SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



DEEP DIVE

Romans

Chapter Three, Verses 1–31

Every Mouth Closed, Then — But Now — God true, all guilty, and a righteousness given as a gift

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

Paul answers the objector, calls Psalms and Isaiah to the witness stand until every mouth is closed, and then turns on two words — **"But now"** — to the courtroom, the slave market and the mercy seat of the cross. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind Paul's key words.

THE PASSAGE

Romans 3:1–31

Faithful · guilty · justified · one God

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Four objections, one verdict, two words that change everything

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"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" — Romans 3:23–24

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

Romans 3:1–31

Every Mouth Closed, Then — But Now — God is faithful, the world is silenced, and the Judge becomes the Justifier

† How to Read This Study

This study walks Romans 3 in 4 movements, in Paul's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the argument so you can see where Paul is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word
R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle
MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED
God — His character & actions
Command / instruction
Key repeated word
Sin / warning
Promise / blessing
Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · ROMANS 3:26

"for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be △just and the justifier of the one who has 🔁faith in Jesus."

† Before the Passage

Romans 3 closes the longest indictment in the Bible and opens its brightest verdict. Since 1:18 Paul has been building one case: the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness. Chapter 1 indicted the pagan who exchanged the glory of God for idols; chapter 2 turned to the moral man who judges others, and then to the Jew who rests in the Law and boasts in circumcision. Chapter 2 ended with a thunderclap: "he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart" (2:29). Chapter 3 begins with the question every Jewish listener would ask next: then what good was it to be a Jew at all?

Paul answers in the style of a debate — the *diatribe*, where a teacher voices his opponent's objection and then answers it. Four times in verses 1–8 an objector speaks, and three times in the chapter Paul answers with his strongest denial, *mē genoito*, "May it never be!" (vv. 4, 6, 31). He is not shadow-boxing. Verse 8 tells us that

people were already saying Paul taught "Let us do evil that good may come." The gospel of free grace has always drawn that slander, and Paul meets it head-on.

Then he calls witnesses. Verses 10–18 are a *catena* — a chain of Old Testament texts linked end to end — drawn from Psalms 14, 53, 5, 140, 10 and 36 and from Isaiah 59. These are Israel's own Scriptures, and verse 19 makes the point: whatever the Law says, it says to those under the Law. The Jew who thought the Psalms described the wicked Gentiles hears them read over himself, and the verdict is the same for both: "all under sin" (v. 9).

Then come two words: "But now" (v. 21). Everything Paul has said since 1:18 is the bad news; everything he will say through chapter 5 unfolds what follows those words. Verses 21–26 are the center of the letter — Luther called them the chief point of the whole Bible — and they draw salvation in three pictures at once: a **courtroom** where the guilty are declared righteous, a **slave market** where a ransom is paid, and the **mercy seat** of the tabernacle, where blood met the wrath of God on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). The chapter ends with the first fruit of that verdict: no boasting, one God for Jew and Gentile, and a Law not overthrown but established.

FIGURE · "BUT NOW" — THE HINGE OF ROMANS (3:21)



Everything from 1:18 to 3:20 closes the mouth of the world; from 3:21 on, God opens His own — and the same word "righteousness" that condemned now comes as a gift.

I
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 3:1–8

Let God Be Found True

Four objections answered — Israel's advantage, God's faithfulness, God's justice, and the slander against grace

[1] *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?* [2] *Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with* △ *the oracles of God*. [3] *What then? If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify* △ *the faithfulness of God, will it?* [4] ⟳ *May it never be! Rather,* 🖹 *let God be found true, though* ⚠ *every man be found a liar, as it is written, "THAT YOU MAY BE JUSTIFIED IN YOUR WORDS, AND PREVAIL WHEN YOU ARE JUDGED."* [5] *But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the* ⟳ *righteousness of God, what shall we say? The God*

> *who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (I am speaking in human terms.)* [6] *May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?* [7] *But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?* [8] *And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do evil that good may come"? Their condemnation is just.*
>
> ROMANS 3:1–8

> *"Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge."*
>
> PSALM 51:4

τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ

TA LOGIA TOU THEOU · "THE ORACLES OF GOD" · G3051

Logion is a divine utterance — not merely "words" but sayings that come from God's own mouth. It appears only four times in the New Testament: the "living oracles" Moses received at Sinai (Acts 7:38), here, "the elementary principles of the oracles of God" (Hebrews 5:12), and the one who speaks "as one who is speaking the utterances of God" (1 Peter 4:11). The verb is *episteuthēsan*, "they were entrusted" — the same root as *pistis*, faith. Israel was made the trustee of God's Word; verse 3 then asks what happens when the trustees do not trust (*ēpistēsan*, "did not believe"). Paul is playing on one Greek root through three verses: entrusted, unbelieving, faithful.

