



### **Romans 3:21-26 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—<sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

### **Romans 3:21-26 (HCSB)**

<sup>21</sup> But now, apart from the law, God's righteousness has been revealed—attested by the Law and the Prophets <sup>22</sup> —that is, God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, to all who believe, since there is no distinction. <sup>23</sup> For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. <sup>24</sup> They are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented Him as a propitiation through faith in His blood, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His restraint God passed over the sins previously committed. <sup>26</sup> [God presented Him] to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be righteous and declare righteous the one who has faith in Jesus.

# English Standard Version Bible - *Study Bible*<sup>1</sup>

## Romans 3:21-26

**3:21-4:25** *The Saving Righteousness of God.* Since no one can be righteous before God by keeping the law, Paul now explains that right standing with God comes through faith in the atoning work of Jesus on the cross.

**3:21-26** *God's Righteousness in the Death of Jesus.* God's saving righteousness has been manifested now in the death of Jesus Christ, so that God's justice and love are reconciled in the cross.

**3:21** The righteousness of God has been manifested **now**, i.e., in the period of salvation history inaugurated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the **righteousness of God**, see note on [1:17](#). Here in [ch. 3](#) it refers to the morally right character of God that is clearly shown in his saving action by which human beings may stand in the right before God as the divine judge. This righteousness has been revealed **apart from the law**, which means that it is not based on human obedience to the works of the law. Paul may also intend to say it is not based on the Sinai covenant. Even though God's saving righteousness is apart from the law, **the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it**. In other words, the OT Scriptures prophesied this very way of salvation (see [1:2](#)).

**3:22** This right standing with God is available to **all who believe**, whether Jew or Gentile. On the **righteousness of God**, see note on [1:17](#).

**3:23** No one can stake a claim to this righteousness based on his or her own obedience, for all people have sinned and fall short of what God demands (see [1:21](#)).

**3:24** Therefore, all are **justified** (declared not guilty but righteous by the divine Judge) only by God's **grace** (unmerited favor). The word **redemption** reaches back to the OT exodus and the blood of the Passover lamb (see [Exodus 12-15](#)), by which the Lord liberated Israel from Egypt; the exodus likewise points forward to the greater redemption Jesus won for his people through his blood by forgiving them their sins through his death on the cross (cf. [Eph. 1:7](#); [Col. 1:14](#)). On justification, see note on [Gal. 2:16](#).

**3:25** Jesus' **blood** "propitiated" or satisfied God's wrath ([1:18](#)), so that his holiness was not compromised in forgiving sinners. Some scholars have argued that the word **propitiation** should be translated *expiation* (the wiping away of sin), but the word cannot be restricted to the wiping away of sins as it also refers to the satisfaction or appeasement of God's wrath, turning it to favor (cf. note on [John 18:11](#)). God's righteous anger needed to be appeased before sin could be forgiven, and God in his love sent his Son (who offered himself willingly) to satisfy God's holy anger against sin. In this way God demonstrated his **righteousness**, which here refers particularly to his holiness and justice. God's justice was called into question because in his patience he had overlooked **former** sins. In other words, how could God as the utterly Holy One tolerate human sin without inflicting full punishment on human beings immediately? Paul's answer is that God looked forward to the cross of Christ where the full payment for the guilt of sin would be made, where Christ would die in the place of sinners. In the OT, propitiation (or the complete satisfaction of the wrath of God) is symbolically foreshadowed in several incidents: e.g., [Ex. 32:11-14](#); [Num. 25:8, 11](#); [Josh. 7:25-26](#).

---

1. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 3".

[3:26](#) Paul repeats again, because of its supreme importance, that God has demonstrated his **righteousness**, i.e., his holiness and justice, **at the present time** in salvation history. In the cross of Christ, God has shown himself to be **just** (utterly holy, so that the penalty demanded by the law is not removed but paid for by Christ) but also **the justifier** (the one who provides the means of justification and who declares people to be in right standing with himself) and the Savior of all those who trust in Jesus. Here is the heart of the Christian faith, for at the cross God's justice and love meet.

## Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible<sup>2</sup>

### *Romans 3:21-26*

[3:21-26](#) The phrase **but now** marks a decisive shift in Paul's argument. According to one interpreter, [verses 21-26](#) are the "centre and heart of the whole of [Romans 1.16b-15:13](#)" (Cranfield, *Romans*, I:199). This paragraph (one long sentence in the Greek original) is a wonderful compression of theology. It contains three ways of describing Jesus' work on the cross and the benefits that come from the gospel: justification, redemption, and propitiation. Each term pictures the gospel by appealing to a different realm of ancient life. "Justification" is a term from the courts. Sinners stand condemned in God's court, and yet He freely declares "not guilty" anyone who places his faith in Christ. "Redemption" is a term borrowed from the slave market. All people are slaves to sin by their fallen nature, but Christians are purchased by God and freed to new life in Christ. "Propitiation" is a term borrowed from temple rites, where the sacrificial animal figuratively comes under God's wrath as it is killed. Jesus received God's wrath on the cross. By our faith in Christ, God's wrath is counted satisfied and we are no longer under wrath. **God's righteousness** was thus manifested and given in the event of the cross. Sinners gain pardon not through their adherence to the law, but through faith in the One who fulfilled all righteousness on our behalf. The **Law and the Prophets** refers to the OT, and the entire OT is correctly understood as a witness to Jesus and His work.

[3:22](#) **Jesus** is the object of faith and the means of obtaining the gift of **God's righteousness**. The gift is for both Jews and Gentiles who **believe**.

[3:23](#) All have missed the mark that God intended for the human race and have lost the **glory** of the original creation ([Ps 8:5](#)). Believing the good news starts the process of the restoration of glory ([Rm 8:30](#); [2Co 3:18](#)).

[3:24](#) **Justified** means that Christians are declared to be righteous ([5:1,9](#); [8:30](#); [1Co 1:30](#); [6:11](#)). The Judge deems believers innocent because of Jesus' work on the cross. **Freely** means that God grants justification not due to any merit in Christians but solely by **His grace**, the undeserved love and mercy of God. **Redemption** is a commercial term that refers to purchasing freedom for slaves. The purchase price for our freedom was the blood of **Christ Jesus** (see [Mk 10:45](#); [1Pe 1:18-19](#)).

---

2. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., HCSB Study Bible, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Romans 3".

**3:25 Propitiation** is a term borrowed from the sacrificial system and the temple. The Greek word *hilasterion* was used for the cover of the ark of the covenant. Luther translated it as the "mercy seat" ([Heb 9:5](#)). 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" ([2Co 5:21](#)). This involves a double imputation. Our sin was imputed to Jesus on the cross, and His **righteousness** was imputed to us. Justification is not a legal fiction; Christians are made righteous by the imputation of God's own righteousness in His Son.

#### hilasterion

Greek Pronunciation	[hɪh lahss TAY ree ahn]
HCSB Translation	propitiation
Uses in Romans	1
Uses in the NT	2
Focus passage	<a href="#">Romans 3:25</a>

The Greek noun *hilasterion* in [Rm 3:25](#) is rich with theological meaning. The only other place this term occurs in the NT is [Heb 9:5](#), which says that the cherubim above the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place were "overshadowing the mercy seat." In the OT, the word is used for the lid of the ark of the covenant (traditionally called "the mercy seat"; see [Ex 25:17-22](#); [Lv 16:2,13-15](#)). Another related word, *hilasmos*, occurs twice in the NT ([1Jn 2:2](#); [4:10](#)). This word family refers to the turning away of God's wrath against sin by means of a sacrifice. The main ideas of this word group are *mercy* and *satisfactory sacrifice for sin*. The innermost part of the tabernacle was the place where *mercy* was found, but only through the proper sacrifice. Similarly, Jesus' death is the only place one can find *mercy*. God's wrath against sin was turned away by Christ's sacrificial death.

**3:26** The **present time** of the cross and preaching of the good news vindicated God, showing that He is just and Justifier of the one **who has faith in Jesus**. It has become fashionable to translate *pisteos Iesou* in [verses 22,26](#) as "Jesus' faithfulness" instead of "faith in Jesus." While the Greek permits this translation, it seems to diminish somewhat Paul's emphasis on faith in Jesus' work on the cross. The HCSB's rendering is to be preferred.

