appreciation for the righteousness we find in Christ that we will be compelled to share it with others.

# COMMENTARY

## | ROMANS 3:1-31

3:1-2 It is a great privilege to be Jewish—considerable in every way. They heard God speak the “ten words” or Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-20) directly to them. Then through a long series of prophets, God’s words came to them. No other people on earth had this privilege.

3:3 Even if some of the Jewish people did not believe, God will be faithful to His covenant and will bring His promises to fulfillment. Paul referred particularly to the promises centered in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

3:4 After he was confronted by the prophet Nathan for his sins surrounding the Bathsheba incident, David confessed in Psalm 51:4 that God is justified in His judgments.

3:5-8 Paul addressed several implications to which critics mistakenly thought his teachings would lead. For example, if God is shown to be in the right by man’s sin and error, then God is honored by our shortcomings. How then can God punish us when we have helped display His righteousness? But Paul answered that as a matter of principle God’s judgment of sin is always righteous. People who think otherwise deserve condemnation, for their true focus is not on glorifying God but on giving free reign to their sinful desires.

3:9. Some of Paul’s fellow Jews contended they enjoyed a privileged status as God’s people that precluded their being subject to judgment. Paul returned to that theme with stark pronouncements that sin has infected every person.

3:10. The words in verses 10-12 come from Psalm 14:1-3 or Psalm 53:1-3. Written by David, the psalm shows racial distinctions do not matter with regard to sin. Those who trust in their own righteousness to bring salvation need God’s clear word: There is no one righteous.

3:11. A second couplet underscores Paul’s argument. Understanding translates a word that indicates the ability to use reason to comprehend a given concept. No one seeks God indicates a person who holds on to sin or to reason alone will never find God.

3:12. A third couplet adds the idea that not only are people unrighteous and pursuing the wrong path, they consciously have turned away from God. God provides plenty of

signposts. If we choose to ignore them, we are doing the same thing as turning away.

3:13-18. Paul's portrayal of the unrighteous person may seem overly pessimistic to many contemporaries. However, Paul was making a specific point and was under no obligation to mention all the extenuating circumstances. Then, of course, we participants in this fallen world tend to minimize the difference between our own conduct and the expectations of a holy God. In view of what God intends, humans fall lamentably short (cf. Rom 3:23).

3:19-20. Paul says that the law's purpose is to let you know that the law cannot make you righteous. Rather, it is through the law that we become conscious of sin. In other words, when the law says, "Do this or that," it is really saying, "You can't do this or that." The law wants you to know that you are guilty of not being able to keep it, and that your righteousness will never have its source in the law. The law tells you of your unrighteousness; the gospel tells you of the righteousness of God.

3:21. Few passages in Scripture are as rich in theology and as important for understanding salvation as this portion of Romans 3. Paul had established that all people have sinned and that the law is inadequate for salvation. What then? What is the hope? Paul's answer would have surprised many people. Apart from the law God has revealed His righteousness. Last week's lesson explained the law's function: it reveals sin (see Rom. 3:20). The law diagnoses the spiritual disease of sin. This lesson shows God provides the healing apart from the law. Though the law is inadequate to save a person, it does testify to God's means of salvation. The Old Testament serves a valuable role in our faith.

3:22. The phrase in verse 21 "attested by the Law and the Prophets" is parenthetical, and Paul returned to his point in this verse with the words that is. He clarified that God's righteousness is through faith in Jesus Christ. Righteousness is first and foremost an attribute of God, but it is also an activity of God. He is in the business of making us righteous. God desires fellowship with us, and in order to enjoy that fellowship He makes believers right. Faith is the key to salvation. The offer of salvation is available by faith, as to all who believe indicates. The word for believe and the word for "faith" in the Greek language are from the same root. To "believe in" is to "have faith in" something or someone. The English word believe is inadequate to convey the force of the Greek word. Faith involves intellectual assent as well as a thorough commitment of a believer's life.

3:23. Paul repeated the need for salvation. People of every race and gender need to be saved because all have sinned. God's righteousness is pure. Our sin renders us completely incapable of reaching Him. The task of righteousness, of accessing the glory of

God, is completely beyond our ability. Glory is a difficult word to pin down but essentially means “the full weight” of God’s attributes. Glory is God’s splendor. It defines, in part, who God is. In Jewish thought Adam and Eve possessed God’s glory before they sinned. Now, through Jesus Christ, God is restoring His glory in His people.

3:24. This verse clarifies the result that “all who believe” (v. 22) enjoy. Justified means “to be declared right with God.” The context is judicial; the scene is a courtroom. The divine judge declares all who believe to be innocent. Freely translates a Greek word meaning “gift” and underscores the difference between the attempt at salvation by works and the free offer of God. This offer of salvation is the pinnacle of His grace. Nothing surpasses it, and nothing is more important than for us to experience it. Being declared right with God comes only through His grace. Knowing we have this gift relieves our fear and grants us peace. The means by which God grants justification is through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ.

3:25-26. Propitiation is a term borrowed from the sacrificial system and the temple. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest would sprinkle blood over the ark to atone for the nation. By this rite sins were deemed expiated; people became reconciled to God and God’s wrath was averted. But human sins could not literally be atoned for by the death of animals. “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). Thus Jesus came to accomplish what no priest slaying an animal could ever hope to accomplish: full satisfaction of God’s requirements for atonement. God the Father “made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

3:27. A salvation based on works is human oriented and thus opens up the possibility of boasting. This Greek word can refer to unseemly boasting about legitimate accomplishments. It also can mean trying to make oneself appear greater or better than is appropriate. The latter meaning likely applies here, for Paul had already excluded the possibility of salvation by works. Paul answered his rhetorical question of what kind of law by returning to the theme of faith. Faith as the way of salvation is the antithesis of salvation by works. We receive salvation as a gift through faith. Therefore, we cannot brag about it as if we did something to earn it. Salvation is not based on our ability but on God’s grace.

3:28. Paul restated the conclusion of his argument to this point, that a person is justified through faith. Paul had tried the works of law and in his estimation had done it as well as anybody could (see Phil. 3:4-6). When he was confronted on the road to Damascus,

however, Paul came to a new conclusion about salvation: because he was still a sinner, works could never justify him before God. That insight led to the magnificent understanding of God's grace and of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.

3:29-30. There is only one God and only one way to be justified by Him, no matter your ethnic and national identity: by faith. The phrase who will justify does not mean that justification occurs at a future time (at the last judgment) and is therefore not a present reality for the believer. Rather, it points to the fact that God counts each of us justified as we come to faith. Thus God "will justify" your neighbor tomorrow if he comes to faith.

3:31. Does the gospel destroy the law? To answer this question, Paul considered the case of Abraham in the following chapter.