

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 3: 21

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we are going to read Romans Chapter 3, verses 21-31, and today we'll read verse 21.

We have spent five weeks studying Paul's discourse on condemnation. The conclusion is this: no one can be justified before God by the works of the Law, because the Law was given to bring the knowledge of sin. When it comes to dealing with sin, man is completely powerless—man can only rely on God's grace. This leads us to the topic of justification by faith. This section of Scripture spans Romans 3:21 to 5:11, and we will spend four weeks studying justification by faith.

This passage can be divided into three main parts: Romans 3:21–31, The Doctrine of Justification, we will cover this in this week's study. Romans 4:1–25, The Example of Justification, we will spend two weeks on this section. Romans 5:1–11, The Result of Justification, we will spend one week there.

Judicial redemption includes both condemnation and justification. In both matters, man can do nothing—it is Jesus Christ who has already accomplished the great work of redemption. Men simply need to receive by faith what Christ has already completed, and then he will be justified by God. However, justification is not the goal—it is only the beginning of salvation. After justification comes the process of organic salvation, described in Romans 5:12 – 8:30. This section addresses sanctification and glorification, which are the lifelong experiences of every believer. Every Christian must actively participate in this process and, through faith, appropriate the salvation that Christ has already accomplished—only then will glorification be reached. Romans 8:30 says: "Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." Glorification is the ultimate purpose of justification:

When Christ returns, the glory of Christ will be manifested in every saint, and our bodies will be redeemed at that time.

When we talk about justification by faith, we cannot avoid mentioning Calvinist theology. I have no intention of turning our daily Bible reading time into a theological debate. I simply want to provide some historical background for the saints and help you understand the context of my interpretation. I am merely sharing God's word according to the burden He has given me, and I do my best to let the saints know the background I come from.

If my interpretation suits you, then receive it with a grateful heart. If it does not, I ask for your forbearance in the Lord. After all, theological debates have been going on for hundreds of years, and we likely won't arrive at a final conclusion either—so let us learn together and respect different perspectives.

Calvinist theology emphasizes God's sovereign authority, while a Dutch theologian named Arminius emphasized human free will. These two schools of thought debated in 1619 in the Synod of Dort in the Netherlands. At the time, both the Dutch king and the chairman of the assembly supported the Calvinist side. As a result, the Arminian side was declared heretical, and the pastors who supported Arminian theology were expelled from the church.

The Calvinist side then issued the well-known TULIP, an acronym representing the five key points of Calvinist theology. Each letter stands for one of the core doctrines:

1. T – Total Depravity: Man is completely fallen and corrupted by sin.
2. U – Unconditional Election: God chooses whom to save based solely on His sovereignty, not on anything in man.
3. L – Limited Atonement: Christ's atonement is only for the elect.
4. I – Irresistible Grace: When God's grace comes to the elect, they cannot resist it.

5. P – Perseverance of the Saints: Those who are truly saved will persevere and never lose their salvation.

This is just a very brief introduction. If any of the saints are interested, you can find many resources online that explain these five points in greater detail. Personally, I agree with four out of the five points, with some reservations about the third—Limited Atonement.

Regarding the third point—Limited Atonement—the Calvinist view emphasizes that Christ's atonement is only for the elect. However, this clearly conflicts with certain Scriptures. For example, 1 John 2:2 says, "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." The apostle John plainly and directly tells us that Christ's atoning sacrifice is for the sins of the whole world. This means that salvation has already been prepared and is for everyone. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." The apostle Peter likewise says that God does not want anyone to perish, but desires all to repent. So the salvation He prepared is truly for each and every person. Even Paul himself, in 1 Timothy 2:4, says, "Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." The Chinese Union Version says "wan ren", which doesn't mean just ten thousand people. In English it's "all men," meaning God desires everyone to be saved.

Generally speaking, believers who begin their studies through systematic theology tend to emphasize the logical consistency and completeness of theological frameworks. They view the five points of Calvinism as interconnected—if one point is invalid, the entire system collapses. Hence, they argue that you cannot disagree with one point while accepting the other four. My view is just the opposite. I do not believe that any theological framework can fully contain the entirety of Scripture. Therefore, I will not twist Scripture in order to preserve the consistency of a theological system. Theological systems are meant to help us understand the Bible, but they must not replace the Bible.

In addition, when a theological system becomes the dominant interpretive lens for a church—like churches built upon Calvinist theology—it must stand the test of time in its practical outworking. There’s no doubt that Calvin was a great theologian, and after the Synod of Dort, his theological system heavily influenced the Church of England. However, Calvinism’s overemphasis on God’s sovereignty and neglect of man’s responsibility led many in the English church to believe they already had a “ticket to heaven,” and they became passive in spiritual pursuit and lacked zeal for evangelism. They thought: if someone is not elect, preaching is useless; and if he is elect, even if you don’t preach, God will still find a way to save him. As a result, the English church fell into widespread spiritual decay and corruption. About a hundred years later, John Wesley, while at Oxford, initiated the Holiness Movement, once again emphasizing human free will, and founded the Methodist Church. This reignited the debate between God’s sovereignty and man’s free will, a debate that continues even to this day.

