

## Paul's Letter to the Romans:



THE PINNACLE OF  
CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

### But Now a Righteousness from God...

#### Romans 3:21-26

Last week, I used an illustration from my boyhood to try to emphasize the significance of the change that occurs here in Romans starting in chapter 3, verse 21. For those of you that weren't here, let me just repeat a portion of what I said back then. When I was a boy and whenever my family was in Tyler, I used to just beg my parents to go to the Tyler Rose Garden. Whenever they would agree to take me, we would leave my Aunt Murdie's house and head out. I remember there was a sign that read, "**Tyler Rose Garden Straight Ahead.**" Unfortunately, there was also something else straight ahead that the sign didn't care to reveal and that was the Tyler Soap Factory. Now there was a reason for that and that reason was that the Tyler Soap Factory stunk to high heavens. We would roll up the windows on our car and just try to hold our breath for eight or nine blocks as we drove past it. Then after that eight or nine blocks, we drove up a little hill and hurriedly rolled down the windows of our car and breathed in the wonderful, wafting scent of the tens of thousands of roses that were in bloom at the Rose Garden.

Now I told that story because I was trying to make the point that the structure of Romans is almost exactly like that. Romans 1:17 is like the sign that announced what was ahead and what it announces is that...

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 1:17**...in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Now what we expected to happen was that Paul was going explain what that righteousness included, how it was brought about and how we might obtain it for ourselves. But he doesn't do that. Instead, he takes us on a little drive alongside the foul smelling "soap factory" of human sinfulness. Now, of course, he had a purpose in doing that. His purpose was to show that all people everywhere, whether pagan or religious, whether Gentile or Jewish, desperately need a righteousness other than the one they inherently possess in order to stand before Almighty God.

Then, finally in Romans 3:21, Paul takes back up the wondrous theme of the righteousness of God that God has revealed in the gospel. Last week, I read just the first half of verse 21 and I likened it the moment in our drive to the Tyler Rose Garden when we ascended that little hill leaving the scent of the soap factory and rolled down our car windows and breathed in the wondrous, wafting scent of ten thousand roses, only what we were actually breathing in last week was the glorious scent of God's kindness to us in Christ in the gospel.

Now what I want to do this morning is to begin a bit of an expositional tour of the gospel rose garden growing here in Romans 3:21-31. I want to do that by just pointing out to you and perhaps even marveling with you at some of the wondrous fragrant truths growing there. Let's start by looking at verse 3:21.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 3:21**...But now a righteousness from God, apart ( $\chi\omega\rho\iota\varsigma$ ) from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Now let me focus for a minute of that word **“righteousness.”** The reason I want to do that is because unless you know a little Greek it is very easy to miss the central point that the words, **“righteous”, “righteousness,” “justify”** and **“justification”,** are closely related. You see the Greek word for **“righteous”** is δίκαιος, the word for **“righteousness”** is the word δικαιοσύνη and the Greek word for **“to justify”** is δικαίωω and the word for **“justification”** is δικαίωσις. Now notice how the three terms all have the same common root, δικαιο. In each case, the term carries with it the notion of the **“declaration”** or **“pronouncement”** of justice.

Now these three words are used hundreds of times in the Bible but one place where you can really get a sense of what the word means occurs in Luke 7:29.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Luke 7:29** (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John.

<sup>BNT</sup> **Luke 7:29** Καὶ πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ἀκούσας καὶ οἱ τελῶναι ἐδικαίωσαν τὸν θεὸν βαπτισθέντες τὸ βάπτισμα Ἰωάννου·

Now. Let me ask you a question. Could the people and the tax collectors make God anything? No, of course they couldn't. What they could do was declare God to be just, which they did. Now the reason I am stressing the point that these words are related and they all have the notion of **“declaration”** or **“pronouncement”** associated with them. You can see the same sort of thing in Luke 18, where the self-righteous Pharisee and the publican went up to the temple to pray. You remember that the Pharisee “justified” himself before God and the publican pled for God’s mercy. The Lord Jesus Himself tells us in verse

