

Veronica Torgerson

4-28-2023

NT 631

Romans 3:21-31

In the verses that precede our section, Paul has been explaining God's righteous wrath against sin and how all people are condemned under His wrath. But, in verse 3:21 Paul shifts to God's solution—Jesus' death which purchased atonement and God's grace for those who respond with faith in Jesus. Most of the commentators note that this section begins with "but now" which serves not only as a verbal transition in the text but to emphasize that a new era in history is beginning in which God's salvation is available through Jesus.

Osbourne lays out the thesis of this section and the process of salvation as outlined in 3:21-26 like this—Christ has given himself as the propitiation for our sins, producing the atoning work that makes salvation possible and providing redemption by making the payment to free us. Then, when we as sinners respond by faith we are justified by God (Osbourne, 92).

Sherwood sums up Paul's gospel presentation in verses 3:21-26 this way, "the gospel is the joyful news that as sinners trust in Jesus' sacrificial death, God redeems them out of sin's dominion and into his reign" (Sherwood, 237). But, Sherwood says giving a description of the gospel is not Paul's main goal in this section. It is to show that Jesus' death on the cross proves God's covenantal faithfulness. According to Sherwood, Paul's main idea in this section is "that God is presently righteousizing believing sinners through their personal trust in Jesus; and since that is the eschatological deliverance promised by Scripture, the gospel is God's disclosure of his covenantal faithfulness" (Sherwood, 239).

Gorman begins his section on 3:21 by calling it a “major turning point,” where unfaithful and unjust humans (which has been unpacked in 1:18-3:20) finally receive the revelation of God’s righteousness in Christ (Gorman, 117). In verse 21, Paul is showing that God’s faithfulness no longer depends on humanity’s observance of the Torah meaning God’s people no longer have to relate to Him indirectly (Sherwood, 840). Paul points out to his audience that this transition to a new era of salvation is still in line with the theology of Israel’s scriptural heritage and all of scripture is fulfilled by God’s work through Jesus (Sherwood, 242).

Gorman immediately notes the challenge of translating this revelation correctly as the word *dikaiosyné* (righteousness/justice) appears nine times in the ten verses and is tricky to pinpoint the meaning (Gorman, 117). Two important aspects of translating this correctly, according to Gorman, is realizing that God’s righteousness/justice is God’s saving covenant faithfulness or saving restorative justice, an actionable attribute. Second, is that what is typically translated as “faith in Christ” should more accurately be “the faithfulness of Christ” (Gorman, 118). This applies to verses 22 and 26. Gorman’s support for this second point is that the most natural translation of the Greek word *pistis* (meaning faith or faithfulness) makes Jesus the subject not the object. This makes Jesus’ faithfulness on the cross the means of justification that we respond to not the mode of expressing our justification and it makes our justification God and Jesus centered rather than us-centered (Gorman, 119). Our response, therefore, is a response to God’s initiative not the other way around.

Garland expresses that the reading “faith of Christ” would make sense with the support of verse 5:19 when the idea that disobedience came through one man, Adam, and obedience came through one man, Jesus (Garland, 139). Schriener notes that a similar phrase is found in Romans 4:16 and is translated “faith of Abraham” not “faith in Abraham” (Schriener, 190). Garland also

says it makes more sense for the faith of Christ to display the righteousness of God rather than human faith in Christ. Still, both Garland and Schriener prefer the traditional reading of “faith in Christ” as the believer’s personal faith in Jesus’ work on the cross is the means for their salvation rather than works of the law is the main issue being discussed in this passage and makes the most sense for the flow of the passage.

