

Nov. 10, 2019

Speaker: Eric Naus **Series:** This I Believe – The Book of Romans

Passage: Romans 3:21-26

Community Group Questions: "The Other Side of Forgiveness"

1. Read Romans 3:21-31 aloud as a group. This paragraph has been described by Martin Luther as "The chief point... of the whole Bible." So far in Romans, we've explored the idea that all humanity stands condemned before God, guilty of sin, deserving of judgment. But here, the good news of the gospel breaks in with the words "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested!" How does the "bad news" of Romans 1:18-3:20 help us to fully appreciate the "good news" of Romans 3:21-26?
2. Verse 21 explains that the "righteousness of God" (sometimes translated "righteousness *from* God") has been manifested (or revealed). This "righteousness of God" is a righteous status that God gives to all those who put their faith in Jesus Christ. It's a declaration of our "rightness" before God, because of what Jesus has done for us. As this verse makes clear, this "righteousness of God" comes to us "apart from the law" (you can't earn it by your good works), yet "the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it" (the Old Testament Scriptures predicted it was coming). In your opinion, how do most people in the world try to establish a sense of righteousness, approval, and acceptance in their lives? How do our own attempts at justifying ourselves compare with the righteous status coming to us from God through Christ?
3. Read verses 23-25a again. Notice three important words in these verses. The first important word is "**justification.**" This word comes from the legal world. To be "justified" means to be legally declared righteous in God's sight. When they believe, God declares guilty sinners to be "righteous" in his sight. The second important word is "**redemption.**" It comes from the world of slavery. To "redeem" means to buy a slave's freedom through payment of a price. God purchased our freedom from sin through the payment of Jesus' life on the cross. Finally, notice the word "**propitiation.**" A "propitiation" is a sacrifice that turns away divine wrath. On the cross, God put forward his own Son as a propitiation, and Jesus bore the wrath that our sins deserve, so that God could offer us grace and forgiveness. How do these three important words help us understand how the cross works? How do each of these terms help us to uniquely understand God's great love for us in Christ?
4. Forgiveness is always costly. Tim Keller put it this way, "...God's grace and forgiveness, while free to the recipient, are always costly for the giver.... From the earliest parts of the Bible, it was understood that God could not forgive without sacrifice. No one who is seriously wronged can "just forgive" the perpetrator.... But when you forgive, that means you absorb the loss and the debt. You bear it yourself. All forgiveness, then, is costly." – Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*. How did God "absorb the loss" when it comes to forgiving sinners like you and me?

5. Read verses 25b-26. These verses explain that the cross demonstrates the righteous character of God. The cross explains why God could be so patient in forgiving people before Jesus came – their sin debt was stacking up, and it was paid off in full at the cross. The cross also explains how God can be “just” in forgiving sinners today: justice was served on Christ so that we can be forgiven. When you look at the cross, what attributes of God do you see coming together there? Why is it so important to look deeply at the cross, not just at the start of our Christian lives, but every day of our Christian journey?

6. **Prayer suggestion:** Along with sharing life updates and prayer requests, spend time thanking God for the full and final salvation that Christ has accomplished for us on the cross. Praise God for his righteous character seen in how he “justifies the ungodly” through Christ.