14 that it was the publican who went home justified. But you can see that yourself.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Luke 18:14** "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. "

<sup>BNT</sup> **Luke 18:14** λέγω ὑμῖν, κατέβη οὗτος δεδικαιωμένος εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ παρ' ἐκεῖνον·

Now was this publican made sinless? Obviously, he was not made sinless. The man was and recognized that he was a vile sinner but he was declared to be in a right standing with God by God before God. Now keep that in mind and we'll talk more about that in a minute. Now let's continue to look at verse 21.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 3:21**...But now a righteousness from God, apart (χωρὶς) from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Now the next thing I want you to notice is that this righteousness or right standing before God is apart from the law. Of course, that doesn't mean that this righteousness is revealed only where the law doesn't exist. Rather, it means that this righteousness is revealed apart from the **"works of the law."** Charles Cranfield makes the point that **"apart from law"** here and **"apart from the works of the law"** in verse 29 and **"apart from works"** in 4:6 all mean the same thing.<sup>1</sup> And of course, that's right. Paul's point is that **"apart from law"** means apart from any righteousness that keeping the law can provide. Of course, the obvious reason for that is because we just found out in the previous section that nobody keeps the law.

Now look again at verse 21 because I want to look at is that little preposition **"apart"** where Paul says **"apart from law."**

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 3:21**...But now a righteousness from God, apart (χωρὶς) from law, has been made known...

Now I want you to get the full force of that little word and I thought the easiest way to help you do that might be to show you a couple of other places where the word is used. It is used in Matthew 14:21 and it is used in John 15:5.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Matthew 14:21**...The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides (χωρὶς) women and children.

Now in this first case, you can see that the word conveys the idea that the women and children were not included in the count that numbered 5,000. That is, there 5,000 men and that number did not include women and children.

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 15:5**..."I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart (χωρὶς) from me you can do nothing."

In this second verse you can see the point is that the branch is not connected to Jesus. In that sense it is apart from Him or not associated with Him. Now that helps us I think to get Paul's point. You see he is saying that now a righteousness from God has been revealed and this particular righteousness is not connected in any way with the works of the law.

Now finally, let me make one last comment on verse 21, especially on the last part of verse 21.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 3:21**...to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Now Paul's point and think it is so easy to forget that he has already made this point before is that this wonderful "**righteousness from God**" is not something from out of the blue. It is something that has been around from the beginning of

creation. It is witnessed both in the law, the five books of Moses and in the Prophets. That is, the promise of a future redeemer and His work on our behalf is both witnessed by and promised in the Old Testament. Now that promise may be in type and in shadow but it's really there. Now I wonder sometimes if we really and truly believe that's true. Oh, I know we say that we think it is true but I wonder if we actually read the Bible that way. What I mean is this, **"When you read the Old Testament do you look for Jesus there?"** He's there you know. We know He's there because we have His own good word that it is about Him from start to finish. Do you remember what he did when He was with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? He expounded the Old Testament to them explaining how it was about Him.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>NIV</sup> **Luke 24:27** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

And He made the same point to the Pharisees when He told them...

<sup>NIV</sup> **John 5:39**...You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, <sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

Now we could spend hours going through the Old Testament looking at the various prophecies and shadows and types that relate to Jesus but I am not going to do that because several will come up in the next two lessons, especially since those two lessons will deal expressly with the faith of both Abraham and David. So will put it off till then...well, maybe we could look at just one from the life of Abraham.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Genesis 22:6**...Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, <sup>7</sup> Isaac spoke up and said to his father

Abraham, "Father?" "Yes, my son?" Abraham replied. "The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" <sup>8</sup> Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. <sup>9</sup> When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup> Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. <sup>12</sup> "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." <sup>13</sup> Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son.

