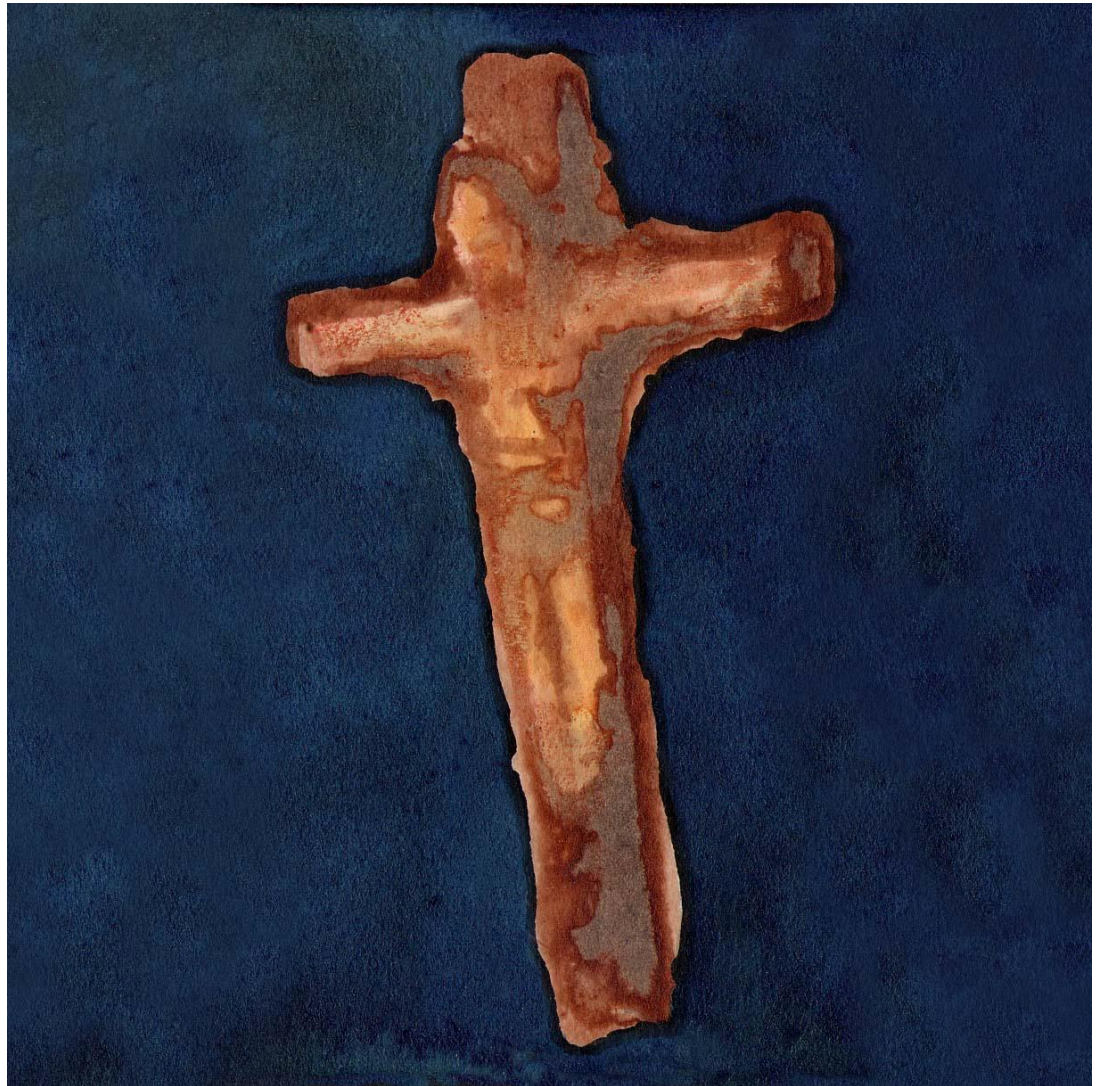


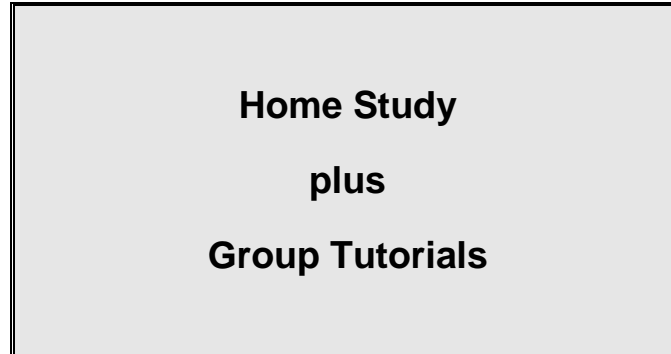
The Righteousness of God



*A Sample Lesson from:
Discover Christian Living (2)
The Letters of Paul*

Introduction


Our Open Learning courses are designed to help you learn by means of:



