

## **An Important Passage in Romans:**

### **The Saving Righteousness of God by Faith (3:21–4:25)**

In order to understand the beauty and greatness of what Christ did for us it is vital that we understand why it was necessary. In the previous section, 1:18-3:20, Paul established that God is righteously wrathful against all mankind on account of our. God's wrath is not an irrational anger, but the demonstration of His justice upon all who transgress His law by sinning. Paul will now spend several chapters discussing how through Christ God has in fact **put people right with Him**. Through faith in Jesus a person can be **declared and treated as righteous** by God despite the fact that they have sinned in the past, and will continue to be a sinner in this life!

### **Three Theological Words (3:23-26)**

Paul uses three words in 3:21-26 that help paint a picture of what Christ accomplished on the cross for those who trust Him. Each term has an associated place or word picture attached to it.<sup>1</sup> (It is a good idea to commit to memory both the basic definition, and the associated "place" for each word or concept.)

#### ***Justification***

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- ☞ **Definition of Justify:** to declare and treat as righteous
  - Thus, to be justified by faith is to be **declared** and **treated** as righteous by God through faith in Jesus Christ.
  - It is helpful to remember that when I put faith in Christ He treats me **Just-as-if-I'd** never sinned. More than that, He treats me as if I had lived a life of perfection.
  
- ☞ **Associated Location:** A Court of Law
  - ◆ "Justifying is the judge's act. From the litigant's standpoint, therefore, 'be justified' means 'get the verdict' (Is. 43:9, 26)."<sup>2</sup>
  
- ☞ **Mini Greek Word Study:** Righteousness
  - ◆ **Righteousness** (1:18, 3:21-22): *dikaiosynē*, noun
    1. Meaning *uprightness, righteousness*, particularly speaks of "the act of doing what God requires."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Kenneth Choflet, "Romans & Galatians Study Notes," Zion Bible College, p.17ff.

<sup>2</sup> J.I. Packer, *Justification* in *New Bible Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, ed., J. D. Douglas, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1996), p 636.

<sup>3</sup> Louw-Nida Lexicon

- **Matthew 5:10** "Blessed are those who are persecuted for **righteousness**' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- 2. Legally, "*justice, uprightness, righteousness*"<sup>4</sup>
- 3. In the case of **1:18** and **3:21**, *God's way of putting people into right relationship, or making them right before Him*. Friberg writes, "in Pauline thought of the divine action by which God puts a person right with himself."
- ◆ **Justify** (24, 26): *dikaioō* verb
  1. "to render a favorable verdict, *vindicate*"
  2. Thus, to declare and treat as righteous.
- ◆ **Just** (26): *dikaios*
  1. "morally and ethically, of persons *righteous, upright, just*, from a legal viewpoint *law-abiding, honest, good* (in behavior), opposite; from a religious viewpoint, as rightly related to God *righteous, just*"<sup>5</sup>

**We are Justified by Grace through Faith in Jesus Christ! (3:21-22, 24)**

**Grace**

- ◆ **Definition:** God's unearned & unmerited favor
- ◆ Grace is not a last resort or something God gives occasionally. It is rather the context in which you live out your entire relationship with God. We live under grace—God's unearned, unmerited, unmatched love, faithfulness, and favor!

**Faith**

- ◆ **Definition:** At its most basic, *faith* is simply belief.
  - BDAG: state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted, *trust, confidence, faith* (see pages 28-29 for more)
- ◆ When used in relation to Christ and the Gospel it speaks of wholeheartedly embracing Him as your only savior, and the only sacrifice for sin.
- ◆ Faith Acrostic: **F**orsaking **A**ll **I** Trust **H**im!
  - **Forsaking All** of what?
    - Forsaking all other (false) ways of salvation.
    - Forsaking any idea that I could earn my salvation through my own good works.
  - **I**

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<sup>4</sup> Friberg

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

- A person's faith in Christ must be personal. Each person enters into their own relationship with Christ personally. They are not merely embracing the teachings of the Church, or the Bible, but are embracing Christ Himself as their savior, Lord, and treasure.
- **Trust Him** how?
  - Trust Him as the only one who is able to save me, because He laid His life down as a perfect sacrifice for my sins. Trust Him because He is trustworthy, and is truly able to save me when I put my faith in Him as my savior, Lord, and Treasure.

### Who gets justified?

- **Sinners** who put their **faith** in Jesus (vv. 23-24).
- Verse 23 speaks of **past sins** and **present sins** in the life of a person who **currently** stands **justified** before God!