Now brothers and sisters, you don't have to be biblical scholar to see where this story points. You can see Abraham was not only speaking prophetically to his son but to us as well. God was going to provide a substitutionary sacrifice for Isaac but that ram was just an example or type of the ultimate substitutionary sacrifice to be fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus would ultimately stand as the great sin offering for all those who believe.

Of course, I could go on but then we would never finish this verse much less this chapter. So let's press on and look at verse 22-24.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 3:22**...This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, (διαστολή) <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις) that came by Christ Jesus.

Now notice how Paul picks back up the idea of a "righteousness from God" and notice how Paul says this righteousness is acquired. In the last verse, he made it a point to say that it was not acquired through the "works of the law." Here, he

says it is acquired through **“faith”** in Jesus Christ. Now I make that point because there are some people who think that the one work Christians are required to do is to exercise **“faith”**. They go so far as to say that the only part of man that is not fallen is that part that can still exercise **“faith”**. But we saw last week that there is not anybody out there exercising faith. There is no one out there seeking after God and the implication here in Romans and the explicit teaching of Ephesians 2:8-10 is that even the faith that we exercise is a gift from God. We cannot in good conscience claim even that our faith comes from us. Now I make the point here because sometimes the shorthand version is used in the Bible and is used among Christians and you will hear someone say, **“What is it that saves a person?”** Invariably the answer will be and no doubt you yourself have said, **“Faith.”** But the truth of the matter is that is not right. **“Faith”** doesn’t save. A man could have faith that he was an eggplant but that would not make it so and it certainly would not save him. There is nothing redemptive about faith in and of itself. The kindness of God in the work of Christ on the cross is what saves us. We could have **“faith”** till the cows come home and if Christ had not atoned for our sins we would be just as **“lost”** as the next heathen. So what is it that faith does? It connects us to the saving work of Christ. It is like the open hand of beggar receiving bread. It has no strength in and of itself; it simply receives. Have you ever noticed that whenever you see anyone rescued on one of these television rescue programs, whenever you see someone pulled from raging waters by rescue workers, you never hear them say, **“Did you see the way my hand reached out and grabbed that rescue line?”**<sup>3</sup> No, instead what do they say? They say things like, **“I was dead sure as the world. I had absolutely no strength left when they came along and saved me.”**

That's why this morning I want to teach you a little Latin phrase to help you keep in mind how it is that you are actually saved. We're actually saved *gratiae per fidem propter Christum*.<sup>4</sup> Can you figure out what that says? It says we are *saved by grace, through faith on account of Christ*.

Now it is O.K. to use the shorthand version *saved by faith* if you know the longhand version *saved by grace, through faith on account of Christ* by heart. But don't make the mistake and begin to think that *saved by faith* is anything like a full or complete expression of what actually happens. I mean my wife's official title is "*My Beloved and Faithful Wife of Thirty-one years Who Constantly Overlooks My Failures and My Eccentricities and Endures Me with Undeserved Patience and an even more Undeserved Love*." Of course, I just call her "**Sugar**" but make no mistake about it I know what her actual title is and I never really forget it, not even for a moment. How God has saved us ought to be just as emblazoned on our hearts. We ought to be able to speak of it with some sort of precision. We ought to know that our salvation is *gratiae per fidem propter Christum*, by grace, through faith, on account of Christ.

You see saving faith is not just some sort of dimwitted, anti-intellectual, glandular, emotive outburst. No, not at all. It's based upon facts. Saving faith is an uninformed faith. I would not wager a nickel on the reality of a man's faith that has no inclination to know about his Savior any more than I would wager a nickel on the well-being of a marriage where a man doesn't have an earnest, relentless desire to know what matters to his wife.

The Reformers gave proper consideration to this intellectual aspect of saving faith by noting that genuine saving faith really has three different aspects. They noted those three different aspects by three separate Latin terms: *notitia*,

assensus and fiducia.<sup>5</sup> Essentially, these three elements involve knowing the facts, assenting to the facts and finally trusting that the facts are true for us. Now if you think about it, you can see how not having one of these three elements would mean that your faith was lacking. I mean think about it. Does Satan know the facts about the gospel? Yes, he does. Does he believe the facts concerning the gospel are true? Of course, he does. He knows they are true. Does he willfully trust that the facts are true for him? No he does not. That is why James can say:

<sup>NIV</sup> **James 2:19** You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder.