Home Study

Each Block has **four sessions**. For convenience, each of these sessions has been broken down into two **lessons** so that, if you have about $\frac{3}{4}$ hr to spare (very roughly), you can complete one lesson. These lessons require you to read and interact with the course material as well as with your Bible.

The sample lesson is **programmed** to help you check your progress as you work through. To get the maximum benefit it is important that you use the course in the way it that was intended:

1. Read section 1 (often referred to by the technical term 'frame' 1).
2. Make the response required, if there is one.
3. Check that your answer corresponds with the feedback given in the 'feedback' section at the end. (Wherever feedback is given, it is marked with a raven.) 
4. Proceed to section 2.

Note that the **course** is programmed—**you** are **not** being programmed! The aim of programming is that:

1. you can check frequently that you have understood the material presented;
2. you are stimulated to active and critical thinking;
3. you reinforce what you learn and are better able to remember it.

Sometimes, discussion frames are given. These are clearly indicated in a box with the heading 'For Discussion'. Here you should answer the question in your own words and come to the tutorial prepared to discuss the question as indicated.

At the end of each lesson, we encourage you to spend some time in reflection on how what you have learnt applies to you in the situation where God has placed you.

Group Meeting

At the end of each block of home study, you will meet in your tutorial group where you will have the opportunity to discuss points of interest that have arisen and think through with others how your learning may be applied. You will also normally be given a five-minute quiz.

The group tutorials give the opportunity for you to clarify ideas and to share your own thoughts and to listen to the ideas of others. The process of learning from the Bible in a group is an essential part of the programme. It is here that you are able to think through areas of application and to pray and support each other in your studies.

Romans 3:21-4:25: The Righteousness of God

block 1 session 1 lesson b

Preparing for this lesson:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pray that God will remind you of the significance of salvation in Christ.
Objectives	<p>At the end of this lesson you will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> explain the righteousness of God; give three lessons that Paul draws from the life of Abraham.

a. Introduction

- In our introductory lesson, we looked at the fact that Paul begins his letter by outlining the stages of God's judgment and the groups of people under judgment. These groups of people probably correspond to three obvious categories of people in Roman society (and each of these groups may also have been represented by those who had become Christians):
 - the openly immoral (remember Tacitus – 1a.4)
 - the self-righteous (remember the list of Roman virtues – 1a.3)
 - the Jews (who were the proud possessors of God's law)

Paul's argument leads to a list of quotations from the Old Testament in 3:10-18 which conclude that 'no one is righteous' before God.

For Discussion

Can you identify similar groups within society today? Would you agree with Paul that none of them is righteous before God? Or do you think that some people are 'good'?

b. God's solution in Jesus (Romans 3:21-31)

2. Paul's argument about the sinfulness (unrighteousness) of all humanity in 1:18-3:20 (the bad news) sets the scene for his explanation of the Gospel (the good news), which he has already introduced in chapter 1:16,17. In fact, the detailed argument that 'no one is righteous' prepares the readers for the 'But now...' of 3:21,22.

What is the great contrast that Paul describes in this verse?

3. As in Galatians, Paul is concerned to explain how people are put right/declared right before God. If you studied Galatians in the previous course you might remember two terms from the law court that were used to describe this:

j_____ and a_____.

4. Explain in your words what is meant by those terms:

5. Here in Romans 3:21 (echoing 1:17), Paul uses similar terms to describe the new age of salvation that has been revealed in Jesus.

But what does he mean by the righteousness of God?

In order to understand this phrase, we must first understand what is meant by '*righteousness*' and then try and understand what is meant by the righteousness '*of God*.' So let us try and understand the word 'righteousness'.

- The Greek noun *dikaosune* (vv21, 22, 25, 26) can mean 'justice' as well as 'righteousness'.
- The Greek verb *dikaioo* (v24, 26) can mean 'justify' as well as 'make righteous'.
- The Greek adjective *dikaios* (v26) can mean 'just' as well as 'right'.

