

# THE MOST IMPORTANT PASSAGE IN THE BIBLE

## *Discover God's Grace Study Series*

### Study #2 - Read Romans 3:19-23

#### C. Man's Righteousness vs. God's Righteousness (Romans 3:21-22)

(vs.21-22) **“But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known...This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”** (NIV)

In our last study, Paul made it very clear that the 10 Commandments (God's laws) can never make us righteous, they only reveal how *unrighteous* and *sinful* we really are. God's laws demonstrate our utter helplessness and our desperate need for a savior.

**“For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.”** Rom. 3:19-20 (NLT).

God's laws reveal the vast chasm and immense gap that exists between man's relative goodness (our flawed self-righteousness) and the unapproachable holiness and perfect righteousness of God. Although we may think of ourselves as being good or moral compared to other people, the Bible makes it clear that best we have to offer (our personal integrity, morality and devotion, etc.) is polluted and infected by our inherent sinfulness. Speaking to the nation of Israel, the prophet Jeremiah put it this way:

**“We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags. Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall, and our sins sweep us away like the wind.”** Jeremiah 64:6 (NLT)

As much as we dislike the thought, none of us has anything to bring to the table when it comes to the righteousness and goodness that God requires. Our righteous deeds are “nothing but filthy rags” which are offensive to God. “There is no one righteous, not even one.” (Romans 3:10). Salvation is truly a *rescue mission*. God sees that we are lost in our own inability and futility, and yet He provides a way to save us solely on the basis of His undeserved kindness and unmerited grace.

Q1. Have you been relying, to any degree, on your good deeds, morality, or personal devotion to make you righteous and acceptable in God's sight?

Q2. Do you ever feel that there is something that you have to contribute (give or give up) in order to gain God's forgiveness?

Q3. Do you ever wonder if your sins have been fully and forever forgiven?

**“Look into your own heart and see whether you are trusting, even in a small fraction, in something you are doing for God, instead of finding in your heart that you have ceased from your works...and that you are resting on the work that was accomplished on the cross...God has provided righteousness for men who do not have any of their own... Righteousness comes out of the righteous heart of God as a gift of His sovereign grace...apart from human doing...apart from human character... [It is] God's own righteousness...that comes from God upon an ungodly man...Will you stand on your own righteousness and be lost forever, or will you stand in the righteousness of God apart from anything in your self?”** - Dr. Donald G. Barnhouse (Romans - Volume III)

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It is essential for us to understand that God *assigns* the impeccable, flawless and magnificent righteousness of Christ to sinners (like us) as a free gift of His grace.

Note: The word “grace” means *unmerited kindness* and *undeserved generosity*. It refers to *giving a gift to someone who is completely undeserving* (like an enemy). God in His grace gives the gift of forgiveness of sins and perfect righteousness to His enemies. See Romans 5:6-10.

**“Perhaps the most difficult task for us is to rely on God’s grace and God’s grace alone for our salvation... We want to earn our own way and atone for our own sins... All the suffering I could possibly endure could not earn me a place in heaven. Nor can I merit the merit of Christ through suffering. I am altogether an unprofitable servant who must rely on someone else’s merit to be saved.” - Dr. R.C. Sproul**

(Romans 1:17) **“In the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith’.” (NIV)**

Note: As we have seen previously, the word “faith” means *to be persuaded, to believe in, to trust in*. “By grace are you saved through faith [childlike trust]. It is the gift of God”. See Eph. 2:8.

**“Justification before God is by grace, through faith, plus nothing.”**  
- Dr. William Pettingill

Many people who attend good churches lack real assurance that they have received forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Often this is because they connect their salvation experience to a particular event like repeating a prayer, going forward in an evangelistic meeting, making a promise to obey God, or getting baptized, etc. If you are struggling with knowing for certain that you are fully forgiven and perfectly righteous in God’s sight, you can settle the matter once and for all by putting your only hope for salvation in Jesus Christ. “Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life.” (John 6:40). On the cross He paid the full price for all of your sins. Your part is only to receive the gift that He has already purchased for you. He has promised the gift of eternal life to anyone who believes in Him. This is a personal matter and something that you can do in the privacy of your own heart and mind right now. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” (Acts 16:31).

(Romans 4:5-8) **“...To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.’” (ESV)**

(Philippians 3:9) **“...not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.” (ESV)**

(2 Corinthians 5:19-21) **“God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them... God made Him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” (NIV)**

Note: The perfect righteousness that God demands *of us*, He freely provides *for us* in Christ. The righteousness that God provides is Christ’s own perfect righteousness. This righteousness is totally unrelated to anything in us. It is, in fact, the very righteousness of God credited to us!

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If you have placed your faith in Christ alone, you can rest assured that God will never hold your sins against you! Not only that, but you can have complete confidence that God has imputed (credited) *Christ's own perfect righteousness* to you based solely on His death and resurrection on your behalf!

#### D. Understanding the Nature of Sin (Romans 3:23)

(vs.23) **“For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.”** (NLT)

This verse can be paraphrased like this, ‘Every one of us has sinned to such an extent that we all fall *infinitely short* of what God in His holiness requires’. In other words, because of our sin, we are unable to measure up to the righteousness that God demands. Our sin has caused a severe breach in our relationship with God.

The line below represents a *relative* scale of human good and evil. The left side of the line represents the *worst* that man is (or could be) and the right side represents the *best* that man is (or could be). So for the purpose of this illustration, if we were to classify certain categories of people, we might say that murderers and rapists would be to the far left. While people who are very, very good are to the far right.

(Worst)   Criminals   Immoral & Deceptive   Moral & Honest People   Morally Superior & Generous   (Best)



Q4. Where would you put yourself on this scale?

Q5. Where would you place God on this scale?

Q6. How many of the categories on the line above would you characterize as being sinners? Circle each category that would apply. *Note: The word “sinner” in the Bible is a derogatory term that refers to those who are hostile, rebellious and/or indifferent to God.*

These three questions were intended to be a bit *tricky*. This was done to emphasize the the nature of sin and the serious implications of Romans 3:23 and related passages.

Answer Key: Q4. The main point here is that God does not mark on a *curve* (like the relative scale of human good and evil above). Regardless of where we fit on the scale, or how we compare with other people, we all fall *infinitely short* of God’s perfect standard. Q5. The point here is that God does not fit *anywhere* on a relative scale of human good and evil. God is uniquely righteous and perfect in holiness. God’s righteousness is all together different than human goodness (the difference could be compared to the chasm between heaven and hell).

The best of all humans deserve God’s righteous (just) judgment and wrath. “There is no one who is righteous, not even one.” Q6. The point here is that all human beings, from the worst to the best, are sinners. The Bible describes us as *hostile, rebellious and indifferent* to God from birth. *The good news of the gospel is that Christ bore the full penalty of our sins on the cross.* The judgment that we deserved He took on Himself. He is the sacrificial lamb of God (Jn 1:29).

*Optional: For further insight, see Romans 3:9-18, Romans 8:3-8, Ephesians 2:1-9, Titus 3:3-7.*

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