You see the devil has a defective type of faith. He lacks the element of trust that stems from a regenerated will. True faith contains all three elements. Listen to Calvin.

Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup>

And listen also to Luther. I think you ought to hear what he actually said just in case you hear someone charge Luther with teaching that faith never manifested itself in good works.

Faith, however, is a divine work in us, which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God, [John 1:12–13]. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done them, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is nor

what good works are. Yet he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works.

Faith is a living, daring confidence in God's grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his life on it a thousand times. This knowledge of and confidence in God's grace makes men glad and bold and happy in dealing with God and with all creatures. And this is the work which the Holy Spirit performs in faith. Because of it, without compulsion, a person is ready and glad to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, out of love and praise to God who has shown him this grace. Thus it is impossible to separate works from faith, quite as impossible as to separate heat and light from fire.<sup>7</sup>

Obviously we could go on and on but I think you get the idea. Faith is not a work. Faith has different aspects and is gift from God linking us to saving work of Jesus Christ. That having been said, let's press on to verse 3:23.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 3:22**...This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, (διαστολή) <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...

You see the point there in 3:23 is that there is no difference between how people obtain this wonderful righteousness from God.<sup>8</sup> All who believe...all who place their faith in Christ gain the righteousness that comes from God and it doesn't matter who they are. In that regard there is no distinction between people. It doesn't matter if they are Jewish or Gentile and the reason it doesn't matter is because all people everywhere have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Now most commentators think that the "glory of God" here is a reference to what God intended man to be when he created him. If that is the case, then of course, it is a reference to the fact that God judges men not only for their actual sin but also for the stain of original sin they obtained in Adam.<sup>9</sup>

Now, I think one other thing that is interesting about this passage is that it is so often used in witnessing to show people that everyone everywhere is a sinner. You know it is one of the principal verse in the evangelistic presentation called the Roman's Road and it does certainly say that all men are sinners although that is not the principal point of the passage. No, the principal point of the passage is that all people who are saved are in fact saved the same way. They gain the righteousness of God through faith and there is absolutely no distinction in that regard. Jews are not saved one way and Gentiles another. No, it doesn't matter whether a man is a Gentile or a Jew, whether he is moral or a scoundrel that man is only saved through faith in Jesus Christ. Of course, the reason there is no distinction between how men are saved is because there is only place for a man to obtain the righteousness of God, which all men need because they have all sinned and come short of the glory of God, and that is in Christ. John Stott quotes Bishop Moule here and I just love what he says:

The harlot, the liar, the murderer, are short of God's glory; but so are you. Perhaps they stand at the bottom of a mine, and you on the crest of *one of the Alps*; but you are as little able to touch the stars as they.<sup>10</sup>

Now, let's look at verse 24.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 3:22**...This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference,<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and are justified (δικαιόω) freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Now I have to tell you that this is one of my favorite verses in the Bible and certainly one of my favorite verses in Romans. It is my one of my favorites because it is the first place the doctrine of justification is actually mentioned in Romans. Listen to what John Stott says here:

...now for the first time '**a righteousness from God**' is identified with justification: *and are justified freely by his grace...*(24a). The righteousness of God or from God is a combination of his righteous character, his saving initiative and his gift of a righteous standing before him. It is his just justification of the unjust, his righteous way of 'righteousing' the unrighteous.<sup>11</sup>

Now I absolutely love that phrase. In fact, let me repeat it.

...his righteous way of 'righteousing' the unrighteous.

Now the main reason I like Stott's way of saying that is because it connects the idea of "**God's justice**", His gift of a "**righteous standing**" before Him and the doctrine of "**justification**". Now I made the point earlier that all four words, "**righteous**", "**righteousness**", "**justify**" and "**justification**" are built upon the same Greek root, "δικαιο". Here I thinking Stott's sentence you can begin to see that even in English.

Now I have to tell you I am tempted here to stop and just shoot all my bullets on the doctrine of justification. But I think I will save that discussion until next week and besides I want to give each of you a homework assignment and that is to read a short article I wrote for the kids in our Youth Mentoring Program. You'll find copies in the back after class. But let me just say a bit about "**justification**".

The Protestant Church has for the last 400 years viewed the article of justification as the principal article by which the church stands or falls. Listen to what Luther says:

The article of Justification is the master and prince, the lord, the ruler, and the judge over all kinds of doctrines...Without this article the world is utter death and darkness...This doctrine alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour.<sup>12</sup>

And he said this:

Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed...On this article rests all that we teach and practice against the pope, the devil, and the world. Therefore we must be quite certain and have no doubts about it. Otherwise all is lost, and the pope, the devil, and all our adversaries will gain the victory.<sup>13</sup>

And if that is not enough, listen to Calvin:

The theme of justification was therefore more lightly touched upon because it was more to the point to understand first how little devoid of good works is the faith, through which alone we obtain free righteousness by the mercy of God; and what is the nature of the good works of the saints, with which part of this question is concerned. Therefore we must now discuss these matters thoroughly. And we must so discuss them as to bear in mind this is the main hinge on which religion turns...<sup>14</sup>

This is what Thomas Watson said about it:

Justification is the very hinge and pillar of Christianity. An error about justification is dangerous, like a defect in a foundation. Justification by Christ is a spring of the water of life. To have the poison of corrupt doctrine cast into this spring is damnable.<sup>15</sup>

And this is from the mild mannered J.I. Packer:

For the doctrine of justification by faith is like Atlas: it bears a world on its shoulders, the entire evangelical knowledge of saving grace...a right view of these things is not possible without a right understanding of justification; so that, when justification falls, all true knowledge of the grace of God in human life falls with it, and then, as Luther said, the church itself falls.<sup>16</sup>

Now all those quotes in a row tell you that someone somewhere thinks this doctrine is pretty important. Let me add one more quote and this one from a

more familiar name, one Larry Danner. The last time we taught through Romans together in 1996 he said this:

Getting the doctrine of justification wrong is not just a matter of being right or wrong. It is more important than that. You see it's not just an issue of right or wrong, it can be an issue of heaven or hell.<sup>17</sup>

Now that having been said let me define what I mean by the doctrine of justification using the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Now, of course, what that means is that when we are justified we are declared **"righteous"** by an act of God's kindness. That means He **"imputes"** or credits our sin to Christ upon the cross and at the same time **"imputes"** or credits Christ's righteousness to us. This righteous standing occurs before God as we regenerates our heart and we respond to the gospel in faith. It is an act that occurs only once and because it is a legal or judicial act on the part of God is good for all eternity; it obviously is not a process.

Now we are going to flesh that out next week but what I want to do in the time we have left is look at two particular words. The first word occurs at the end of verse 24. It's the word **"redemption"**.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 3:24**... and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption (απολύτρωσις) that came by Christ Jesus.

Now the reason this act of justification can occur is because Christ has redeemed us for our sin. The expression **"to redeem"** is an ancient expression that was typically used and applied to slaves bought out of their slavery.<sup>18</sup> It was some

times used of political prisoners or soldiers when a man's family or sometimes even his government bought him or ransomed out of the hands of the enemy. The noun form of this word is translated "**ransom**" and is used in Mark 10:45. In other words, when you "redeem" someone you pay a "ransom".

