

ROMANS

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED

GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS EXPLAINED

Text: Romans 3:24-26

Main preaching point: God provides His very own righteousness to sinners who repent and believe in Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION:

In March 1911, the Syracuse Advertising Men's Club held a banquet to discuss journalism and publicity. In an article in *The Post Standard* covering this event, the author quoted Arthur Brisbane as saying, "Use a picture. It's worth a thousand words," and thus, the adage was born. What is meant by the adage is seeing something is better for learning than having it described. And in our text today, Paul gives us three vivid pictures that explain *the righteousness God provides through faith in Jesus Christ*.

The first picture belongs to **the law courts**—it is seen in verse 24a with the word "*justified*." The second picture is taken from **the marketplace**—it is seen in verse 24b in the word "*redemption*." The third picture emerges from **the temple precincts**—and it is discovered in verse 25 with the word, "*propitiation*." All three pictures set before our eyes *the source, grounds, and wonder of justification*.

Martin Luther said, "The church stands or falls on this doctrine of justification." If you ever hope to stand before God *accepted, acquitted, and welcomed* into His presence, then come up close and pay attention to these verses. The theme before us is: how God provides His very own righteousness to sinners who repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Walk with me now through the Gospel gallery in this text as we behold, *God's Righteousness Explained*.

RECAP:

In what is perhaps the most important single paragraph ever written, Paul condenses and sets forth the magnificence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Beginning at verse 21, Paul has shown us...

- First, that **God's righteousness is apart from the Law (v.21a)**—that is, it is not accomplished by people keeping the Ten Commandments.
- Second, that **God's righteousness has been manifested (v.21b)**—it is not hidden behind types, symbols, and shadows. In the apostolic generation of the first century, God made it clear when Jesus came, died, and rose again.
- Third, that **God's righteousness was witnessed by the Law and the Prophets (v.21c)**—which is a summary term encapsulating the whole Old Testament. The Gospel is not new, but it is as old as the Old Testament.

- Finally, **God's righteousness is through faith in Jesus Christ (v.22)**—faith is a gift of God (*Eph.2:8-9*). It is not a work, but it is simply the channel, the cord, the hand that receives the benefits of salvation found *by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Act 4:12)*.

Now Paul explains the source, grounds, and wonder of God's justifying righteousness in three pictures. The first picture unfolds:

EXPOSITION:

A. THE SOURCE OF JUSTIFICATION (v.24a)—What or who is the source of our justification?

Here we are told in plain language that everyone can understand—*the source of justification is God and His grace*.

²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace

The word **"justified"** or justification is a very important term that we need to be crystal clear about. So here are several truths to hang your understanding of this important doctrine on.

1. **Justification is by God.** The first truth is found at the beginning of verse 24, *"being justified."* Here, Paul explains that we are *passive* and someone else is *active*. Someone is justifying us. We cannot justify ourselves. Someone is the justifier, and we are the ones who are being justified. Who is the One who alone can justify us? The answer is stated in verse 26—*"so that He [God] would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."* It is God the Father—and God alone—who can bring the gavel down and declare us to be *the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ*. All that matters is what God has to say about this issue. God is the justifier.
2. **Justification is immediate.** The word "justification" is a legal or forensic term belonging to the law courts, and it is the opposite of *condemnation*. When God the Judge declares the guilty sinner to be righteous before His judgment bar based on what Jesus has done, *this justification is immediate*. You don't have to wait 30 days until some paperwork is filled in heaven. It takes place in a moment! Sanctification takes place progressively over the entirety of the Christian's life. Glorification takes place in a moment and lasts throughout all eternity. Justification is declared the millisecond one believes in Jesus Christ.

You walk into church or a Bible study or you are listening to a message like this on YouTube—you are lost and under the wrath of God—and in the middle of the message, the truth is being made known to you. When you put your faith in Jesus—before you sing the closing doxology and walk out of the service or study—you are *immediately justified before God*. Justification is immediate.

3. **Justification is irrevocable.** What God has declared stands in the courts of heaven *forever*. There is no higher court of appeal to overrule the declaration of God in heaven on this matter. Paul writes in Romans 11:29—*"For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."*
4. **Justification is complete.** You can never be *more justified* than the moment you believe in Christ and God declares you to be the righteousness of God in Christ. This justification is the reversal and the opposite of condemnation. Before you believed, Jesus said in John 3:18, *"He who does not believe has been judged already."*

In John 3:36, He said, *"But he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."* Before we believe, the verdict on your life and mine was *condemnation*. After we believe—the moment we believe—we are justified by God.

Although justification and condemnation are both pronouncements of a judge, in the Christian context, they contain present and future consequences. God anticipates His final judgment by bringing into the present what belongs properly to the last day and declares the person who believes, *acquitted of all sin because of the work of Another*—the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. **Justification changes our status before God.** Justification and pardon are not synonymous terms. Pardon or forgiveness is *negative* and deals with the removal of our sin debt. Whereas justification is *positive* and speaks to *the bestowal of a righteous status and the sinner's reinstatement in favor and fellowship with God*. We need more than forgiveness to be saved. Forgiveness brings us back to zero. Zeroes don't go to heaven. Forgiveness washes away sin, but to have a right standing with God, we need more than *neutral*. Forgiveness gives us a zero balance in the spiritual checking account before God. But to go to heaven, there must be a positive deposit into our account, and only God can place it there because it comes from Him—the righteousness of God!

Again, I say, justification is the pronouncement or declaration of a new status. To justify is not to sanctify. It is not the *infusion of a new righteousness* or *the gift of a new heart*. That's regeneration. Although justification (a new status) and regeneration (a new heart) are not identical, they are *simultaneous*. When the sinner is given a new heart to repent of sin and believe in the Lord Jesus, the moment faith is placed in Christ, the status is declared in the court of heaven—our status is changed from *a child of wrath* (Eph.2:2) to *a child of grace*, from a child of the devil (John 8:44) to child of God (John 1:12), from *an enemy combatant* to a reconciled member of God's household and family. Paul declares in

- **Romans 5:1**—Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

6. **Justification is a gift of God's grace.** *"Being justified as a gift by His grace."* This justification finds its *source in God* and His free and independent grace. I say independent because this gift was independent of any action or work in the past, present, or future. God did not look down through time and see that you would believe, and on that basis, justify you. Grace is not only *undeserved favor*, but it is also *undesired favor*. It was not *wanted*, then God gave it to us. Wages are what you work hard for. You earn wages and deserve them. A gift is different. There is nothing you can do to earn it. It is based upon the mercy of the Giver. We have no merit or any basis to claim God's gift. God freely chooses to give this prepaid gift to those who deserve the very opposite. Paul says in Romans 5:8, *"God demonstrate[d] His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners [hating Him, rebelling against Him, ignoring Him], Christ died for us."* And in dying, He paid the price in full. We don't even cover the tip. John R.W. Stott once said, *"Grace is God loving, God stooping, God coming to the rescue, God giving Himself generously in and through Jesus Christ."*

What does this mean for us? How should we respond? The New Testament scholars Morison and Godet appropriately call attention to an experience of the poet William Cowper in connection with this passage. It was a time when he was brought to the very verge of despair. He had walked up and down in his room for a long while, profoundly agitated. At last, he seated himself near his window, and seeing a Bible, he opened it to seek, if possible, some consolation and strength.

"The passage which met my eye," he says, "was the 24th and 25th verses of Romans 3. On reading it I immediately received power to believe. The rays of the Sun of Righteousness fell on me in all their fulness; I saw the complete sufficiency of the expiation which Christ had wrought for my pardon and entire justification. In an instant I believed, and received the peace of the Gospel." "If" he adds, "the arm of the Almighty had not supported me, I believe I should have been overwhelmed with gratitude and joy; my eyes filled with tears; transports choked my utterance. I could only look to heaven in silent fear, overflowing with love and wonder."