In Garland’s commentary, he gives five reasons to support his stance in landing on the translation “faith in Christ” in verse 22. First, he thinks it is unlikely that Paul switches back and forth between the meaning of the word “faith” referring to the believer’s faith and then to Jesus’ faith. Second, he says that Paul never refers to Jesus as “faithful” in other texts. Third, because this translation doesn’t make the next phrase redundant but emphasizes that justification is for “all who believe”—meaning the Jews and the Gentiles. Fourth, the context from verse 22 is concerning how sinners can gain righteousness only through faith. Fifth, no early interpreters of the Bible understood “faith of Christ” to mean the faith that Christ held and the topic was never debated amongst them (Garland, 140). Petersen shares a very similar argument to Garland and Osbourne’s commentary also reads verse 22 the traditional way. (Osbourne, 94). Osbourne says that the word “faith,” meaning belief in Jesus, is written seventeen times in 3:21-4:25 and reading it as the believer’s faith in Jesus’ work fits the context of these verses better (Osbourne, 94).

In Gorman’s commentary, he immediately goes on to press into another interpretive debate regarding if, to Paul, the word justification used in verses 24 and 26 means that God counts sinners as righteous/just, or if God makes sinner righteous/just. The first makes justification a legal concept and the second make it a transformative idea. Gorman argues that for Paul, justification is transformative, and God makes sinners righteous/just because when God

speaks, something happens just like in Genesis one. So, when God makes us righteous/just we are actually made to be just that. Simply put, what is spoken actually happens (Gorman, 121). With verse 23-24 in mind, we see that Paul is suggesting that this transformative justice is solving the problem of human's missing out on the glory of God by restoring the glory we once possessed in our original created state (Gorman, 121). Gorman sums it up like this, "Justification is the beginning of a new reality that will reach its ultimate goal in eternal life and final glorification" (Gorman, 121).

Gorman also argues, in verse 23, that a more accurate translation of "fall short of the glory of God" is that we all "lack God's glory" (Gorman, 122). This is because, here, glory refers to God's divine presence like the glory that filled the tabernacle and the temple. So, lacking God's glory is a way to describe the fundamental human issue in life—being separated from God—and justification is what restores us into that presence (Gorman, 122). Schriener explains that even believers in God, the Jews, lacked this glory which was eschatologically promised to them (Schriener, 194). Osbourne quotes the Apocalypse of Moses and study of ancient Judaism to show that, in Jewish thought, humanity possessed the glory of God before they fell in the garden, and they believed it would be restored to them in the eschatological future (Osbourne, 95). This enlightens verse 23 to show us that, though Christ, the lost glory is in the process of being restored to those who are in Christ (Osbourne, 95). Sherwood argues that in verse 23 when Paul says that as sinners we lack the glory of God, Paul is not just saying that sinners lack God's perfection but that we lack the presence of God and ability to participate in God's immortal life (Sherwood, 243). To put it more succinctly, sinners don't just lack godliness, but they lack all ability to access to eternal life with God (Sherwood, 244). Schriener seems to agree with Sherwood's explanation as he finds that "lack glory" likely includes falling short of God's nature

and character with is tied closed to life (Schriener, 195). Garland doesn't seem to take a clear stance on if the "glory of God" in verse 23 refers to the original glory that humanity received and lost in the fall but does say that Paul seems to believe it is an eschatological state, that righteousness is the prerequisite for receiving it, and that it is connected to justification (Garland, 142).

In verse 24, Sherwood explains that Paul's use of the word "grace" (and also its use in all of Romans) would be better left transliterated as "charis" because of our inability to read it correctly in context in English (Sherwood, 244). Charis is God's unmerited gift that is both unconditioned but also conditioned in the sense that it initiates a relationship in which the believer must go forward (Sherwood, 245). Sherwood also says that the pairing of the word charis with the Greek word for gift typically causes us to read the verse meaning that salvation is not based on works which is not exactly what Paul is trying to convey (Sherwood, 245).

Sherwood mentions Barclay's recent work on Paul's usage of the word gift and its implications for the believer as they become God's dependents, much like the client-patron relationship in the Greco-Roman world (Sherwood, 245). God gives His grace gift with no preconditions or concern for shame based on who He gives to but when the believer responds to accept this grace gift, their response generates a conditionality in which they must faithfully submit to God's authority (Sherwood, 246).