<sup>NIV</sup> **Mark 10:45**...For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Now obviously, there have been a lot of weird ideas about where and to whom this ransom was paid. Perhaps the strangest view of all was the one called the "**Ransom to Satan**" theory. The idea was that when man sinned he became the property of Satan and for God to redeem man He has to pay a "**ransom**" to Satan. According to this particular theory, a theory which has reappeared recently in some Charismatic preaching God tricked Satan into accepting the body of Christ as a ransom for sinners only to be foiled three days later when he was unable to keep Christ from rising from the dead. Now there are kinds of problems with that whole line of teaching, not the least of which is verse 25. it is best to just of the act of "redeeming" or "redemption" as a payment for the penalty of sin. Hat is how it is used and defined in Ephesians 1:7.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Ephesians 1:7**...In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace

Now finally the last thing I want to look at this morning are verses 25-26.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 3:25**...God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement (ἱλαστήριον)<sup>19</sup>, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- <sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Now that phrase “**sacrifice of atonement**” in the NIV is a pretty nasty translation of the underlying Greek word *hislasterion*. The word actually means “**propitiation**” but the problem is almost nobody knows what that means in English. What it means is a “**sacrifice, which turns away wrath.**” Now, if you are married you will know what a “**propitiation**” is. No doubt men you have at one time or another brought home flowers to make amends with a wounded wife. No doubt ladies, you at one time or another have baked a pie or a cake to smooth things over with a wounded husband. In the new recently, we learned that Kobe Bryant just spent four million dollars on a ring to make a propitiation. But some Bible translators and I don’t necessarily think the NIV translators are guilty of this have refused to use this wonderful biblical word because they do not care to promote the idea that God is angry and needs to be propitiated. As a result, they change the word from “**propitiate**” to “**expiate**” which means to “**cancel out**” or they turn to something even more difficult to understand like “**sacrifice of atonement.**” The problem is the word “**expiate**” means something altogether different than “**propitiate.**” You see, you expiate things. That is, you can expiate or cancel out a debt because it is a thing. You propitiate a person.<sup>20</sup>

Now the principal theologian responsible for this enmity toward the idea of “propitiation” is a man named C.H. Dodd. He disliked the idea of “propitiation” intensely and the main reason he did is because he thought it made God sound like one of the Mayan or Aztec gods. That is, he thought it made God sound bloodthirsty and cruel. This is what he writes:

The rendering propitiation is therefore misleading for it suggests the placating of an angry God, and although this would be in accord with pagan usage, it is foreign to biblical usage.<sup>21</sup>

Now I want you to think about that last sentence. Is the idea of “wrath” or anger foreign to the Book of Romans? No, no it is not foreign at all. In fact that is one of the principal points Paul has been making straight along. But I want you to look at verse 25 one more time.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Romans 3:25**...God presented him as a sacrifice propitiation <sup>22</sup>, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- <sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Now, let me ask you who is presenting the act of “**propitiation**”? You see that is one of the things that make our God so completely different from the heathen gods. Man is not presenting a “**propitiation**” in Christ’s blood to God. God is presenting a “**propitiation**” in Christ’s blood to Himself. You see it is God’s justice that God is satisfying on the cross and it is the satisfaction of that justice that makes it possible for a holy and just God to forgive our sins.<sup>23</sup> Listen to what Leon Morris writes:

There are problems with the next expression, which the KJV rendered ‘a propitiation’ and which nearly every modern translation waters down. Part of the trouble is that ‘propitiation’ is neither a well-known nor a well-used word today, and translators like to employ something simpler. But the major reason is that propitiation means the removal of wrath and, as we earlier, some commentators find the concept of the divine wrath distasteful and unworthy; so they write it out of Scripture...There are two major reasons for rejecting this approach. One is the meaning of the word Paul uses...The other is the context. Paul has mounted heavy artillery in the section 1:18—3:20 to show that all are sinners and subject to the wrath God. But unless the present term means the removal of wrath he has left them there, still under God’s wrath.<sup>24</sup>

Now all that means that God can be both “just” in that His justice has been maintained and He can be the “justifier” in that He has made a way for man to

stand before Him forgiven and covered over in the righteousness of Christ. Without question that is extraordinary. I think what R.C Sproul says in his Interact Series on Romans is right. There is no place where a person can look and more plainly see the wrath of God being poured out than on the cross. There is also no place where a person can look to see more plainly the love and mercy of God poured out than on the cross. Praise be to God that both things are true.