In other words, there is a legal and a moral aspect to 'righteousness'. The legal aspect would refer to God 'making things right' (declaring justice). The moral aspect would refer to God 'making us right' (changing our character).

Which of these understandings of righteousness do you think Paul is referring to in these verses?

6. The term 'justify' in these verses (esp. v.24) may also allude to a significant phrase in Isaiah 53:11. Look up that verse and see if you can find the phrase:

7. If this echo of Isaiah is correct, what does it suggest about Paul's understanding of Jesus in these verses?

8. Now we turn to explore what is meant by the righteousness *of God*. There are three basic possibilities to understanding the little English word 'of' (Greek: genitive – see note):

- a. 'Righteousness from God'
- b. 'God's (own) righteousness'
- c. The righteousness promised by God in the Old Testament

Let's now unpack the differences between these possibilities.

 *Go on to the next frame.*

Note: English uses the word 'of' to translate the 'genitive' case of a Greek noun. The normal use of the genitive is to indicate possession (i.e., belonging to) or a characteristic of the noun. As you will see below, there are various ways to translate this in different contexts.

9. **'Righteousness from God'** (genitive of origin – see Rom 3.21 in NIV) – This interpretation suggests that righteousness comes from or originates with God. God has given his gift of righteousness to us either by declaring or by making us righteous through what Jesus has done for us.

Do you think that this interpretation makes sense of the context of Romans 3:21-31? Give reasons for your answer:

10. **'God's (own) righteousness'** (subjective genitive) – expressing a characteristic of God, i.e. God being righteous. God is revealed as righteous through what Jesus has done. God could be seen as righteous in the following ways:

- i. as just judge – God's justice is seen to be done at the cross. God is righteous because both the punishment that the sin and evil of humanity deserves and God's anger at humanity's rebellion are dealt with in Jesus' death.
- ii. as 'saviour' – In the Old Testament, the Israelites were looking for a day when God would 'save' them and vindicate them. This would be seen in the defeat of evil and evildoers (especially those who had oppressed and persecuted his people). God would be seen as righteous in the defeat of and delivery from evil, which is accomplished by Jesus at the cross.
- iii. as a covenant faithful God..... (he is faithful to his promises)

Summarise in your own words what you think is the difference between the two interpretations of righteousness that we have looked at:

11. The righteousness promised by God in the Old Testament

(eschatological). This interpretation reminds us that righteousness is part of the expectations of the people of Israel. In Jesus, the new age of righteousness expected in the last times is revealed. In Jesus is seen:

- i. the coming of God's own righteousness, justice, salvation, covenant faithfulness;
- ii. the clothing of God's people with righteousness.

Eschatology

The term used to refer to the doctrine of the "last things".

This interpretation incorporates both the understandings mentioned above in which righteousness both originates in God and characterises him.

What do you think is distinctive about this view?

12. Let us summarise what we have learnt about the righteousness of God.

- a. Righteousness can include both a legal and a moral significance. God 'makes things right' (declares justice) and also 'makes us right' (changes our character).
- b. The righteousness of God that we are given in Christ can be understood in three ways:
 - i. it originates from God;
 - ii. it expresses the righteous and faithful nature of God;
 - iii. it expresses the fact that God fulfils the Old Testament promises that he will bring about a new 'righteous' age.

For Discussion

Write down how you would explain to a friend what Paul means by the 'righteousness of God' in Romans 6.

13. Just as Paul has argued for the complete equality (no distinction) of humanity in its sinfulness (vv.22-23; see 1:18-3:20), he now goes on to argue for a complete equality of humanity in salvation (v.24). This equality

is based on a historical event that forms the basis of Paul's understanding of the Gospel. What is this essential event? (v.25; 1 Cor 1:23; 2:2; Gal 2:20; 6:14)

14. The focus on Jesus' death here in Romans 3:24f. seems to confirm the echo of the servant from Isaiah 53. Paul uses two further ideas from the Old Testament to explain what is achieved through Jesus' death:

a. Redemption. This term seems to allude to two things:

- i. The slave market – in the ancient world people could pay for the release of slaves and so redeem them from slavery. The implication here is that Jesus' death wins us freedom from sin, death etc. (so Rom 6).
- ii. Passover (Exodus 12) – Paul sees Jesus as our Passover lamb, taking the judgment we deserve, so that we may go free! (1 Cor 5:7, 2 Cor 5:21).

