

DEVOTIONAL

WHEN IN ROME III // BUT NOW...
JULY 25, 2021

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discussion Starter: What life changes have you experienced since receiving Christ?

Key Text: *“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”* (Romans 3:21-26)

The Power of One Word

In his book *Simple Little Words; What You Say Can Change a Life*, English professor Dr. Dennis Hensley tells of a former student named Sean who sat in the back row of Hensley’s World Literature class. Sean had some learning challenges and struggled greatly with understanding and appreciating the writings of Shakespeare, Dante, and Melville. Sean was in danger of failing the class. Sean loved sports, so Dr. Hensley modified Sean’s reading list to include more action stories like Jack London’s high sea adventures and Rudyard Kipling’s military works. Sean’s grades improved dramatically—he even moved to the front row in the classroom, taking copious notes. Dr. Hensley regularly complimented Sean on his diligence and studiousness. At the end of a test on which Sean scored 100%, Dr. Hensley wrote, “This is superb work, son. I congratulate you. You’ve been working hard, and this is the payoff. Well done!”

A few days later, Sean showed up in Dr. Hensley’s office weeping. He shared his background with Dr. Hensley—a childhood filled with rejection and unrealistic expectations from his tyrannical father. Wiping another sudden rush of tears flowing from his eyes, Sean said, “Dr. Hensley, I want you to know that I’m going to conduct my life—from here on out, in everything I do—so that you will be proud enough to always call me ‘son.’ You’ve given me something I’ve been yearning for my entire life.” Sean graduated from college and became a high school teacher in inner-city Indianapolis where he changed the lives of hundreds of fatherless children. That one catchphrase word “son” from an older man to a younger fellow changed the course of a life.

The Bible has a particular word that not only changes our lives, it also changes our eternity—it is the little word “*but*” (v.21). Paul had just spent three chapters building a step-by-step logical case of why everyone is guilty of sin and accountable to God. In 3:21, Paul presents a major turning point in his Romans letter—with the word “*but*” Paul moves us from condemnation to salvation, from despair to hope, from hell to heaven!

Discuss: Why must we understand the bad news of sin before we can appreciate the good news of salvation?

Paul focuses upon three key words that show us we were condemned sinners “*but now*” (v.21) we are forgiven, accepted children of God:

1. Justification – Declared Righteous by God

“[all]...*are justified by his grace as a gift...*” (v.24a) Justification is an act of God whereby He pronounces a sinner to be righteous because of that sinner’s faith in Christ. Justification restores us to God’s favor, which had been lost due to our sin (John 3:36). So, justification is more than an acquittal; it is full acceptance—we are now friends of God (James 2:23) and co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). Justification occurs apart from the law—we cannot earn justification through rule-keeping or our own good works. Paul emphasizes that it occurs “*by his [God’s] grace as a gift*” (v.24a). Because the wrath of God is satisfied in Christ (Isaiah 53:4–6), we are free from condemnation (Romans 8:1), and God remains both “*just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus*” (Romans 3:26).

Discuss: What is the difference between being merely forgiven and being justified?

2. Redemption – Set Free from Bondage

“...*through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...*” (v.24b) The word redeem means “to buy out” and was used in reference to the purchase of a slave’s freedom. Our prior condition was one of slavery, but through Christ’s death on the cross, God purchased our freedom, and we are no longer in bondage to sin or to the Old Testament law. We were slaves to sin, condemned to eternal separation from God. Jesus paid the price to redeem us, resulting in our freedom from slavery to sin and our rescue from the eternal consequences of that sin.

Discuss: Look up these verses and discuss the benefits of redemption they mention: Ephesians 1:7; Galatians 3:13; 4:5.

4. Propitiation – Satisfaction of God’s Holiness

“...*whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith...*” (v.25) Propitiation is the idea of appeasement or satisfaction, specifically toward God. We are totally incapable of satisfying God’s justice except by spending eternity in hell. There is no service or sacrifice that we sinners can offer that will appease the holy wrath of God or satisfy His perfect justice. This is why God the Son, Jesus Christ, came into the world in human flesh. His sacrifice on the cross on our behalf perfectly met God’s righteous penalty against sin (Isaiah 53:11; Hebrews 2:17).

Discuss: Explain how each of the three key words in today’s lesson—Justification, Redemption, and Propitiation—are different yet work together to describe our salvation.

For Further Study:

Key Words of the Christian Life by Warren Wiersbe

“What is Justification? Redemption? Propitiation?” articles at www.gotquestions.org

Making Sense of Salvation by Wayne Grudem