---

<sup>1</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans: Volume 1, Introduction and Commentary on Romans 1-8* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975; reprint, 1992), 201. He writes "...it is clear that Paul did not think that the law was absent at the time of the manifestation referred to—on the contrary, passages like Gal 3:13 and 4:4 suggest that he thought that it was deeply involved in the gospel events. The words are most naturally understood in relation to ἐξ ἔργων νόμου and διὰ νόμου in v. 20—as indicating that the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ of which vv. 21 and 22 speak is manifest as something which has not been earned by men’s fulfillment of the law. In other words, χωρὶς νόμου here is equivalent in significance to χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου in v. 28 and χωρὶς ἔργων in 4:6. To appeal to these words as evidence that Paul regarded the law as superseded and set aside by the gospel as something now out of date and irrelevant is surely perverse."

<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Romans Volume 1: Justification By Faith, Romans 1-4* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991), 345. "These prophecies of the salvation that was to come through Jesus Christ can be multiplied hundreds if not thousands of times throughout the Old Testament."

<sup>3</sup> I duly note this illustration is from Dr. Rod Rosenblatt.

<sup>4</sup> Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification from 1500 to the Present Day* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986; reprinted 1996), 14.

<sup>5</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 72-88.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 2 vol. From the Library of Christian Classics, translated and indexed by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), vol. 1, 551.

<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s works, vol. 35: Word and Sacrament* edited by J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1960; reprinted 1999), 369.

<sup>8</sup> NIV **1 Corinthians 14:7**...Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction (διαστολή) in the notes?

<sup>9</sup> C.K. Barrett, *Romans: The Epistle to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), 74.

<sup>10</sup> John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News For the World*, (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 109.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 109.

<sup>12</sup> Edwald M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 704.

<sup>13</sup> Plass, 717.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin, vol. 1.3.11, 725-6.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1692; reprinted many times between 1890 and 2000), 226.

<sup>16</sup> Sproul, 69. Quoted from Packer's introduction to Buchanan's work on Justification.

<sup>17</sup> Larry Danner, *Sunday School Lesson on Romans at Arlington Presbyterian Church, 1996-1997*.

<sup>18</sup> John W. Walvoord, "The Person and Work of Christ. Part IX: Redemption." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119:473 (January 1962): 9. He writes: "The use of ἀπολύτρωσις. One of the most common and definitive terms for redemption is the use of the word ἀπολύτρωσις ten times in the New Testament (Luke 21:28; Rom 3:24; 8:23 ; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:7, 14; 4:30 ; Col 1:14; Heb 9:15; 11:35 ). The frequent use of this term in the New Testament is somewhat accentuated by the fact that outside of the Bible it is rarely used. The verb form ἀπολυτρόω is not found in the Bible at all, and only eight times in other literature.<sup>10</sup> It is obvious that ἀπολύτρωσις is a compound form somewhat more intensive than λυτρόω or λύω. It may be defined as *set free, released, pardoned, dismissed, sent away*.<sup>11</sup> It is not difficult to establish that in all of its instances it has the concept of a ransom being paid with resultant deliverance of the one in difficulty."

See also...Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning & Significance* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 129. he writes: "Sometimes in the history of the church the question has been asked, 'To whom was the price paid?' The early church Fathers tended to answer, 'To Satan.' Some of them worked out quite a theory of the way redemption works. They held that because of our sin we were all destined for hell. Sinners belong to Satan. In that situation God, in effect, offered to do a deal with Satan. He would give his Son in exchange for sinners. Satan realized that he would be making a fine profit on this transaction and was happy to accept the offer. The death of Jesus on the cross represented the handing of the Son over to Satan. But when Satan got Jesus down into hell he found (in the modern elegant idiom) that he had bitten off more than he could chew. On the third day Christ rose triumphant and Satan was left lamenting, having lost both the sinners he previously had and him whom he had accepted in exchange for them.