Another word in verse 24, "redemption," brings another word picture and calls to mind the exodus narrative where God defeated Pharaoh and claimed Israel for Himself. Sherwood notes that it is important to recognize that redemption is not just deliverance from something but also to something (Sherwood, 246). The exodus freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt but it's also when God created the nation of Israel as his uniquely set apart people (Sherwood, 246). So,

for Paul in Romans, redemption is God both rescuing His people and bringing them under His rule to be His people (Sherwood, 246).

Schriener adds to this idea that in order to receive redemption a price must have been paid, although some scholars debate the necessity of this (Schriener, 197). Schriener finds two pieces of evidence to support the idea of a price being paid. First, Paul says that humans are justified “freely” meaning they don’t pay anything to receive righteousness but the justification must have incurred a cost on God’s part since it was obtained “through the redemption” in Christ (Schriener, 198). Schriener points out that the contrast between freely and redemption provided by God suggests that God has paid a price (Schriener, 198). Secondly, the sacrificial character of the context (words like blood in verse 25) points to a price being paid since sacrifices were literally the paying of a price (Schriener, 198). Therefore, we can conclude that believers are freed from their sins through the paying of the price of Jesus’ shed blood.

Gorman argues in these verses that to Paul, Christ’s death accomplishes two things: the forgiveness of sin (plural) and the redemption from sin (singular) and both are a part of what justification means (Gorman, 123). The first is found in verse 25 when the Greek word *hilastérion* is used which can be translated as “sacrifice of atonement” or “mercy seat” from the holy of holies. This language emphasizes the people’s need for forgiveness due to their many sins. The second shows how Christ’s death gave liberation and uses language of the deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Gorman, 124). Gorman sums it up by saying that Jesus’ death deals with “both sin (the deeds) and Sin (the power)” (Gorman, 124).

Like Gorman, Osbourne also argues that Christ’s death on the cross accomplished two things but his short list is different. He says, it appeased the wrath of God and brought the forgiveness of sins (Osbourne, 98). Osbourne also says, in this we can see the reason God created

humanity in the first place—to have a focus for His love which requires us to be reconciled from our fallen state (Osbourne, 98).

Garland, like the other commentators notes Paul's use of the metaphor of the mercy seat in verse 25 to describe God's initiative in solving the problem of sin. The mercy seat was in the most sacred space where the high priest entered once a year on the Day of Atonement to cleanse the people from their sin (Garland 145). By using this word which is rich with atonement association, Paul is giving vivid imagery that gives deep meaning and emotion to show that the place where our sins are atoned for has shifted from the temple to the cross (Garland, 145). In its imagery, we see that where Jesus' blood was spilled was greater than where animal blood was spilled because unlike the temple sacrifices, Jesus' sacrifice was once and for all rather than needed to be continually given day after day, pardoned the sin of all who have faith in Him not only Israel's sin, and was initiated by God himself rather than the humanly priests (Garland, 148). Garland explains that Christ's sacrificial death proved God's righteousness by both judging sin and showing mercy to sinners (Garland, 146).

Schriener points out the use of cult terminology like "mercy seat" signals the importance of recognizing that the temple cult is no longer effective (Schriener, 203). The sacrifices commanded by the Old Testament cannot bring forgiveness and only foreshadowed the forgiveness that would come through Jesus (Schriener, 203).