καταργήσει … μὴ γένοιτο

KATARGĒSEI … MĒ GENOITO · "NULLIFY … MAY IT NEVER BE" · G2673 / G1096

Katargeō means to make idle, render ineffective, abolish. Will Israel's unbelief "nullify" the faithfulness of God (v. 3)? Paul answers with *mē genoito* — a negative wish in the optative mood, literally "may it not come to be." It is Paul's strongest denial, and he uses it ten times in Romans, three of them in this chapter (vv. 4, 6, 31). The KJV's "God forbid" catches the force though not the words. Notice the bookend: the chapter opens asking whether unbelief will *katargeō* God's faithfulness and closes asking whether faith will *katargeō* the Law (v. 31) — and both get the same answer.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik starts with the privilege: the Jew's great advantage was the Word itself, and he borrows Trapp's phrase that "they were God's library-keepers." Unbelief in some does not cancel God's faithfulness, and "let God be true but every man a liar" means God's Word stands even against the united opinion of the race. On the objection that our sin serves God's glory, he points to Judas: God used his treachery, yet the wickedness was still Judas's own. Paul's "I speak as a man" flags the objection as fallen human logic. And the charge that grace says "do evil that good may come" is slander — twisting grace into a license to sin is, for Guzik, a deep perversion of God's gift, and of such people Paul says "their condemnation is just."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul preached these verses as "God's Judgment Defended." Paul's word "first" means first in importance, not first in a list: the chief advantage is the oracles of God. "There is no greater advantage for any person in the world than to be within earshot of the Word of God," he says — recalling that he heard Scripture read even in a liberal church that denied it. Men are promise-breakers; God cannot lie. David in Psalm 51 shows true repentance: he concedes that God is justified when He judges. To the objector who says sin magnifies God and so should go unpunished, Sproul answers that wrath is not a flaw in God's character but an expression of it: "It's because God is righteous that He is wrathful." A God who could not judge could not judge the world (v. 6).

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon preached verses 3–4 as "God Justified, Though Man Believes Not" (No. 2255, 1890). He calls the unbelief of privileged Israel a sorrowful fact, and the inference drawn from it — that God's faithfulness must therefore fail — a horrible one. Learned men may call the gospel a failure; Spurgeon reminds them that the ideas of each generation's philosophers are discarded by the next, and answers, "The gospel is no failure, as many of us know." He pictures the whole human race marching past, each man declaring God's Word false, and still the believer stands with Paul: truth is not settled by majority vote. Then he turns to the hearer — stop arguing with God, and "kiss the Son" while there is time.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry grants the Jews real privileges, chief of them that "unto them were committed the oracles of God" — "The Jews were the Christians' library-keepers, were entrusted with that sacred treasure." Yet privilege is not salvation: "The Jews had the means of salvation, but they had not the monopoly of salvation." Their unbelief cannot make God false; God will be true though every man fail. And when God brings glory out of sin, the sin is no better for it: "The sin has never the less of malignity and demerit in it though God bring glory to himself out of it." As for those who say "let us do evil, that good may come," Henry agrees with Paul — their damnation is just.

II
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 3:9–20

Every Mouth Closed

Jew and Greek all under sin — the Psalms and Isaiah called as witnesses, and the Law that only convicts

9 *What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are* ⚠ *all under sin*; 10 *as it is written, "*⚠ *THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE*; 11 *THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,* ⚠ *THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD*; 12 *ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." 13 "*⚠ *THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS";* 14 *"WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS";* 15 *"THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD,* 16 *DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS,* 17 *AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN."* 18 *"*⚠ *THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES*." 19 *Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks*