For Discussion

How does the term 'redemption' help us understand the significance of Jesus' death for today?

15. In verse 25, Paul uses another phrase that may be unfamiliar to us to describe the second thing that Jesus' death achieved:

b. An Atoning Sacrifice/Propitiation by his Blood

Here there are two aspects:

- i. 'Blood' (v 25) reminds us of Old Testament sacrifice (eg Leviticus 17:11, etc.). Sacrifice may be strange to us, but was a powerful ritual, in which the sacrifice:
 1. dealt seriously with my sin;
 2. implied that the sacrificed animal was my representative;
 3. represented an exchange: the sinless for the sinner (me).

So Paul understood Jesus' death as the final sacrifice for our sin (Rom 8:3, see also Gal 3:13, 2 Cor 5:21).

ii. 'Atoning Sacrifice/Propitiation' translates the Greek word *hilasterion*. There is debate over the meaning of Greek word *hilasterion*. Three possible meanings are:

1. 'propitiation' of divine anger (i.e. taking our wrath/judgment);
2. 'expiation' of the defilement of sin (i.e. removing our sin);
3. 'A sacrifice of atonement'.

Propitiation
A term used to refer to a sacrifice that deals with God's righteous anger.

Expiation
A term used to refer to a sacrifice that removes sin (cleanses from sin).

The word was also used of the 'mercy-seat', i.e. the lid of the ark where the blood was sprinkled on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:15-22, = the Jewish Festival of *Yom Kippur*), when the high priest went into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled blood on the ark of God's presence for the sins of the people – so is Jesus seen as fulfilling that great day?

So, at the centre of Paul's understanding of the Gospel is the cross of Jesus. To explain the significance of this, we have looked at two terms used by Paul. See if you can explain them in your own words:

a. Redemption

b. Atoning Sacrifice/Propitiation by his blood



16. Paul concludes this section on God's solution in Jesus, by drawing out the implications of this for the Roman Christians (vv.27-31).

For Discussion

See if you can summarise what Paul is saying here and be prepared to discuss the implications of this for the church today in your tutorial.



c. Lessons from the Life of Abraham

17. We now turn to have a closer look at chapter 4 and the example of Abraham. Paul draws three basic lessons from the life of Abraham.

A. How to be righteous before God

Read 4:1-8 and see if you can decide which of the following statements express Paul's teaching.

- a. Abraham's righteousness was given, not earned.
- b. Abraham was good enough for God to call him righteous.
- c. Even though Abraham was a good man, that wasn't what made him righteous in God's sight.
- d. If you want to be righteous in God's sight you have to take it as a gift, not earn it.
- e. Some people have so much goodness from their own actions, they need very little of God's righteousness.
- f. Righteousness is granted in response to faith, and nothing else. ✕

18. Taking these responses, write a brief statement of the lesson Paul teaches from Abraham in this passage.

 ✕

B. What about Circumcision?

19. Try and answer these questions from 4:9-16.

- a. When was Abraham declared righteous? _____ (v10)
- b. This makes him father of two groups. Who are they?
v11 _____
v12 _____
- c. What is the quality both have in common? _____
- d. The result is two-fold (v16):
 - i. the promise _____; and
 - ii. is guaranteed _____. ✕

20. There are many indications in this letter that the church in Rome had a sizeable proportion of Jews. If you were a Gentile in that church, a Jewish Christian might say something like: "Of course, you Gentiles aren't children of Abraham, and you haven't been circumcised, so you can't

expect to have the same standing with God as we do.” Using this passage, what would you reply?

C. *Abraham’s Faith and Us*

21. Read 4:16-25. Here Paul seems to focus on two things:

- a. He makes a clear link between the God of impossibilities in verse 17 and the God who raised Jesus from the dead in verse 24.
- b. He draws attention to the persistence of Abraham’s faith against all odds.

Why do you think Paul does this?

- a. He wants the Roman Christians to know that unless they have strong faith they cannot be justified.
- b. He puts before them an inspiring example to encourage them.
- c. He wants to emphasise the importance of trusting God without external evidence.
- d. He wants to show that what was true for Abraham is also true for the Roman Christians (who are Abraham’s descendants because of their faith).
- e. Other _____

22. So the key sentence in this section is “Now the words, ‘it was reckoned to him’, were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also” (v23,24a). Write down in your own words, what you think Paul is saying here:

23. Give a brief summary of the three lessons we’ve considered here from the life of Abraham.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

24. Finally, write down your own preferred explanation of justification by faith.

Reflecting on this lesson

As before, note down in your notebook anything from this lesson:

- that you want to discuss in your tutorial;
- that is significant for your own personal faith;
- that is significant for explaining the Christian Gospel to others.