Petersen see the three metaphors used in verses 24-25 as each expressing independent and important ideas about God's righteousness (Petersen, 192). The first, "justification," is a forensic word meaning to vindicate someone or not punish them (Petersen, 192). God's justification by faith is given as a gift of grace through Jesus' work which gives us a verdict of pardon (Petersen, 192). The second, "redemption," is linked to freedom from slavery both in the

Greco-Roman and Jewish sources (Petersen, 192). In the previous verses, Paul charged everyone with being under sin but now Paul is claiming that redemption from sin's captivity has taken place in Jesus (Petersen, 192). Petersen says that it's important to note that this isn't just deliverance or emancipation like some have suggested but it is redemption that required a paid ransom which was Jesus' blood (Petersen, 193). Paul's third metaphor is "atoning sacrifice" or "propitiation" which Petersen links to the LXX verb for the priestly task of setting out bread before the Lord and the LXX noun for the golden cover over the ark in the inner sanctuary of the temple (Petersen, 194). In this sacrificial system, the Jews were diverting the wrath of God for their sin from them onto an animal. With this understanding we see that Paul is arguing that the wrath of God is diverted from believers to Jesus as a substitute for bearing the penalty for their sins (Petersen, 197).

Paul then goes on in verses 25 and 26 to explain the reason for Jesus' sacrifice—to demonstrate His justice and because in his forbearance "he had passed over former sins." This is a difficult section of verses to understand but Osbourne interprets it to say that God has proven His justice in two ways. First, by declaring that Jesus has borne our sins and procured atonement for us and second, that He has allowed the sins under the old covenant to go unpunished in order to prepare for Jesus (Osbourne, 99). This shows that God holds absolute righteousness and justice as well as that Jesus' work on the cross is the only way to satisfy God's justice (Osbourne, 99). In verse 26, we see that God judges humanity with perfect justice while still graciously providing deliverance from his own judgements (Petersen, 199).

Sherwood sums up verses 21 to 25 saying that God's covenantal faithfulness is manifested in Jesus' work on the cross (vs 21-22) and that the gospel reveals God's faithfulness because, through Jesus, God is making sinners righteous (vs 24-25) (Sherwood, 252). God is

now relating directly and intimately with His people, no longer through the Torah, and God is giving Jew and Gentiles both the ability to participate in His immortal life which fulfills His scriptural promises to make Israel a blessing to all the nations (Sherwood, 253). Paul has proven that in Jesus' work on the cross a turning point has come and God's faithfulness has been fulfilled.

Often, Christ's work on the cross is called "the finished work of Christ" but the reality is that when this work isn't received with human response it is not finished, as in the goal is not completed (Gorman, 125). This is because Christ's work on the cross was intended to initiate human response. Therefore, we should go about wording this process differently. Instead of saying that our justification comes by faith, we should say that our justification comes by grace through faith—Christ's death is the means of justification and our faith is the mode (Gorman, 125). Verse 22 says that "the one shares in the faith of Jesus" is the one who is justified, which begs the question—what does it mean to "share" in Jesus' faith? Gorman says that fully identifying with Jesus' death means crucifying our old ways of living and beginning a new life just as Jesus did (Gorman, 125). It also means responding to God the same way as Jesus did, with total self-abandonment and trust. It means living in obedience to God and also in love for others. Therefore, those who are justified are the ones who have started the process of leaving behind ungodliness and replacing it with faith as well as leaving behind unrighteousness and replacing it with love all by the power of the Spirit (Gorman, 125). All this because our faithful God has demonstrated His faithfulness in the death of Jesus.

As we go on to verses 27-31, we see Paul express the necessity of faith in justification as he goes back to his familiar question-answer diatribe style. Sherwood argues that Paul's main point in 3:27-31 is that access to righteousness is no longer exclusive to Jews or Torah

observance since it is now through faith (Sherwood, 254). Paul is also arguing that this gospel does not contradict scripture but upholds it (Sherwood, 254). Since the prestige of knowing God is no longer owned by the Jews their ability to boast is excluded although Paul doesn't divorce the gospel from its Jewish roots (Sherwood, 256).