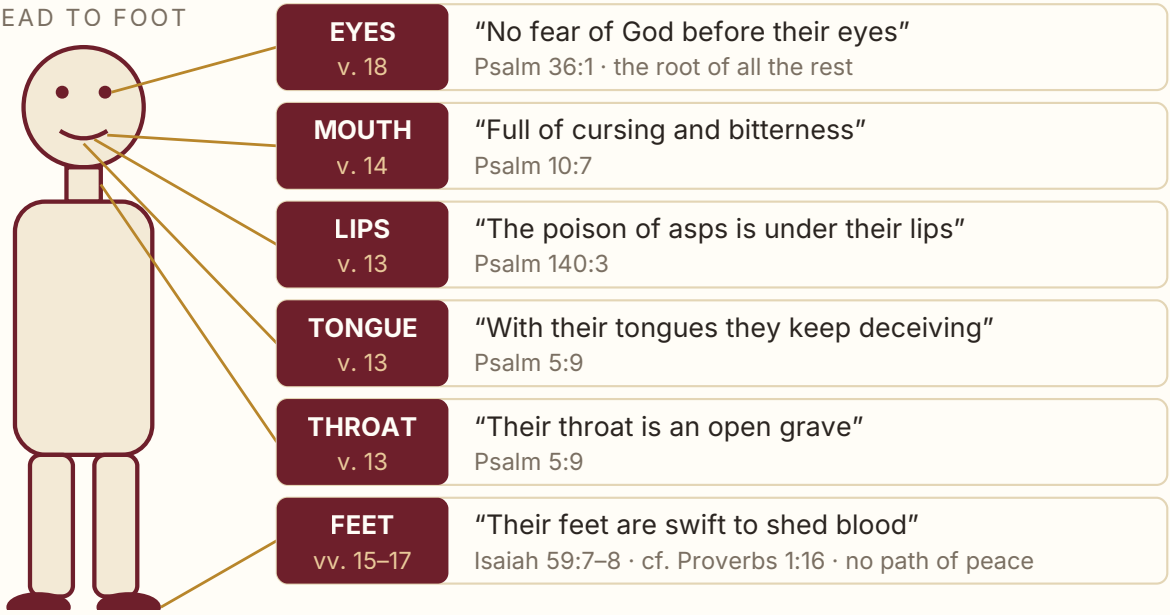
> *to those who are under the Law, so that ⚠ every mouth may be closed and all the world may become ⚠ accountable to God;* [20] *because by the works of the Law ⚠ no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.*
>
> ROMANS 3:9–20

> *"The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God. They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one."*
>
> PSALM 14:2–3

FIGURE · THE X-RAY FROM HEAD TO FOOT (3:10–18)

VV. 10–12 · WHO WE ARE — Psalm 14:1–3 · 53:1–3 · cf. Ecclesiastes 7:20

None righteous · none understands · none seeks God · all turned aside · none does good



Paul's chain of texts first names what we are (vv. 10–12), then walks down the body — eyes, mouth, lips, tongue, throat, feet — and every witness he calls is from Israel's own Psalms and prophets.

ἠχρεώθησαν

ĒCHREŌTHĒSAN · "THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS" · G889

Achreioō appears only here in the New Testament — to make useless, unserviceable, spoiled. Paul is quoting the Septuagint of Psalm 14:3 and 53:3, where the Hebrew says "become corrupt" — something gone bad. Guzik catches it: "The word unprofitable has the idea of rotten fruit." Notice the verbs of verse 12 are aorist: "all have turned aside" (*exeklinan*), "together they have become useless." The verdict is not that people sometimes slip, but that the whole race has left the road and gone bad on the vine.

ἵνα πᾶν στόμα φραγῇ

HINA PAN STOMA PHRAGĒ · "SO THAT EVERY MOUTH MAY BE CLOSED" · G5420

Phrassō is to fence in, block up, stop — the same verb used when faith "shut the mouths of lions" (Hebrews 11:33). The courtroom image is exact: the accused has nothing left to say. Then *hypodikos* (G5267), "accountable," found only here in the New Testament — a legal word for one who is under sentence, who has lost his case and owes satisfaction. KJV: "guilty before God." Verse 20 seals it with an echo of Psalm 143:2: by works of the Law "no flesh" (*ou … pasa sarx*) will be justified. The Law is not the cure; it is the diagnosis — "through the Law comes the knowledge (*epignōsis*) of sin."

