

DISCUSSION GUIDE: ROMANS 3:21-23
APRIL 9, 2017

Romans 3:21-26 is one of the great passages in the Bible. Of course the whole Bible is equally inspired, but this passage serves as the fulcrum upon which the message of Romans turns. It is one of the most concise and clearest explanations of the gospel in one passage. In fact, Martin Luther called it the center of the whole Bible.

1. It's always important to look at the flow of logic in a text, particularly in Paul's letters. The righteousness of God of v21 connects to the righteousness of God revealed in Romans 1:17. In 1:18—3:20, Paul explains that no person is righteous before God. So, it's important to see the dilemma Paul puts mankind in here. How can unrighteous people be in relationship with a righteous God? The answer comes in our text—it's not just that God *is* righteous, but that he also *provides* his righteousness to those whom he saves.

—To be right with God is the most important need of every human. Discuss ways that mankind strives to make himself right with God through his own effort. How are Christians also vulnerable to fall back into this mode of self-achieved righteousness?

—Clearly the Bible describes God as righteous. But in Romans 1:17 and 3:21, Paul uses the term to describe the righteousness God provides rather than describing who He is by nature. Why is this distinction so important?

2. In v21, Paul says this righteousness of God has been manifested or displayed apart from the law. So, the righteousness God provides comes not from the law, but from somewhere else.

—What does Paul mean by this phrase?

—How does it connect to what Jesus says about the law in Matthew 5:17-18?

3. Although Paul is saying that salvation comes apart from the law, he goes on to say that the Law and the Prophets (a phrase used for the Old Testament) point to it. So, the law has a role to play in salvation.

—Discuss the purpose of the law in salvation. (It may be helpful to read Galatians 3:19-26). What role does the law play in manifesting the gospel?

—Read Martin Luther’s quote on the purpose of the law: “The principal point...of the law...is to make men not better but worse; that is to say, it shows unto them their sin, that by the knowledge thereof they may be humbled, terrified, bruised and broken, and by this means may be driven to seek grace, and so come to that blessed Seed [Christ].”

—How does the law of God drive people to Christ?

—What implications should this have on how we evangelize and witness to unbelievers?