Garland outlines four questions that Paul answers in regard to the consequence of God's justification. He first addresses the Jewish belief that their salvation and righteousness will come from adhering to the law when Paul is teaching that it will come on the basis of faith by asking, "Where is the boasting?" Which is succinctly answered, "It is excluded." This means boasting in their works of the law will not produce anything for them but if works of the law were what righteousness was based on then boasting would be natural. This is an echo of 3:20 which said that the purpose of the law was to make people aware of their sin not to fix their problem of sin (Osbourne, 101). Schriener notes that many scholars see verse 28 as Paul criticizing the Jews for excluding the Gentiles from becoming part of the people of God and holding onto a special privileged status just for the Jews (Schriener, 212). Schriener also points out that the Jew's inability to obey the law might serve as another reason for nullifying boasting as only the person who could obediently uphold the whole law would be able to boast (Schriener, 212). Therefore, this passage has two ends to it—works of the law won't save because a new era of salvation has come through faith in Jesus, and because no human is able to perfectly keep the law (Schriener, 212).

Second, Paul essentially asks, "What is the basis for excluding boasting?" where Paul points to the fact that the law points to a righteousness that comes by faith. Third, "Is God the God of the Jews only?" Since justification isn't based on adherence to the law, Gentiles could meet the requirement of faith and receive justification. This is because God is the God of all and

only has one way to salvation which is available to everyone through faith in Jesus (Garland 151). Fourth, Paul asks if justification by faith calls into question the validity of the law to which he answers “No!” Garland notes that the story of Abraham and the testimony of David which follow in chapter four prove Paul’s point (Garland, 152). This new reality puts Jews and Gentiles on an even playing field as both, then, are in need of grace which comes through faith. Which means God is the God equally of both Jews and Gentiles despite Jews having been God’s chosen people (Osbourne, 102). Paul clarifies in verse 31 that this doesn’t nullify the law but “upholds it.” Osbourne finds that this likely means that in Christ the law has been fulfilled so when we turn to Christ, we have kept the law in its entirety, just as Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-20 (Osbourne, 104).

Petersen says that the claim that “God is one” in verse 30 to remind the Jews that the “oneness of God means he is the God every race and nation and is concerned for the welfare of all” (Petersen, 207). Deuteronomy 6:4 which says, “Here, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” is the core of the Jewish faith, the best-known verse in all of Judaism. In the Old Testament, the oneness of God is often connected to the God’s special relationship and covenant with Israel but here Paul uses God’s oneness to show that God is both the God of Jew and Gentile (Schreiner, 213). Schriener says Paul is able to do this by pairing Deuteronomy 6:4 with Zechariah 14:9 which says that “on the day of the Lord the lord and king will reign over all the earth” (Schriener, 214). Essentially, God is and will be the God of all people. The theme of justification by faith and the inclusion of the Gentiles are so closely related.

Paul’s final question about nullifying the law is pointing to the wrong conclusion on what he has just been said. Some in Paul’s day have concluded that if righteousness is not achieved through the law then the law is abolished (Schriener, 216). But, the fact that God will justify the

Jew and Gentiles both along the basis of faith is consistent with the teaching of the law, not against it (Petersen, 208). This is because the covenant made with Abraham is fulfilled in Christ and the law is upheld in its prophetic role as preparation for the gospel (Petersen, 208). As Sherwood puts it “even the Shema celebrates God’s authority over and passion for all people” (Sherwood, 257). And because God remains the same God of the Shema, he carries through with His original purpose for Israel to be a blessing to all nations (Sherwood, 257). All of this is not explained by Paul to demote the Jews but to promote the non-Jews (Sherwood, 259). This new era of faith has set aside Torah observance but trusting God in Jesus has not overturned or eliminated the Torah (Sherwood, 259). It doesn’t mean that believers can throw out the moral norms of the law, either, but the moral norms of the law are part of the law of Christ (Schriener, 216). In chapter 4, Paul goes on to further explain how the exclusion of Jewish boasting upholds the theology of the Torah and the gospel (Sherwood, 259).