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

"Under sin," Guzik notes with Poole, means under its power and chiefly under its guilt — the language of slavery. He reads the catena, after Wiersbe, as "An X-ray study of the lost sinner, from head to foot": throat, tongue, lips, mouth, feet and eyes all filled with sin and rebellion. No one seeks God on his own initiative. The root of it all is the missing fear of God, and he cites Calvin that the fear of God is the bridle on wickedness. Verses 19–20 draw three lessons: the Law can only condemn; future obedience cannot undo past disobedience; and law-keeping is not God's way of salvation. He quotes J.B. Phillips' paraphrase — "it is the straight-edge of the Law that shows us how crooked we are."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul preached this as "The Indictment of the Jews and Gentiles." "We are under the awesome weight of sin, under the burden of our guilt before God." He presses the universal negatives: none righteous, none who understands, none who seeks. People who seem to seek God, he argues, are seeking the benefits only God can give — "No one seeks after Christ until they have first been found by Christ." He grants a civic righteousness, but God judges the heart, and no one has loved Him with all his heart. Of verse 18 he says, "This is the scariest thing of all: the pagan is not afraid of God." Verse 19 is the courtroom of the last day where the accused stand silent — and the "But" of verse 21 is the turn to good news.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In his exposition of the chapter Spurgeon refuses to flatter human nature: these verses describe the natural state of every unregenerate man, Jew or Gentile. Man was made noble in God's image, but sin has erased that dignity, and Paul has no patience for preachers who talk up the dignity of fallen man. On verses 19–20, preached as "The Knowledge of Sin Only by the Law," he gives his famous picture: "The law of the Lord is like a looking glass." A mirror shows you the spots on your face, but "you cannot get rid of the spots by looking in the glass." The law shows a man how much he needs cleansing, but it cannot cleanse him; "The law proves that we are condemned, but it does not bring us our pardon."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry calls the catena a mirror of fallen nature and sorts it into two kinds of sin. First the habitual — "An habitual defect of every thing that is good": none righteous, none understanding, none seeking. Then the actual, sins of the tongue and of the life: "Their throat is an open sepulchre," ready to swallow up the poor and innocent; deceit, the poison of asps, cursing; "Their feet are swift to shed blood," very industrious to compass any cruel design. Then he lays bare the source: "The root of all this we have: There is no fear of God before their eyes." The Law speaks to those under it, "that every mouth may be stopped—that all boasting may be silenced," and the whole world must plead guilty.

III
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 3:21–26

But Now: The Righteousness of God

A righteousness given, not earned — justified as a gift, redeemed at a price, covered at the mercy seat

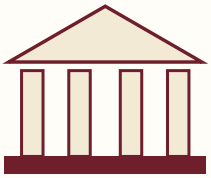
21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

ROMANS 3:21–26

"Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat."

LEVITICUS 16:15

FIGURE · THREE PICTURES OF ONE SALVATION (3:24–25)

JUSTIFIED v. 24	REDEMPTION v. 24	PROPITIATION v. 25
		
	THE CHAIN BROKEN	
The courtroom	***The slave market***	***The mercy seat***
dikaioō · G1344	apolytrōsis · G629	hilastērion · G2435
The Judge declares the guilty righteous	A ransom paid, the captive set free	Wrath satisfied by blood sprinkled on the lid
ANSWERS GUILT	**ANSWERS BONDAGE**	**ANSWERS WRATH**
"accountable to God" · 3:19	"all under sin" · 3:9	"the wrath of God" · 1:18

Paul puts the courtroom, the slave market and the tabernacle side by side: each picture answers a different part of the sinner's plight — guilt, bondage and wrath.

δικαιούμενοι δωρεάν

DIKAIOUMENOI DŌREAN · "JUSTIFIED AS A GIFT" · G1344 / G1432 / G629

Dikaioō is a courtroom verb — to declare righteous, to acquit — not to make someone righteous by slow improvement. *Dōrean* is the accusative of *dōrea*, "gift," used as an adverb: freely, without a cause. The same word says the world "hated Me without a cause" (John 15:25) — there was nothing in Jesus to earn hatred, and there is nothing in us to earn acquittal. And it comes "through the redemption" — *apolytrōsis*, release secured by a ransom paid, the language of buying a slave out of bondage. Free to us; costly to Him.

ἱλαστήριον

HILASTĒRION · "PROPITIATION" · G2435

Used only twice in the New Testament — here and Hebrews 9:5, where it is plainly "the mercy seat," the gold lid of the ark between the cherubim. The Septuagint uses it the same way for the *kapporet* of Exodus 25 and Leviticus 16, where the high priest sprinkled blood once a year. The word family means to turn away wrath by an offering. So the translators have argued: propitiation (wrath satisfied), expiation (sin removed), or mercy seat (the place where both happen). Sproul insists on keeping both propitiation and expiation; Henry, Guzik and Spurgeon all hear the mercy seat. They are not rivals — the lid was where the blood both covered the sin and met the wrath. God "displayed [Him] publicly" (*proetheto*): the ark was hidden behind the veil; the cross was set up in the open.