Personally, I was saved and equipped in a Brethren-influenced church. Teachers in the Brethren movement generally combine elements from both theological camps, while also incorporating the idea of overcoming believers. In the matter of salvation, they lean toward Calvin’s view of divine sovereignty. But in the process of sanctification after salvation, they emphasize personal responsibility. Only those believers who are willing to cooperate with the Holy Spirit, pursue spiritual growth, and live a godly life, can become overcomers. For when Christ returns, He will judge each saint individually according to how they lived after being saved. I have shared all this background information in order to clearly state my position in advance. Concerning judicial redemption, I lean toward God’s sovereign authority; concerning organic salvation, I emphasize personal responsibility.

Verse 21: “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.”

But now—but signals a turning point. In the preceding discussion on condemnation, Paul concludes, “There is none righteous, no, not one,” and “Therefore by the deeds

of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” But now, we have entered the New Testament era of grace. Because Jesus Christ has already completed the work of redemption, the righteousness of God has now been revealed apart from the law.

This one statement is rich with meaning. First, let us consider “righteousness.” Righteousness is an attribute of God; it is the principle by which God acts. The fact that God’s righteousness has now been revealed means that this righteousness becomes the standard by which God justifies. A person must fully align with God’s righteousness before God can declare them righteous. Originally, God’s righteousness had nothing to do with us, because we were utterly depraved sinners. But now, in this age of grace, the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the law.

Why apart from the law? Because according to the law, we are all condemned. Within the law, we have no hope; within the law, we have reached a dead end. But outside the law, God made a new beginning. In other words, God extended mercy outside the legal framework. That the righteousness of God is revealed apart from the law means that outside the system of the law, God prepared a way through which totally depraved sinners might still obtain His righteousness.

However, righteousness is the foundation of God’s throne; all of God’s actions must conform to the principle of justice and righteousness. If not, His throne would not be secure. Therefore, if God is to extend mercy outside the law to sinners, He must go through a process to address the problem of sin. According to God’s righteous principle, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. Hence, God the Father had to send His only begotten Son to come to earth, to live a perfect human life, and ultimately, for the sins of man, to lay down His life, shed His blood, and bear the penalty of sin.

Therefore, when Paul says here that the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the law, it carries two layers of meaning. The first layer is that the Son of God had to be born under the law, live under the law, and completely fulfill all the requirements of the law. Only then would He be qualified to redeem humanity.

Ultimately, He had to pay the price of sin on behalf of mankind, by enduring the most brutal punishment—being crucified on the cross. Only by completing these steps could God extend mercy outside the law. The second layer is that the righteousness of God has now been revealed outside the law, giving people the opportunity to receive God's righteousness apart from the law. God's righteousness becomes the standard by which He justifies, and also the foundation upon which He justifies.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must understand that as a foundation, God's righteousness is far more secure than God's love. When God declares us righteous, we can come before the righteous God with boldness and confidence. As Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." A person who has been justified can also, on the basis of righteousness, seek God's forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Within the framework of His righteous law, God must forgive our sins, and we no longer need to be under accusation. Romans 8:33 says, "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies." Satan also has a name — "the accuser." But when God declares us righteous, not even Satan can bring an accusation against us. We must appreciate that righteousness as a foundation is more secure than love, because love is God's sovereign choice—He can choose to love or not to love. But righteousness is what God must do. Therefore, the foundation of righteousness is more secure.

"But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." The Law and the Prophets refer to the entire Old Testament. The righteousness of God being revealed apart from the law was already foretold in the Old Testament—especially regarding God sending His only begotten Son to accomplish redemption, so that God could extend mercy beyond the law, and manifest His righteousness outside the law.

The Law refers to the Pentateuch, the five books of Moses. In Leviticus, there are ordinances about offerings, the service of the priests, the feasts, etc.—all of which are types of Christ. In Deuteronomy 18:15, it says, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear.” As early as 1500 years before Christ, Moses had already prophesied that God would raise up a Prophet from among the Israelites—this referred to Jesus Christ.

And in the prophetic books, there are countless prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah. For example, Isaiah 9:6 says, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Isaiah chapter 53 is known as the “Messianic Psalm,” and the entire chapter contains prophecies about Christ. Among the most familiar are verses 4–5: “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”

Dear brothers and sisters, now that we have come to the era of New Testament grace, how blessed we are! For the righteousness of God has been revealed apart from the law. Within the law, we are all condemned, and utterly without hope. But the righteousness of God has been revealed outside the law, giving us the opportunity to obtain the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ. This is a tremendous grace.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord, thank You! We give You praise and thanksgiving for the Scriptures on justification by faith. In past generations, You raised up many Bible teachers to not only unfold the truth of justification by faith but to give us a complete and structured explanation. Though there are differing interpretations, we believe that if we truly seek You, You will surely provide us with the most fitting understanding according to our need. Bless our daily Bible reading—not only that we may understand the truth of justification by faith doctrinally, but also that we may experience it in reality. Help us see that if You have declared us righteous, we

can come before our righteous God at any time, and we need not fear the accusations of the devil. When we are weak and fall into sin, we can also be forgiven through confession, receiving the grace of forgiveness within the framework of righteousness. Bless my daily life, that I may experience the reality of justification by faith. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen!