

Romans 3:21–4:5 Study Guide

Romans 3:21–4:5 is one of the clearest passages in Scripture on justification by faith. Paul has already shown that both Gentiles and Jews are guilty before God (Romans 1:18–32; 2:1–13; 3:9–20). Now he turns to the good news: God provides righteousness apart from law-keeping, through faith in Jesus Christ.

1. What does Paul mean when he says “now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed”? (Romans 3:21)

Paul is not saying God’s righteousness is unrelated to the Old Testament. He says it is “witnessed by the Law and the Prophets” (Romans 3:21). The point is that sinners are not made right with God by keeping the law. God has revealed a righteousness He gives, not one we achieve.

This connects back to Romans 1:17, where Paul said the righteousness of God is revealed “from faith to faith.” It also points forward to Romans 3:28, where Paul says a person is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

Everyday Application: Our standing with God does not rest on our ability to perform well enough. God provides what we could never produce.

2. Who receives this righteousness from God? (Romans 3:22–23)

Paul says the righteousness of God comes “through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe” (Romans 3:22). This is necessary because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

The problem is universal, so the gospel is offered without distinction. Jews and Gentiles, moral and immoral, religious and irreligious all need the same grace. Romans 1:16 says the gospel is God’s power to salvation “for everyone who believes.”

Everyday Application: No one is too good to need grace, and no one is too sinful to be saved by grace. The invitation is to believe in Christ.

3. What does it mean to be “justified freely by His grace”? (Romans 3:24)

To be justified means to be declared righteous before God. Paul says this happens “freely by His grace” through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24). Justification is not earned, purchased by our works, or deserved. It is given by grace.

“Redemption” points to rescue by payment. Jesus described His own mission this way: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Everyday Application: Grace humbles pride and relieves despair. We cannot boast that we earned salvation, and we do not have to despair that we failed too badly for Christ to redeem.

4. What does Paul mean when he says Christ was set forth as a “propitiation”? (Romans 3:25)

“Propitiation” means that Christ’s sacrifice satisfies God’s righteous judgment against sin. God does not ignore sin; He deals with it through the blood of Christ. This shows both God’s justice and His mercy.

The sacrificial language connects with the Old Testament system, where blood was associated with atonement for sin (Leviticus 17:11). But those sacrifices pointed forward. Hebrews says it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins permanently (Hebrews 10:4), but Christ offered Himself once for all (Hebrews 10:10–14).

Everyday Application: Forgiveness is free to us, but it was not cheap. The cross shows how serious sin is and how great God’s mercy is.

5. How does the cross show that God is both just and the justifier? (Romans 3:25–26)

Paul says God passed over former sins in His forbearance, but now He demonstrates His righteousness through Christ (Romans 3:25–26). God is “just” because He does not pretend sin does not matter. He is “the justifier” because He makes sinners right with Himself through faith in Jesus.

This answers the deepest problem: how can a holy God forgive guilty people? The answer is the cross. God judges sin in Christ and justifies those who believe in Him.

Everyday Application: God’s mercy is not sentimental. He forgives righteously. That gives us confidence that salvation rests on God’s finished work, not on God overlooking reality.

6. Why does justification by faith exclude boasting? (Romans 3:27–28)

Paul asks, “Where is boasting then?” and answers, “It is excluded” (Romans 3:27). If we were justified by works, we could boast in ourselves. But if we are justified by faith, all boasting is removed.

Paul concludes that “a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Romans 3:28). Faith receives what God gives; it does not earn what God owes. Ephesians 2:8–9 says salvation is by grace through faith, “not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Everyday Application: The gospel removes superiority. We do not look down on others as if we saved ourselves. We stand only by grace.

7. How does Paul show that God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles? (Romans 3:29–31)

Paul asks whether God is the God of Jews only, or also of Gentiles. His answer is clear: “Yes, of the Gentiles also” (Romans 3:29). Since there is one God, there is one way of justification: by faith (Romans 3:30).

This does not overthrow the law; it establishes it (Romans 3:31). The law exposed sin and pointed to the need for righteousness from God. Jesus said He did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17).

Everyday Application: The gospel creates humility and unity. All believers come to God the same way — not through heritage, status, or achievement, but through faith in Christ.

8. Why does Paul use Abraham as his example? (Romans 4:1–5)

Abraham was the father of Israel, so Paul uses him to show that justification by faith is not new. Scripture says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3; Genesis 15:6).

Paul contrasts wages and grace. If someone works, wages are owed as debt. But the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness (Romans 4:4–5). Abraham was counted righteous by faith before the law was given through Moses.

Everyday Application: God justifies the ungodly who trust Him. That means our hope is not in presenting a record of achievement, but in believing the God who credits righteousness through faith in Christ.