πάρεσιν … ἀνοχῇ

PARESIN … ANOCHĒ · "PASSED OVER … FORBEARANCE" · G3929 / G463

Paresis appears only here: a passing over, a letting go unpunished for the time — not *aphesis*, the full forgiveness of Ephesians 1:7. For centuries God held back the full sentence on the sins of Abraham, David and every Old Testament believer, in His *anochē*, His holding-back patience. That raised a question about His justice: had He looked the other way? The cross is the answer, an *endeixis* (G1732), a public "demonstration" (vv. 25, 26) that He never overlooked sin at all — the bill was paid at Calvary.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

"These words provide the most glorious transition from the judgment of Romans 3:20 to the justification of Romans 3:21." This righteousness is apart from the Law yet witnessed by the Law and the Prophets — new in its arrival, old in its promise. Faith is the means, not the merit. *Dōrean* means truly free, not discounted: grace is giving motivated purely by the giver. Redemption "has the idea of buying back something, and involves cost." Then Guzik names the three pictures — the court, the slave market, and the sacrifice — and sees Jesus as our mercy seat, standing between guilty sinners and the holiness of God. "But only God could find a way to be both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

In "Righteousness Revealed" Sproul defines the word that split Christendom: "Justification is that act by which God judicially declares a person to be righteous in His sight." The Greek *dikaioō* means declare righteous; the Latin *iustificare*, make righteous, misled the medieval church into grounding justification in a righteousness inside us, where the Reformers found it in an alien righteousness — Christ's, credited to us. Faith is the instrument, not a work. He insists the translators keep both words: propitiation, Christ satisfying the Father's justice, and expiation, sin removed from us — "Do not ever get rid of the words propitiation and expiation." Sin must be punished, and it is punished in a Substitute: "Beloved, God never negotiates His own righteousness."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon returned to these verses for decades. In “Justification by Grace” (No. 126, 1857) it is “freely” because there is no price for us to pay — Christ “to the utmost farthing paid whate’er his people owed,” and “The sacrifice of Calvary was not a part payment.” In “Justification, Propitiation, Declaration” (No. 3488) he sees “a reference here to the mercy-seat” and insists “the main point in this propitiation is the blood.” In “Justice Satisfied” (No. 255, 1859) he makes the logic of substitution plain: “All I ought to have suffered has been suffered by my substitute,” and “when justice once is satisfied it were injustice if it should ask for more.” So “God can be just, and yet the justifier.”

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

Henry makes the freeness of grace and the cost of Christ belong together: justification is free to us, yet bought by Christ’s redemption, and the one does not undo the other. Christ is “the great propitiation, or propitiatory sacrifice,” set forth by God, the true mercy seat. Then a pastor’s picture: “Faith is the bunch of hyssop, and the blood of Christ is the blood of sprinkling” — faith is only the instrument that applies the blood. For the wounded soul “there is the healing plaster provided.” And God loses none of His justice: it would not be just “to demand the debt of the principal when the surety has paid it.” So He is just, and the justifier of him that believes.

IV
MOVEMENT

ROMANS 3:27–31

Boasting Excluded, the Law Established

Faith shuts the mouth of pride, makes one people of Jew and Gentile, and honors the Law it cannot break

27 *Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.* 28 *For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.* 29 *Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,* 30 *since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.* 31 *Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.*

ROMANS 3:27–31

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!”

DEUTERONOMY 6:4

ἡ καύχησις; ἐξεκλείσθη

HĒ KAUCHĒSIS; EXEKLEISTHĒ · “BOASTING? IT IS EXCLUDED” · G2746 / G1576

Two words in Greek: “Where then the boasting? Shut out.” *Ekkleiō*, from *ek* (out) and *kleiō* (shut), appears only here and Galatians 4:17. The aorist passive pictures a door slammed once for all, and the passive voice says who slammed it. Boasting is what the Jew of 2:17 and 2:23 did “in God” and “in the Law”; now it is locked outside — not by a better rule of works but by “a law of faith,” a principle that by its nature receives instead of achieves.