It did not take a profound intellect to work it out that God must have foreseen this. The theory means that he deceived Satan. But, bless you, that did not worry the Fathers. Indeed some of them gloried in it. It simply showed that God is wiser than Satan as well as stronger than he. Some of them worked out an illustration of the process along the lines of a fishing expedition.

---

The flesh of Christ was the bait, the deity the fishhook. Satan gulped down the bait and like any poor fish was caught on the hook of deity and destroyed.

Such theories do no more than amuse us these days. We cannot take them seriously when we are trying to work out what God has done for us in Christ. But they remind us that in the New Testament there is never any hint of a recipient of the ransom. In other words we must understand redemption as a useful metaphor which enables us to see some aspects of Christ's great saving work with clarity but which is not an exact description of the whole process of salvation. We must not press it beyond what the New Testament tells us about it."

<sup>19</sup> Walter Bauer, (Rvd. By Arndt, Gingrich and Danker), "ἱλαστήριον" in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* Third Edition, Copyright © 2000 by The University of Chicago Press. In Gr-Rom. lit. that which serves as an instrument for regaining the goodwill of a deity; concr. a 'means of propitiation or expiation, gift to procure expiation. A *place of propitiation*. For this view of ἱ. Ro 3:25. The LXX uses ἱ. of the lid on the ark of the covenant, חֲבֻטָּה, which was sprinkled w. the blood of the sin-offering on the Day of Atonement (Ex 25:16ff). So Hb 9:5, transl. *mercy-seat*; for the history of this word s OED.

<sup>20</sup> Morris, 151. "The two concepts are really very different. Propitiation means the turning away of anger; expiation is rather the making amends for a wrong. Propitiation is a personal word; one propitiates a person. Expiation is an impersonal word; one expiates a sin or a crime." See also Barrett, 77-8. Barrett seems to prefer "expiation" but admits a connection. He writes: "We can hardly doubt that expiation rather than propitiation is in his mind; though it would be wrong to neglect the fact that expiation has, as it were, the effect of propitiation: the sin that might justly have excited God's wrath is expiated (at God's will), and therefore no longer does so." Obviously, Barrett is wrong or at least way too understated.

<sup>21</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans* in the Moffatt NT Commentary Series (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932; reprinted 1947), 54-55.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Bauer, (Rvd. By Arndt, Gingrich and Danker), "ἱλαστήριον" in *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* Third Edition, Copyright © 2000 by The University of Chicago Press. In Gr-Rom. lit. that which serves as an instrument for regaining the goodwill of a deity; concr. a 'means of propitiation or expiation, gift to procure expiation. A *place of propitiation*. For this view of ἱ. Ro 3:25. The LXX uses ἱ. of the lid on the ark of the covenant, חֲבֻטָּה, which was sprinkled w. the blood of the sin-offering on the Day of Atonement (Ex 25:16ff). So Hb 9:5, transl. *mercy-seat*; for the history of this word s OED.

<sup>23</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* in the New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 232. "Particularly significant are the several occurrences of the word in the description in Lev. 16 of the "Day of Atonement" ritual. According to this text, the high priest is to enter the "Holy of Holies" once a year and sprinkle on the mercy seat *the* blood of a sacrificial victim, thereby "making atonement." In the OT and Jewish tradition, this "mercy seat" came to be applied generally to the place of atonement. By referring to Christ as this mercy seat then, Paul would be inviting us to view Christ as the New Covenant equivalent, or antitype, to this Old Covenant "place of atonement,"

and, derivatively, to the ritual of atonement itself. What in the OT was hidden from public view behind the veil has now been “publicly displayed” as the OT ritual is fulfilled and brought to an end in Christ’s “once-for-all” sacrifice. This interpretation, which has an ancient and respectable heritage, (Luther and Calvin) has been gaining strength in recent years.”

<sup>24</sup> Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988; reprint, 1994), 180.