



Central  
Peninsula  
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

*But Now...*

Romans 3:21–31

Dan Reid

November 1, 2015

*series: Romans: Unashamed • Undeserved • Unstoppable*

Today is November 1, 2015. Today is exactly my second year anniversary at Central Peninsula Church. Some of my friends in Wisconsin have asked me what are the biggest differences between life here on the Peninsula and back there in Wisconsin. I tell them for one thing there is less cheese on the Peninsula! That has been hard to get used to. I also tell them there is less snow and ice. I would tell them that last Friday night Julie and I went to see a movie, and I was in shorts and short sleeves the day before Halloween. It was awesome. They ask about real estate. I don't tell them much. I don't want them to think I am crazy!

But I also get to tell them that I am part of a loving and diverse church family, that I am privileged to work with a great group of staff and volunteers who support what God is calling us to do, and who challenge me to grow as well. I tell them that my family is very happy here. I now love Indian food and sushi, and I am learning to live in a place without a backyard or a garage. And that I actually check the box scores for the Warriors and the Giants along with the Packers.

In many ways things are really different here. I read this week that the town of Portola Valley claims to have more patents per capita than any other city around. Portola Valley claims to have the brightest in technology, medical science, government, banking, finance, and humility I'm sure; quite a performance record. In Wisconsin, we also had a performance record. We could claim to have the best hunting land, more 4-wheel drives per capita, the best lakes with the best lake cabins. These certainly sound like two very different places, don't they?

But for anyone who has lived in other regions of the country, the closer you look the more things look the same. You know what I am talking about. Every place you go people are seeking—they are looking for something more, they are trying to get ahead, they are trying to be loved and accepted and raise their families. Whether validation comes from securing a patent or by having the largest buck mount hanging on the wall of your den, it really doesn't matter when you look closely. Both offer only temporary good feelings. Everyone everywhere is doing the same thing. We are trying to justify our existence, feel validated and have a sense of meaning to our hard lives.

It's pretty clear to me that many of us find our worth by displaying the right resumé that reflects the right school and the right degree. It's pretty clear to me that many of us find our worth by working at the right company with the right level of

authority with the right compensation. It's pretty clear to me that many of us find our worth through our children and their right school, right grades, right experiences. Why do these things matter? Because these right things open the right doors, and when the right doors open we feel good. We feel accepted. We feel validated. We feel like, "Hey, I'm worthy, accept me."

Whether we are from Wisconsin or California the root, or "the rut" of our problem is the same thing. No matter what world religion you analyze, the root is the same. There is a struggle to do more and be more. There is a struggle to do good things and expect God to reward us for these good things we do. There is a struggle to build a resumé that will make us feel good about our goodness. But Paul says, stop trying to justify yourselves. You can't. Your resumé will never be good enough because you are not good enough. Yes, you need justification. Yes, you need a perfect righteousness before a perfect God.

Let's take a moment to review where the Apostle Paul has taken us these last few weeks.

### **The Whole World is Under God's Wrath**

In Romans Chapter 1 verse 18 we saw that the whole world is under God's wrath because people suppress the truth. The natural response to this idea of God's wrath is, "Oh come on. There has got to be some that don't deserve wrath. What about my grandmother? What about the Dali Lama? What about Aaron Rogers?" All of humanity is accused. All of humanity is indicted.

First Paul demonstrates that pagan Gentiles are guilty and without excuse. Then he moves on to the morally self-righteous and he points out how they are quick to point out the faults of others, but in reality they are doing the same things and therefore are guilty and without excuse.

We saw how even the religious and devout—in this case the Jews who had been given the law and who looked like pretty good religious guys—when that mirror was held up to their hearts, they had no love for God. They only loved their tradition. I guess one could say, "at least God doesn't play any favorites. Everyone of us is a passenger on the same sinking ship, the USS Depravity." Paul sums it all up in Romans 3:10:

**As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one;"**

This is bad news. But the Good News isn't to try to be good. The good news isn't that God helps those who help themselves. The

good news unfolds first with a clear understanding of the truth of our sin. We are sin sick and it's terminal if left untreated. It's also curable. But it requires radical surgery. We are spiritually dead and we need a spiritual transplant.

In Romans 3:21 Paul shows us that he is ready to bring us the really great good news. We have been waiting four weeks for this. He begins with the phrase, "But now." After delivering the awful truth, Paul turns toward hopeful truth. Paul delivers something absolutely new, something unheard of in the religious world of his day. Nothing had ever been said like what is about to be said. We started this series with the question, Can you use some really great Good News? Here is the really great Good News: We are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. How does this happen?