### What Does This Mean for Your Life Now?

#### ☞ ***Forgiveness of Sin—past, present, and future!***

You now have a position in God's kingdom that is dependant wholly upon what Christ has done for you. Your sins have all been paid for (which we will explain under the next two theological words).

#### ☞ ***Freedom from Self-Condernation***

We all feel guilty when we sin, and should take our sin seriously as something God calls us to reject, and as something the Holy Spirit wants to replace with fruit. We must accept however that we are not perfect and God accepts and loves us anyway because of Jesus!

#### ☞ ***Reject Emotionally Based & Circumstance Based Confidence before God***

Let the legal nature of Justification take hold your changing emotions and varying levels of personal righteousness!

## Redemption

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#### ☞ **Definition of Redeem:** to rescue from the control or domination of another person or power through the paying of a price or ransom

- ◆ Christ has redeemed us from two things:
  - The penalty of sin
  - The power of sin

#### ☞ **Associated Location:** The Slave Trader's Block

- ◆ "Redemption means deliverance from some evil by payment of a price. It is more than simple deliverance. Thus prisoners of war might be released on payment of a price which was called a 'ransom' (Gk.*lytron*). The word-group

based on *lytron* was formed specifically to convey this idea of release on payment of ransom. In this circle of ideas Christ's death may be regarded as 'a ransom for many' (Mk. 10:45). . . Again, slaves might be released by a process of ransom."<sup>6</sup>

- ◆ "This is likened to a slavery, a captivity which man cannot himself break, so that redemption represents the intervention of an outside Person who pays the price which man cannot pay."<sup>7</sup>

☉ Mini Greek Word Study: Redemption

- ◆ **Redemption** (3:24): *apolytrōseōs*
  - "literally, as an action a buying back of a slave or captive through payment of a ransom; hence *setting free, release*"<sup>8</sup>
- ◆ **At the center of redemption is the concept of the Ransom** (not to mention that the word ransom, *lutron* is literally at the center of the Greek word for redemption *apolytrōseōs*.)
  - **Ransom: *lutron***
    - "as a price paid for release from slavery or captivity *ransom*; figuratively, of the cost to Christ in providing deliverance from sin *price of release, ransom, means of setting free*"
    - **Matthew 20:28** even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a **ransom** for many."
    - There are a number of words used in the NT to express this thought.
- ◆ A.T. Robertson writes, "God did not set men right out of hand with nothing done about men's sins. We have the words of Jesus that he came to give his life a ransom (*lutron*) for many (Mr 10:45; Mt 20:28). *Lutron* is common in the papyri as the purchase-money in freeing slaves."

### What Does This Mean for Your Life Now?

☉ **You are Free from Sin's Enslaving Power**

The concept of Christ redeeming us from slavery is expanded significantly by Romans 6 (even though the words "redemption" isn't used, the concepts are related). Paul reveals that those who have faith in Christ have died with Christ. Jesus died for our sins, and Paul teaches that this means Christians have died to sin—meaning that they are free from its power, or that they no longer have any relationship to it. Paul goes on to teach that this new relationship (or lack thereof) with sin must be enforced by the believer. He writes, "So you also must **consider** yourselves dead to sin and

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<sup>6</sup> Leon Morris, *Redeemer, Redemption in New Bible Dictionary, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, ed., J. D. Douglas, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1996), p 1003.

<sup>7</sup> Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, (Grand rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), p. 61.

<sup>8</sup> Friberg.

alive to God in Christ Jesus. **Let not sin** therefore **reign** in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. (Romans 6:11-12)”

☞ **Redemption is a concrete basis for your Justification**

This helps us to count on it more securely. God’s declaration of righteous over you is not based on His reading of your emotions at the time you accepted Christ, nor is it based on how excited you feel about Jesus at a given time. It is not based on how perfectly you are obeying God at a given time either.

It is based rather upon the redemption which Jesus purchased for us by laying down His perfect life as our substitute for sin. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).”