## NLT Life Application Study Bible<sup>3</sup>

### *Romans 3:21-26*

**3:21-29** After all this bad news about our sinfulness and God's condemnation, Paul gives the wonderful news. There is a way to be declared not guilty—by trusting Jesus Christ to take away our sins. Trusting means putting our confidence in Christ to forgive our sins, to make us right with God, and to empower us to live the way he taught us. God's solution is available to all of us regardless of our background or past behavior.

**3:23** Some sins seem bigger than others because their obvious consequences are much more serious. Murder, for example, seems to us to be worse than hatred, and adultery seems worse than pride. But this does not mean that because we only commit "little" sins we deserve eternal life. All sins make us sinners, and all sins cut us off from our holy God. All sins, therefore, lead to death (because they disqualify us from living with God), regardless of how great or small they seem. Don't minimize "little" sins or overrate "big" sins. They all separate us from God, but they all can be forgiven.

**3:24** Paul explains that God declares that we are righteous. When a judge in a court of law declares the defendant not guilty, all the charges are removed from his record. Legally, it is as if the person had never been accused. When God forgives our sins, our record is wiped clean. From his perspective, it is as though we had never sinned. He could do this because Jesus took the penalty that we deserved. Christ purchased our freedom from sin, and the price was his life.

**3:25** Christ died in our place, for our sins. God is justifiably angry at sinners. They have rebelled against him and cut themselves off from his life-giving power. But God declares Christ's death to be the appropriate, designated sacrifice for our sin. Christ then stands in our place, having paid the penalty of death for our sin, and he completely satisfies God's demands. His sacrifice brings pardon, deliverance, and freedom.

**3:25, 26** What happened to people who lived before Christ came and died for sin? If God condemned sinners, was he being unfair? If he saved the righteous, was Christ's sacrifice unnecessary? Paul shows that God forgave all human sin at the cross of Jesus. Old Testament believers looked forward in faith to Christ's coming and were saved, even though they did not know Jesus' name or the details of his earthly life. Unlike the Old Testament believers, you know about the God who loved the world so much that he gave his own Son ([John 3:16](#)). Have you put your trust in him?

---

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1899-1900.

## Life Application Concise New Testament Commentary<sup>4</sup>

### Romans 3:21-26

#### *Christ Took Our Punishment / [3:21-31](#)*

Like the swelling waves of the tide, Paul's argument rolls over the predicament of the human race. After each wave of the gospel, the waters recede to reveal a new aspect or depth of the problem of sin. This wavelike approach to Paul's letter provides a number of views of the same issues, with slightly different emphases. Having stated such a strong case for our universal indictment under the law, Paul now turns to God's gracious alternative plan.

[3:21](#) The words **but now** present an important shift in subject. Whereas the law was God's righteous standard, the righteousness required to live up to it was not within man's capacity. God, the measure of righteousness, had to provide a means of righteousness—of **being right in his sight**. The gospel is not a recent creation by God to respond to human failure. It was **promised in the Scriptures long ago**. Whereas the law provided a measurement of the distance between God and his creatures, this righteousness from God has been provided in **a different way**. There is a way to be righteous before God. It is not by obeying the law, by being "Jewish" (see [3:20](#)), yet it has always been in the Law and the Prophets, for they pointed to it.

[3:22](#) The way to being **made right in God's sight** is the way of faith in **Jesus Christ to take away our sins**. Trusting in Jesus Christ means putting our confidence in him to forgive our sins, to make us right with God, and to empower us to live the way he taught us. God's solution is available to all of us regardless of our background or past behavior. And this way is open to all who believe—both Jews and Gentiles.

Trusting in Jesus Christ is the only way **we all can be saved**. We all begin in the same place spiritually, and there is only one way. Faith in Jesus Christ doesn't mean we understand everything that Christ has done for us, but it does mean that we believe he has done everything for us!

[3:23](#) Paul has made it clear thus far in his letter that there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to final judgment—**all have sinned**. If the law measures the distance between God and his creatures, then human righteousness is our attempt to bridge that distance by our own efforts. Paul is correct—we **all fall short**. But what is this **glorious standard** that we do not reach on our own? The word glory (*doxes*), from which we derive the word doxology, refers to the wonderful and awe-inspiring but indescribable presence of God himself. Sin keeps us from the presence of God.