νόμον ἱστάνομεν

NOMON HISTANOMEN · "WE ESTABLISH THE LAW" · G2476

Histēmi (here in the form *histanomen*) is to make stand, set up, uphold — the opposite of *katargeō*, to make idle, in the same verse. Does faith put the Law out of work? *Mē genoito*. Faith makes the Law stand: it agrees with the Law's verdict (3:19), it rests on the Law's witness (3:21; Abraham and David in chapter 4), and it honors the Law's penalty, paid in full at the cross. Verse 28 has no word "alone" in the Greek; Luther's German famously added *allein*, and Paul's logic — "apart from works of the Law" — is why he did.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Boasting is excluded, Guzik says, not by some particular command but because it simply cannot live alongside grace: "Grace absolutely refuses to recognize his (imagined) merits and gives no place to his pride whatsoever." Verse 28 means justification by faith alone, and he cites Lenski: "Since all works of law are barred out, faith alone is left." He takes up James 2 directly — James is contrasting saving faith with dead faith, and, with Calvin, speaking of how righteousness is shown before others. Because God is one, He justifies Jew and Gentile the same way. And the gospel establishes the Law by fulfilling its own predictions, as Romans 4 is about to show.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul preached "Boasting Excluded" on the first day of 2006 and made it a defense of *sola fide*. Rome, he said, teaches faith plus works, grace plus merit, Christ plus us — faith as necessary but not sufficient — and he walked through congruous and condign merit and the treasury of merit that Luther attacked. Even where the word "alone" is absent, the idea is in the text. Faith does not justify as a virtue: "Faith is simply that which links you to Christ." Because Jew and Gentile have one God, "There is only one God who can pronounce you just in His sight." And the Law stands: "The law was never given as a way to justify anyone"; its purpose is to drive us to Christ, who alone kept it.

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In his exposition Spurgeon draws the line plainly: if salvation is by faith, there is no room left for the sinner to boast, because the whole of it depends on grace from first to last. Neither Jew nor Gentile can be saved by the works of the Law, so both must come the same way, by faith. Yet the Law is not thrown aside. Faith, he says, gives the Law its proper footing rather than making it void, and the free gospel of grace, far from overturning God's Law, turns out to be its best vindication.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary · Romans completed after 1714

For Henry, boasting is shut out by the very nature of faith: "for faith is a depending, self-emptying, self-denying grace, and casts every crown before the throne." The "law of faith" is not lawlessness but a working grace. "Is he the God of the Jews only?" No — one God justifies the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith, on the same footing. And faith does not make the Law void; it puts the Law to its right use — still convicting, still guiding, still honored, now under Christ.

V
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

From Abraham's tent to the apostle's letters — one way of righteousness

> *"Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."*
>
> GENESIS 15:6

> *"And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no man living is righteous."*
>
> PSALM 143:2

> *"Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith."*
>
> HABAKKUK 2:4

> *"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."*
>
> 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

> *"nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified."*
>
> GALATIANS 2:16

> *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."*
>
> EPHESIANS 2:8–9

> *"and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."*
>
> 1 JOHN 2:2

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik reads verse 31 as a door into chapter 4: the gospel establishes the Law by fulfilling the Law's own predictions. The righteousness of God is "apart from the law," yet it is the very thing Moses and the Prophets pointed to — which is why Paul's next witnesses are Abraham and David.

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Four men, three hundred years from first to last, on the same chapter. Read across each row to see where they agree — and they agree on almost everything here — and how each brings his own gift: the text, the doctrine, the heart, the counsel.

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · Let God be true	Israel were God's library-keepers; grace twisted into license is slander, justly condemned	No greater advantage than earshot of the Word; God is wrathful because He is righteous	The gospel is no failure; truth is not settled by the vote of the whole race	The Jews had the means of salvation, not the monopoly; sin is no better for God's using it
II · Every mouth closed	An X-ray from head to foot; the Law is the straight-edge showing how crooked we are	None seeks Christ until found by Him; the scariest charge is no fear of God	The Law is a looking glass — it shows the spots but cannot wash them	Habitual and actual sin alike; no fear of God is the root of all
III · But now	The glorious transition; court, slave market, mercy seat — only God can be just and justifier	Justification is a legal declaration on an alien righteousness; keep propitiation and expiation	Freely because Christ paid to the last farthing; justice satisfied cannot ask twice	Faith is the hyssop, Christ's blood the sprinkling; the surety has paid the debt
IV · No boasting	Grace gives pride no place; with works barred out, faith alone is left	Faith alone, against faith-plus-merit; faith links you to Christ, and the Law drives you to Him	No room for boasting when all is grace; the gospel vindicates the Law	Faith is self-emptying and casts every crown before the throne; the Law put to its right use