### **The Righteousness of God has Been Made Known**

**But now... apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify (v. 21).**

Remember, the law doesn't save. We can't get that perfect resumé by following the law because we can't be perfect because we are infected with sin. The righteousness must come from some source. Back in Chapter 1 verse 18 the wrath of God was being revealed against all godlessness and the wickedness of men. So now the righteousness of God has been made known. A righteousness from another source—God. Not just a good resumé, not just a great resumé, but a perfect resumé, a divine resumé has been revealed. It's the resumé we all want because if we have it, it means the struggle to find self worth and acceptance can end. This perfect righteousness concept is not new. The Prophets of the Old Testament encouraged the people to wait for their righteous Savior. So to whom does this righteousness of God come?

### **The Righteousness of God Comes to All Through Jesus Christ**

**This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,... (verses 22-23).**

This righteousness has been given to all who believe in Jesus Christ. Before Christ, it must have been really hard to wrap our minds around this idea of God's righteousness. But because of Christ, we now have a flesh and blood picture of the righteousness of God. We can see this righteousness in Jesus. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:30, "*Christ... has become... our righteousness.*"

Paul goes on to say that this righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ. We do not earn it. We do not deserve it. In fact, we are incapable of ever deserving it. How do we obtain this righteousness? Verse 22 says that it is given through faith in Jesus Christ. Verse 24 goes on to show us that it's faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

**...and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (v. 24).**

We obtain this righteousness through being justified by God. Paul uses the term "justify freely" to give us help to understand. Remember, we are guilty of breaking the law. Justified freely is a legal term that means we stand before a judge totally guilty and we are declared not guilty. We are pardoned. We are let off from the penalty we deserve. We can walk away. But to be justified means even more than that. Not only does justified freely say, "Go, you are forgiven, you are pardoned. You are free to go." It also tells us that we are free to come. We are welcome into God's loving presence. There are no barriers. His righteousness is transferred to us. I not only get to put my name on the perfect resumé—Christ's resumé—I get the presence of God. No condemnation. Now when I read this I think about justice. Something doesn't sit right. Don't get me wrong, I love that I am justified freely, But what about my sin? What about my penalty? Who pays it? Does it ever get paid? And didn't my sin hurt God? Didn't we read that God is angry at sin? What about that wrath verse? Where is the justice because I am getting something for nothing, aren't I? How could God be happy with this? Where is wrath turned away? If I stop here it seems that God just waves a magic wand and says, "Bipity bopity boo, your justified freely." There has got to be more to support this awesome thing of justification. If I don't do anything who does? And how does he do it? How can I be declared right? I can only be declared right if another makes things right.

### **Justified Freely.... Grace.... Redemption....**

Paul gives us another rich term: Redemption. It's the work Jesus did to declare me right because we must learn that we were bought for a price. Let the word redemption open your minds to the idea of a marketplace. You go to the market, the mall where items are bought and sold for a price. We dig deeper into this word and it means literally to buy out of the marketplace. The idea is that once the object or person is purchased they will never have to return there again. Going deeper the word means "when bought back;" the person or object is set free, like a prisoner or slave being released.

Paul is using this marketplace illustration to show us that Jesus Christ redeemed us by buying us out of our slavery to sin. Jesus bought my freedom at a great price. But still there is still something that troubles me. I'm declared righteous, but how am I made righteous? And what happened to my long list of sins that so perfectly describe my depravity? Where did it go? In other words, how did my penalty for my sin get paid or erased?

### **How Does the Penalty for Our Sin Get Paid?**

**God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.**

Paul uses the term "sacrifice of atonement." This is a tremendous word picture. In other translations the word is translated *propitiation*. In the Old Testament we get the word "Kippur" as in the Jewish holy day Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On that Day of Atonement, once a year, the high priest took two male goats before the congregation of Israel. One unlucky goat was chosen to become the sacrificial goat and become a sin offering for the sins of the people. So the high priest would make a blood sacrifice for himself and his family in the public place with everyone watching usually with a bull. He would then slit the neck of the goat and take some blood from that goat and he would slowly, probably with great fear and trembling, enter the Holy of Holies. He would enter into the most holy place in the tabernacle. He would enter into the place where only the High Priest was allowed to go, and only on that One Day of the Year, into that place that contained the Ark of the Covenant. He would enter into the presence of God.

The Bible says the Ark of the Covenant was a gold covered box about a yard long, containing the stone tablets of the law. The box had a cover called the mercy seat. On each side of the mercy seat were statues of cherubim (angels) whose wings stretched upward and forward. In a symbolic way God dwelled above these wings. The Ark is a picture of judgment. It illustrates what God sees when he looks down on earth between these two cherubim. When God looks down he sees within the ark the law of Moses that each of us have broken. He sees that sin must somehow be punished because he can't ignore sin. That is where the mercy seat comes in.