Spend some time in prayer asking God to help you apply what you have learnt.

For Further Study

For this course, we recommend the use of the following textbook as a basis for further reading:

**Howard Marshall, Stephen Travis and Ian Paul,
Exploring the New Testament volume 2: The Letters and Revelation,
London: SPCK, 2002**

This book gives an overview of the world of the New Testament and the importance of letters in the Early Church and then gives introductory articles about each letter. The book also gives suggestions for further reading and study.

For an introduction to the life and letters of Paul see:

Chapter 3: Paul, his letters and his life, pp.31-46.

Specific discussion of Paul's early life and his conversion can be found on pp.36-39.

For an introduction to the Epistle to the Romans see:

Chapter 8: The Letter to the Romans, pp.105-127.

Specific discussion about Paul's purpose in writing Romans can be found on pp.105-108.

An introductory video on Romans can be found at:

<http://www.bibledex.com/videos/romans.html>

**Feedback:****block 1 session 1b**

1b.2	Your words. A righteousness of/from God that is not dependent on obedience to the Law but on faith in Jesus.
1b.3	justification and acquittal
1b.4	a legal declaration of innocence.
1b.5	Your answer. I think that these verses are more about a declaration of God's justice than about making us righteous.
1b.6	NRSV: The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous.
1b.7	Your words. Isaiah 53 speaks of the Lord's servant dying to take the sin of the people, so that they may go free from the judgment of exile. It speaks of him making 'many' to be accounted righteous (see Mark 10:45). Paul sees the death of Jesus as justifying people.
1b.9	Your answer. I would say, yes. Paul is contrasting a righteousness that comes from our own efforts, with a gift of righteousness that comes from God.
1b.10	Your words. Something like: The first talks about righteousness originating from God, the second talks about righteousness as a characteristic of God. In other words, the first talks about the origin of righteousness, the second talks about the nature of righteousness.
1b.11	Your answer. My suggestion is that it implies that righteousness is a characteristic of the new age that is fulfilled in Jesus.
1b.13	The cross of Jesus
1b.15	a. Your answer. Mine is that Jesus paid the price for our sin so that we can be free. b. Your answer. Mine is that Jesus put us right with God and fulfilled all that the Old Testament sacrifices stood for by taking our place on the cross as a sacrifice for sin.
1b.16	Your answer. Mine is: there can be no boasting based on our religious or ethnic background because salvation for everyone is by faith and God is the God of everyone. Implications for today will depend on your own situation.
1b.17	a. : c. : d. : f.
1b.18	Your answer should include that only faith can make us righteous before God, not works.
1b.19	a. before he was circumcised : b. the uncircumcised who believe : the circumcised who believe : c. faith : d. rests on grace : to all Abraham's descendants.
1b.20	You might have said, "Abraham wasn't circumcised when he was accounted righteous. He was accepted in response to faith, and all people of faith are his true descendants, not simply Jews."
1b.21	Here are my comments: a. is definitely not correct since it implies that you are only saved if your faith reaches a certain standard; b. is right as far as it goes but is not all he intends; c. is probably true but not the whole truth; d. I think this is Paul's main concern - but you may be able to express it better than this.
1b.22	Your words: Mine are: If you trust in the God who raised Jesus from the dead, you will be considered righteous, just as Abraham was.
1b.23	Check your answers from frames 18, 20, 22.
1b.24	Your answer. You might like to share this in your tutorial.

This study forms part of an Open Learning programme based on local study groups for anyone who:

- wishes to grow in knowledge of God and understanding of the Christian faith;
- is committed to systematic, disciplined and in-depth personal study;
- is ready to learn from others in small discussion groups;
- is willing to make use of God-given gifts for mission and ministry in the local church.

The programme is designed to be accessible to those who have no previous theological study as well as to those who want to engage with the Bible at a deeper level. The courses are suitable for those who feel called to involvement in different avenues of ministry and mission in the local church as well as those who want to work out how to live more effectively as Christians in daily life whether at home or in the workplace and society.

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