We move now from the first picture of the source to the second picture explaining...

B. THE GROUNDS OF JUSTIFICATION (vv.24b-26a)—What is the grounds, the basis, the foundation, or the cause of our justification?

The question is, if God justifies freely by His grace, on what grounds does He do so without compromising His Word that He would not acquit the guilty (*Cf. Ex.23:7*)? The answer is found in this word "**redemption.**"

through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

The word "**redemption**" means the payment of a ransom in order to secure the release of a captive held under the tyranny of another. In the Old Testament, the term "**redemption**" had its origin in the releases of prisoners of war on payment of a price, and was extended to include slaves, who were purchased to be set free and restored to their own land.

The picture here is that we were slaves or captives in bondage to our sin and guilt, utterly unable to liberate ourselves. But in eternity past, an emancipation was passed that a Deliverer would come to set God's elect ones free from sin and Satan's captivity.

How did the Deliverer or Savior do it? By giving His life (*Mark 10:45*). What did He pay our ransom with? Peter writes, "*You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.*" (*1 Pet.1:18-19*). To whom did He pay this price? To His Father. For we as sinners are indebted to God alone (*Ps.49:7-8; Is.53:10-11; Rom.5:12ff*). What are the former slaves set free to do? Not live for themselves but serve a new Master and walk in a new way of life (*Rom.6:15-22*).

When Jesus Christ entered this world, He came into the slave market of sin. He came into the prison house of this world. And through the perfection of His sinless life, and His substitutionary death, by the shedding of His own blood, Jesus Christ has purchased IN FULL the redemption of all God's elect ones. You'll never hear any better news than this for the rest of your life! This is primary; everything else is secondary. All this redemption, this deliverance, this freedom is "**in Christ Jesus,**" that is to say, in union with Him. Outside of it, it does not exist. It is not in works, church membership, giving, good works, communion, baptism, or anywhere else. This redemption is found in its entirety in the Person and work of Christ. And if it is to be yours, you must be in a relationship with Jesus Christ by faith.

- **Ephesians 1:7**—In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.

How did God accomplish all this? In verse 25, the third word picture is—"**propitiation.**"

²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.

Paul has shown us the picture of the law courts with **“justified.”** He showed us the picture of the marketplace with **“redemption.”** Now, he takes us to the temple courts with the word **“propitiation.”** The word **“propitiation”** is not a well-known term, but it is an important one. It means the removal of wrath.

Paul has mounted heavy artillery in Chapter 1:18-3:20 to show that *all men are not only sinners*, but all men—Jew and Gentile, religious and non-religious—are *under the condemning wrath of a holy God*. So, if God is burning with divine anger against sin, how can it be averted? How can it be appeased? Satisfied? The answer is that God averted, appeased, or satisfied His own wrath by “displaying publicly” Christ on a cross.

Christ not only *purchased our release* from our bondage to sin, but He also *satisfied the anger of God* toward us. What happened on the cross of Jesus is that He *bought us* and *satisfied the Father*—all at the same time (*John 8:32-36*)!

To put it another way, God purposed to direct against His very own Self, in the person of His Son, the full weight of that righteous wrath that we deserve. God placated His own wrath.

- **1 John 4:10**—In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

Christ is *the propitiation*. Christ is *the abiding mercy seat*—the place where God can meet with man through Christ’s atoning blood. *“In His blood”* refers to His sacrificial death.

Let me ask you this: If Jesus had scratched His finger on a nail, would that have been enough to avert, appease, or satisfy God’s wrath? Would a single drop of His sinless, holy blood be enough to cleanse our sin? The answer is NO! Jesus didn’t simply have to bleed; He had to die, *because “the wages of sin is death”* (*Rom.6:23*).

Paul writes in...

