

BUT Now...But NOW...BUT NOW

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe...

(Rom. 3:21-22)

The last half of Romans 3 is a critical passage in our progression through Romans. Some have suggested that this is the most important passage in the Bible. If correct, then it is worth our time and effort to study it carefully. It starts with the words BUT NOW, and we will start there as well. This “but now” phrase can be read in 3 ways: “**BUT** now” or “but **NOW**” or “**BUT NOW!**” All together they form one of the greatest statements in human history.

BUT now!

When we read this phrase stressing the “BUT,” we take note of the fact that there is a strong transition in the immediate context. The preceding verses painted a bleak picture of our human condition. All are under the control of sin (3:9), Paul said. There is none righteous—no, not even one person (3:10). There is none who understands or seeks after God’s ways (3:11). All have gone out of the way, all are unprofitable. There is none that does good (3:12). In fact, the whole world stands guilty before God and worthy of condemnation and death (3:21-22).

Wow! What if the Book of Romans stopped here? We would remain lost, sinking in a quagmire of sin and death,

unable to escape on our own. In chapters 2 and 3, God had ruled out personal righteousness, relative righteousness and law righteousness as a means of acceptance before Him because His passing score was 100%. His righteous standard was the Lord Jesus Christ. We have no righteousness that God can accept. We stand condemned in God’s court. We have no power to extract ourselves and remedy our lost condition. If Romans ended at verse 20, the next logical thing we would expect God the Judge to do is say the command, “Take them away to the punishment they deserve!”

Thank goodness Romans doesn’t stop there. Into the dark blackness of mankind’s hopelessness, with its encroaching horizon of despair, God shines a ray of hope. Just at the point when we could do nothing, God does something amazing—He steps down from the court bench and provides His Own righteousness to the guilty and condemned. A righteousness that comes from the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who took our punishment and paid our debt on the cross. No other righteousness will do, **BUT now** God provides freely by grace through faith what we need most—real righteousness that holds up in the court of heaven and that delivers us from our dire, lost, hopeless condition.

but NOW!!

If, on the other hand, we stress the “**NOW**,” we discover another important facet of truth. “Now” indicates that God is doing something *now* that He was not doing *before*. “Now” He is dealing with mankind apart from Israel and the Law. “Now” He has implemented a dispensational change. *Before* He dealt with Israel under the Law, but *Now* He is dealing with the Church, the Body of Christ, under Grace.

The Law said, “Obey My commandments and live; disobey them and die.” The Law

demanded human works and achievements, but the great lesson on the Old Testament and Gospels is that after 1500 years under the law, even with all the privileges of a special relationship with God, Israel proved beyond doubt that we could not do what the Law demanded. The Law is not a solution to our dire situation; it is one of the causes. That is why Paul says in Rom. 3:20, “by the deeds of the Law no flesh shall be justified in His sight.” You see, the Law doesn’t look at what we do right; it looks at what we do wrong. It is not a defense attorney; it is a perfect prosecuting attorney. It doesn’t demand a good or sincere effort; it calls for perfect obedience. Every infraction of the Law demands a just recompense—and for God’s Law that is death.

God’s “but **NOW**” announces to the world that He is not dealing with us in the same way He was dealing with Israel. He dealt with Israel on the basis of law and works, which led to condemnation and death. But He is **NOW** dealing with us on the basis of grace and faith, which lead to righteousness, life and peace.

BUT NOW!!!

In this “**BUT NOW**” God through Paul proclaims that He has changed His administration of mankind. God dealt with Israel according to the Law in the past. **BUT NOW** He is dealing with us according to Grace in what Paul calls the Dispensation of Grace. Before we were powerless to remedy our lost, hopeless enslavement to sin and death. **BUT NOW**, under grace, God remedied it with His righteousness, which He gives freely to all who believe. He declares believers right, brings them into His presence and imparts eternal life. “**BUT NOW, the righteousness of God without the law is manifested...**”