## Propitiation

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☞ **Definition of Propitiation:** “A sacrifice that bears God’s wrath to the end and in so doing changes God’s wrath toward us into favor.”<sup>9</sup>

- ◆ Christ’s death on the cross propitiated or appeased God’s wrath against those sinners who put their faith in Christ. Those who trust in Him as their substitute for sin have had God’s wrathful disposition and future judgment removed, and thus stand in His favor and grace.
- ◆ Morris writes, “It is the combination of God’s deep love for the sinner with His uncompromising reaction against sin which brings about what the Bible calls propitiation. Since God would not leave man to suffer all the consequences of his sin, Christ suffered . . .”<sup>10</sup>
- ◆ He continues, “Among the heathen, propitiation was thought of as an activity whereby the worshipper was able himself to provide that which would induce a change of mind in the deity. In plain language he bribed his god to be favorable to him. When the term was taken over into the Bible these unworthy and crude ideas were abandoned, and only the central truth expressed by the term was retained, namely that propitiation signifies the averting of wrath by the offering of a gift. But in both testaments the thought is plain that the gift which secures the propitiation is from God Himself. He provides the way whereby men may come to Him. Thus the use of the concept of propitiation witnesses to two great realities, the one, the reality and seriousness of the divine reaction against sin, and the other, the reality and the greatness of the divine love which provided the gift which should avert the wrath from men.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, Glossary.

<sup>10</sup> Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, p. 210.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

- Associated Location: The OT Sacrificial system, especially the mercy seat, but ultimately the Cross
- Mini Greek Word Study: Propitiation
  - ◆ **Propitiation** (3:25): *hilastērion*
  - ◆ Commenting on the OT background and NT use of the word, Moo writes the following:
    - “The word there usually refers to the ‘mercy seat’ a component of the altar in the tabernacle. The word is particularly prominent in Lv. 16, where the ritual of the Day of Atonement is prescribed. It is on this ‘mercy seat’ that the blood of the sacrifice is sprinkled, in order ‘to make atonement’ for the people. Since in its only other NT occurrence (Heb. 9:5) *hilastērion* refers to this mercy seat, it seems likely that Paul uses the word with this meaning. His point, then, would be that Jesus Christ is the NT counterpart to the OT ‘mercy seat’. As this ‘mercy seat’ was the place where God took care of his people’s sin, so now Jesus Christ has been *presented* (publicly displayed for all to see) as the ‘place’ where God now deals, finally and forever, with his people’s sin. Atonement now takes place in him and this atonement, as in the OT, includes both the forgiving of sins—expiation—and the turning away of God’s wrath—propitiation. This propitiation is, of course, a far cry from the sort of ‘bribery’ of capricious and self-serving gods featured in some ancient religions. The propitiation that takes place at the cross is the gift of God himself and involves the satisfaction of his own righteous and holy anger at sin.<sup>12</sup>”

### **The preservation of God’s Righteousness through propitiation (v. 25-26)**

#### **Forgiveness *offered* and Justice *maintained***

- ◆ With all of the excitement in this passage we need to be careful not to miss this important summary in Paul’s argument which started at 1:18. What happened to all of the wrath that God had toward those sinners that have put faith in Christ? What did God do with it? He poured it out upon Christ when He died on the cross!

#### **What does it mean that former sins were “passed over”?**

- ◆ “He has justified people like Abraham and David without extracting the full penalty for their sins. That penalty has now been paid by Christ on the cross, revealing God to be just both in his passing over of those sins *committed*

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<sup>12</sup>Moo, NBC.

*beforehand* (25b) and in his justification of sinners *at the present time* (26a). Thus, in a sentence that summarizes the whole paragraph, God is now seen to be the one is both *just* and *the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus* (26b).”<sup>13</sup>

### What Does This Mean for Your Life Now?

#### ☞ **Freedom from God’s wrath**

Many believers think God is mad at them all the time! By His own declaration, He accepts and loves you! You stand under God’s favor now!

#### ☞ **You stand in God’s grace.**

Christ’s death on the cross propitiated or appeased God’s wrath against those sinners who put their faith in Christ. Those who trust in Him as their substitute for sin have had God’s wrathful disposition and future judgment removed, and thus stand in His favor and grace.

### ***Spend the Rest of Your Life Reflecting on the Truth that We Have Learned Here:***

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From John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding* “As I was walking up and down in the house, as a man in a most woeful state, that word of God took hold of my heart, Ye are ‘justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 3:24). But oh, what a turn it made upon me! Now was I as one awakened out of some troublesome sleep and dream, and listening to this heavenly sentence, I was as if I had heard it thus expounded to me: Sinner, thou thinkest that because of thy sins and infirmities I cannot save thy soul, but behold my Son is by me, and upon him I look, and not on thee, and will deal with thee according as I am please with him.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 257, quoted by F.F. Bruce, Romans, (Grand rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), p. 98-99.