The Old Testament says on the Day of Atonement the High Priest could see God's glory shining above the Ark. The priest would sprinkle the blood of the sacrificed goat on the mercy seat. It was also called the cover of atonement or the place of propitiation. The purpose of this blood sacrifice was to appease or satisfy God's wrath, his anger, his hurt because of the sins his people had committed over that year. God would look down and instead of punishing his people for their sins, he would receive the blood sacrifice as atonement for their sins. This annual sprinkling of blood became the picture that pointed to Jesus.

By using the wording, "sacrifice of atonement" or "propitiation," Paul is telling us that the crucifixion of Jesus became that mercy seat for you and me, that Jesus became our atonement, that his one-time sacrifice appeases the wrath of God against sin. Now when God looks down, he doesn't see the Law of Moses that we have broken, but instead he sees the blood of his innocent Son shed on the cross. He sees the price was paid to redeem us. He sees the punishment that was owed to us carried out fully on his perfect righteous Son.

**He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so**

**as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (verses 25-26.)**

So God is **just** because our sin doesn't go unpunished. Our penalty gets paid. And God is also the **justifier** because he himself offered up his own son to be crucified to death so we could be justified freely. The death of Jesus takes his perfect record and makes it our own so we may go, freely forgiven, and come freely into his presence with no condemnation, the penalty of our sin paid, wiped clean by Christ's death, and God's righteous wrath against sin appeased, and God's sense of justice upheld, and his holiness remaining intact. And he says the only way to receive justification is to receive it on faith. It is a free gift. We are justified by faith.

What about the second lucky goat? This had meaning too. The high priest then laid his hands on the head of the other goat in the sight of the congregation. The idea was to symbolically transfer the sins of the community to the "scapegoat." This more fortunate goat was allowed to run free, bearing the sins of the people. In the same way our sins were transferred onto Christ. He was our scapegoat.

### **What Does a Justified Person Look Like?**

#### **No boasting!**

**Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith (v. 27).**

Jesus the Lamb of God was treated as guilty, as if he had done every sin we did against God. And we were treated righteous, as if we were as blameless as Jesus. God has to love us so much to go through all this to save us. We are the children of God. And we receive this place of worth by God's grace through faith. Never ever think that if you do good work, even good church work God somehow owes you something. Just understanding that we are justified freely should destroy any boasting.

#### **No partiality!**

**For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith (verses 28-30).**

But now... as this passage began. God is the God of all. Everyone is invited to believe. Today, you can receive the free gift of salvation, no matter what your past is, you can be justified freely if you accept on faith what Christ did for you.

#### **Respect for the Law!**

**Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law (v. 31).**

What difference does the law make if we are justified by faith? If we have been justified by faith we will uphold the law. This means that we will respect the law.

Do you know what a colonoscopy is? It's a test. I've had three so far in my life. When someone says the worst part of a colonoscopy is the prep, they're right! A colonoscopy exposes what would otherwise stay hidden. A tube with a camera on the end winds through the deep dark, dank places of the colon that never see the light of day. Its purpose is to expose disease, and that is a good thing. But it is very limited in power. It can reveal a cancer but it has no power to cure the cancer. It is only a test and it reveals something that needs attention. But the cure must come from another source.

I am better able to understand what Paul means by upholding the law by comparing the law to a colonoscopy. The Law is like running a long tube with a camera on the end into every dark corner of the human heart. It can expose sin. It can reveal the sin, but it can't remove it. It can't cure it. The cure must come from another source. The cure for the sin sickness in our heart is to give our heart over to Jesus.

Maybe in these last few weeks in our series on Romans, God has revealed something to you. Maybe you have been surprised to discover for really the first time that your own works cannot justify you before a Holy God nor save you from your sins. My understanding is that Jesus came to seek and save that which is lost. That he came into the world to save sinners like you and me. When God calls us to himself we are to receive him on faith and he promises to enter our hearts and clean them up and live in our hearts forever. And we are to become followers of Christ.

Maybe God is calling you to himself this morning. I invite you to listen for his voice. Today you can know for sure that Jesus "paid it all" for your sins. Today you can know for sure that you will have eternal life with him. Today you can know for sure the joy and relief of standing before God totally loved. Standing on Christ's righteousness and not your own. Maybe God is calling you right now to receive this amazing gift of grace and become a Christian.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

© 2015 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA  
Catalog No. 1418-8FC