ROMANS 3:1–31 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **The Word is the first advantage.** Paul's answer to "what good is it to be a Jew?" is not the temple or circumcision but the oracles of God (v. 2). Sproul: no greater advantage than to be within earshot of the Word. SPROUL
- **Unbelief cannot cancel God.** Israel's unbelief did not nullify God's faithfulness (v. 3). The same verb returns in v. 31: faith does not nullify the Law. God keeps His Word and His Law both. THE GREEK
- **Grace has always been slandered.** If anyone ever accuses you of preaching grace so freely that people will sin more, you are in Paul's company (v. 8). Guzik: twisting grace into license perverts God's gift. GUZIK
- **The catena is Israel's own Scripture.** Every line of 3:10–18 is from the Psalms or Isaiah — and v. 19 reads it over "those who are under the Law." The religious man is not exempt from the indictment. THE TEXT
- **The root of sin is a missing fear.** Paul ends the head-to-foot X-ray at the eyes: "no fear of God" (v. 18). Henry: "The root of all this we have." HENRY
- **The Law is a mirror, not a washbasin.** It shows the spots but cannot remove them (v. 20). Spurgeon: "you cannot get rid of the spots by looking in the glass." SPURGEON
- **"But now" is the hinge of the letter.** Two words turn the courtroom from condemnation to acquittal (v. 21); the same "righteousness of God" that condemned is now given. THE TEXT
- **Justified means declared, not improved.** *Dikaioō* is a verdict. Sproul: an alien righteousness, Christ's, credited to the one who believes — faith the instrument, not the merit. SPROUL

- **The mercy seat moved into the open.** *Hilastērion* is the lid of the ark (Hebrews 9:5), hidden behind the veil; God "displayed publicly" His Son as the place where blood met wrath (v. 25). THE GREEK
- **Just and justifier.** God did not lower His justice to save sinners; He satisfied it in a Substitute (v. 26). Spurgeon: justice once satisfied cannot ask for more. SPURGEON

† Questions for the Table

1 **Paul says the chief advantage of the Jew was the Word of God (v. 2). What advantages have you had with the Word, and what have you done with them?**

Sproul: no greater advantage than to be within earshot of the Word. Privilege is not salvation (Henry) — but it is a trust.

3:1–3; Hebrews 5:12

2 **Read the catena aloud (vv. 10–18). Which body part on the X-ray do you recognize in your own life before Christ — or this week?**

Throat, tongue, lips and mouth are sins of speech; feet are sins of violence; eyes are the root. Be honest at the table.

3:13–18; James 3:6

3 **Why does Paul aim the Psalms at "those who are under the Law" (v. 19) — the religious people? Where do church people most often exempt themselves?**

Every mouth closed means the religious mouth too. The man who thinks the verses are about "them" is the one they are aimed at.

3:9, 19; Luke 18:11

4 **Justified, redeemed, propitiated (vv. 24–25). Which of the three pictures speaks most to where you have been — guilt, bondage or wrath?**

Courtroom, slave market, mercy seat. Each answers a different wound; all three are "in Christ Jesus."

3:24–25; Hebrews 9:5

5 **How can God be both "just and the justifier" (v. 26)? Explain it in a sentence you could say to a man who thinks he is too far gone.**

Henry: the surety has paid the debt. Spurgeon: all I ought to have suffered has been suffered by my substitute.

3:26; 2 Corinthians 5:21

6 **Where does boasting still creep into your faith — your record, your recovery, your Bible knowledge (v. 27)?**

Henry: faith is a self-emptying grace that casts every crown before the throne. Boasting is shut out, not managed.

3:27–28; Ephesians 2:8–9

Romans 3 leaves no man standing on his own feet — not the pagan, not the moral man, not the religious man — and then lifts every man who believes by a righteousness he did not earn. The mouth that was closed in guilt opens again, not to boast, but to say, "Christ is my righteousness."

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

Each teacher's section summarizes the pages below in our own words; short quotations are verbatim from them. Matthew Henry died in 1714 having reached Acts; the Romans volume of his *Commentary* was completed by his successors (John Evans) from his

notes and method, and is cited under his name as it is published. Henry's Commentary and C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) are in the public domain; Guzik and Sproul are summarized — consult each author's own work.

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