

REFLECTION

It's easy for us to question God's dealings with us. God's ways are not our ways, and we will never fully understand the mysteries of his justice and holiness and power. What would you do with stubborn humanity if you were God? As the holy Creator, how would you respond to your sinful creatures? Think about how God has worked in your heart and life recently. What about your salvation is still a mystery to you?

SITUATION

Paul has created a stalemate regarding the Law. God's laws are good, he says, but they are incapable of motivating us to live up to God's righteous expectations. Whether the law is present or not, we can't obey it perfectly, so we are still sinners. Quite a predicament! But Paul is only laying the foundation for the good news that will follow here in Romans 3. Here are helpful definitions for three significant theological terms used in Romans: (1) *Justification* refers to God's declaration that we are not guilty for our sins. (2) *Redemption* means that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins by dying on the cross. (3) *Atonement* refers to Christ's sacrifice on our behalf.

OBSERVATION

Read Romans 3:21-31 in the NCV or the NKJV.

NCV

²¹But God has a way to make people right with him without the law, and he has now shown us that way which the law and the prophets told us about. ²²God makes people right with himself through their faith in Jesus Christ. This is true for all who believe in Christ, because all people are the same. ²³All have sinned and are not good enough for God's glory, ²⁴and all need to be made right with God by his grace, which is a free gift. They need to be made free from sin through Jesus Christ. ²⁵God gave him as a way to forgive sin through faith in the blood of Jesus' death. This showed that God always does what is right and fair, as in the past when he was patient and did not punish people for their sins. ²⁶And God gave Jesus to show today that he does what is right. God did this so he could judge rightly and so he could make right any person who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷So do we have a reason to brag about ourselves? No! And why not? It is the way of faith that stops all bragging, not the way of trying to obey the law. ²⁸A person is made right with God through faith, not through obeying the law. ²⁹Is God only the God of the Jews? Is he not also the God of those who are not Jews? ³⁰Of course he is, because there is only one God. He will make Jews right with him by their faith, and he will also make those who are not Jews right with him through their faith. ³¹So do we destroy the law by following the way of faith? No! Faith causes us to be what the law truly wants.

NKJV

²¹But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²²even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. ²⁹Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

EXPLORATION

1. In what ways are all people alike? What do we all share in common, particularly when it comes to God?

2. How can people be made right with God? (It may be helpful to refer to 3:22–24 and Isaiah 52:13–53:12.)

3. Using this passage as an illustration, how does God's plan demonstrate his fairness toward humanity?

4. What should prevent believers from bragging?

INSPIRATION

"Love," Paul says, "never fails" (1 Cor. 13:8 NIV). The verb Paul uses for the word *fail* is used elsewhere to describe the demise of a flower as it falls to the ground, withers, and decays. It carries the meaning of death and abolishment. God's love, says the apostle, will never fall to the ground, wither, and decay. By its nature, it is permanent. It is never abolished . . .

Governments will fail, but God's love will last. Crowns are temporary, but love is eternal. Your money will run out, but his love never will.

"How could God have a love like this? No one has unfailing love. No person can love with perfection." You're right. No person can. But God is not a person. Unlike our love, his never fails. His love is immensely different from ours.

Our love depends on the receiver of the love. Let a thousand people pass before us, and we will not feel the same about each. Our love will be regulated by their appearance, by their personalities. Even when we find a few people we like, our feelings will fluctuate. How they treat us will affect how we love them. The receiver regulates our love.

Not so with the love of God. We have no thermostatic impact on his love for us. The love of God is born from within him, not from what he finds in us. His love is uncaused and spontaneous. As Charles Wesley said, "He hath loved us. He hath loved us. Because he would love."

Does he love us because of our goodness? Because of our kindness? Because of our great faith? No, he loves us because of *his* goodness, kindness, and great faith. John says it like this: *"This is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us"* (1 John 4:10 NIV).

Doesn't this thought comfort you? God's love does not hinge on yours. The abundance of your love does not increase his. The lack of your love does not diminish his. Your goodness does not enhance his love, not does your weakness dilute it . . . God loves you simply because he has chosen to do so. (From *A Love Worth Giving* by Max Lucado)

REACTION

5. When did you first realize that salvation is a free gift provided by Christ?

6. What or who helped you reach that realization?

7. In what different ways do people try to earn salvation?

8. Why is it important to understand that salvation is a free gift from God? Why wouldn't that news thrill certain people?

9. Describe how your life would be different without Jesus.

10. How do we receive God's approval?

LIFE LESSONS

What is priceless can't be bought or earned. Eternal life is just such a treasure. We receive it free or not at all. We could never afford it. We could never deserve it. It's God's gift to us, or we don't have it. But it would be a huge mistake to conclude in this case that what is free is cheap. It cost God a great deal, including his Son's life, to provide this gift for us. There's no room for bragging in our response; only gratitude.

DEVOTION

Holy God and Father in heaven, we come to you, aware that we do not deserve to be in your presence. We thank you that you have provided a path for us through the blood of your precious Son. Your saving grace is a priceless gift. Keep us amazed and mesmerized by what you have done for us.

For more Bible passages on the gift of salvation, see John 3:16; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 1 Timothy 1:15; Titus 2:11; Hebrews 5:7-9.

To complete the book of Romans during this twelve-part study, read Romans 3:9-31.

LIFE LESSONS WITH MAX LUCADO

JOURNALING

How can I tell others about God's free gift?

LESS  OUR

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

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