- **Romans 5:6-11**—For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹ And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.
- **Romans 8:1**—Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

There is not one drop of wrath that God has for you if you are in Christ, because God laid it all on Him. God did not open a hole in the ground in Death Valley and pour His hot displeasure, fury, and indignation into the ground and cover it up with dirt. No, He poured it on His own Son, on Calvary’s cross, in full, for us. I know this is impossible to get your minds around, but it’s true. And the only people who really comprehend what this means are damned souls in hell at this very moment who are suffering under the wrath of God. There is no more wrath for believers.

Let me give you another picture. Picture a triangle. With God the Father on the top. Jesus Christ is on the lower left angle, and we are on the lower right angle and the cross is in the middle. Got it.

On the line connecting the Son to the Father, write the word **“propitiation.”** What Jesus did on the cross was between He and His Father. It satisfied, appeased, and placated His wrath. On the bottom line, connecting Christ to us, write the word **“redemption.”** Jesus redeemed us out of the slave market of sin. On the line, connecting us to God the Father, write the word, **“justification.”** God the Father declares us to be the righteousness of God in Christ on the basis of what He did for us on the cross. If you understand that simple triangle—and the three theological realities—you will understand something of *the multi-dimensional work of Jesus Christ and the glorious Gospel!*

Why did God do this?

This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

Now, hear this: the righteousness of God demanded that someone suffer in our place if we were to be released from our sin. This is what the Old Testament sacrifices foreshadowed. God could not wink at our sin. God could not just sweep it under the carpet. Sin had to be dealt with in full. So, what about the sins of those in the Old Testament someone might ask?

God gave them a “forbearance”—**“because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed” (v.25).** If you’ve had student loans and you could not make the payments, you asked for a “forbearance.” A forbearance literally means *“a holding back.”* A delay. And in the case of sins previously committed in the Old Testament, God held back punishment that He might have inflicted. God saved Old Testament believers on credit, knowing that Christ would come to pay the debt in full. They were saved looking forward to the coming of Christ and His death. We are saved looking back to what He accomplished on our behalf.

Verse 25 points to *what God did about sin in the past.* Verse 26 refers to *what God has done in the present*—to demonstrate His righteousness now!

²⁶ for the demonstration, *I say,* of His righteousness at the present time,

Today is the day of salvation, now is the acceptable time (2 Cor.6:2).

Now, here is the mystery of the Gospel.

C. THE WONDER OF JUSTIFICATION (v.26b)

so that He [God] would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

To say that God is **“just”** means that He must punish our sins. To say that He is **“the justifier”** means He has devised a plan whereby Another would stand in our place and bear our sins and suffer our punishment. If God had simply punished sinners and left no doubt about His justice, someone could question His mercy. If God had simply forgiven sinners, and left no doubt about His mercy, someone could question His justice. What Paul declares to us is that the cross shows us both.

- **Psalm 85:10**—Lovingkindness and truth have met together;
Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Christ's death on the cross was *penal*—it was a satisfaction of divine justice.

It was *substitutionary*—He took the punishment which was due to others.

The required penalty has been paid. God's justice has not been set aside. He remains just. Both His justice and love are satisfied—neither is set aside. He remains just, and yet there is justification for every believer in Jesus. Oh, the wisdom of it all!

The wonder of the cross is that in the very same stroke, it satisfied both the love of God and the justice of God. And the very same moment it shows that God is both the Judge, who cares enough about His world to set standards and hold us accountable to them, and the Justifier, who has done everything necessary to forgive and restore us. He is a Father worth having. Christ is a Savior worth knowing. God is a Father we can have, and Christ is a Savior we can know, love, and follow.

There is hope for perishing sinners—but only one hope! How *narrow the Gospel is*, yet how wide it is! Its benefits come *only* to those who have *faith in Christ!*

How profound the Gospel is! Yet, it is strikingly simple—*the righteousness of God is received by faith, and by faith alone.*

CONCLUSION:

This is *the heart of the Gospel*. The question now is, *are you among the justified?* Are you among those who have seen their sin, closed their mouths in their own defense, and asked for and received the mercy of God in Christ?

I pray you will not wait another minute until you know that you are.

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