Sinning confirms our status as sinners, and sin cuts us off from our holy God. Furthermore, sin leads to death (because it disqualifies us from living with God), regardless of how great or small each sin may seem. Sins are deadly, but sinners can be forgiven. There are no distinctions: we have all sinned; we all need a savior; Jesus Christ is the Savior; through faith we can receive his salvation.

---

4. Barton B. Bruce et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 592-593.

**3:24** Just as there is no distinction in our fallenness, Paul writes, so there is no distinction in the source of our justification. God justifies us; he **declares us not guilty** for our sins. When a judge in a court of law declares the defendant “not guilty,” all the charges are removed from the person’s record. Legally, it is as if the person had never been accused. When God forgives our sins, our record is wiped clean. From his perspective, it is as though we had never sinned. We do not have to anxiously work while hoping that in the end we will have been good enough to meet God’s approval. Instead, those who believe in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice on the cross are freed—**Christ Jesus has taken away our sins**. Our righteousness before God depends entirely on him and can only be accepted as a gift from him. God **in his gracious kindness** assures us of our acceptance and then calls us to serve him as best we can out of sheer love for him.

**3:25-26** In describing how God provided us with undeserved righteousness, Paul alludes to the sacrificial system in the Old Testament (see [Leviticus 17:11](#)). Only now, the life offered as sacrifice is not a spotless animal, but Christ. God **sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins**. That punishment involved his death—he **shed his blood** for sinners. Because of what Jesus did on the cross, God can accept those who put their trust in Jesus.

Why did the punishment require shed blood? God had said from the beginning, “For the life of any creature is in its blood . . . It is the blood, representing life, that brings you atonement” ([Leviticus 17:11](#)). But the blood Paul mentions here is a particular blood—it is Christ’s blood. Only the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross was the effective atonement for our sins. Christ stands in our place, having paid the penalty of death for our sin, and he could **satisfy God’s anger against us**.

If God **did not** eternally **punish those who sinned** before Christ lived, then why did Christ die? Paul shows that, at the cross, God forgave the sin of all who believe—Old Testament believers looked forward in faith to Christ’s coming and were saved, even though they did not know Jesus’ name or the details of his earthly life. Unlike the Old Testament believers, we know about the God who loved the world so much that he gave his own Son ([John 3:16](#)). The question to answer is, Have you put your trust in him?

God is **entirely fair and just**, both in his inherent character, and in his dealings with sinners. Christ’s death relates to both the past and the present. God did not completely reject his people, the Jews, even though they constantly rejected him. He was not being unfairly generous; rather, he was looking forward to the time when Jesus’ death would be effective for all those who believed in God before Jesus came, as well as those who come after. The only answer to humanity’s plight—that is, death because of sin—was given by God in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This action fulfilled God’s own law and his promises to Israel. The way to receive this answer for ourselves is through faith in Jesus Christ.

# Study and Discussion Questions



**Righteousness Through Faith - [Romans 3:21-31](#)** (Part 1: vs. 21-26)

Topics: [Atonement](#), [Faith](#), [Jesus Christ](#), [Justice](#), [Law](#), [Righteousness](#)

## Open It

1. What hero do you remember who always seemed to arrive at just the right moment to save the day?
2. If you had a message of good news for someone, how would you deliver it?

## Explore It

3. What new righteousness has been made known? ([3:21](#))
4. What previous indication was there about the existence of the new righteousness? ([3:21](#))
5. What is the source of our righteousness? ([3:22](#))
6. What heritage do you share with every person who has ever lived? ([3:23](#))
7. What is the cost or price of justification with God? ([3:24](#))
8. What did God do to provide a means of justification and forgiveness for every person? ([3:25](#))
9. How does providing Christ Jesus as a sacrifice demonstrate the justice of God? ([3:25-26](#))

## Get It

10. What makes it difficult for many of us to believe that we can gain God's forgiveness by faith in Christ alone?
11. What makes Christianity good news for you personally?
12. Why would God offer His righteousness free to every person?
13. What does it mean to believe and put your faith in Jesus Christ?

## Apply It

14. When could you meet with another person to share the good news of God's redemptive plan?