
“The Just & Justifying God”

ROMANS 3:21-26

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PASTOR BRIAN SMITH

WILDWOOD CHURCH

EAST MOLINE, ILLINOIS

BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

How is it possible that sinful people can have a right relationship with a holy God? Check out what Paul has to say in Romans 3:21-26! Learn why it’s called the Gospel, which means “Good News.”

INTRODUCTION

We left last week with the sobering words of Romans 3:20, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” Is all hope lost? God’s perfect justice demands that corrupt man faces condemnation. His love for man desires to reach out to us.

But how can fallen human beings ever close the gap between our depraved selves and the Holy God? If all the works in the world do not yield righteousness in us, how can we be righteous in God’s sight?

We’re going to learn today why it’s called the Gospel, which means Good News!

²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

A SWEET CONTRAST

Verse 21 sets up such a sweet contrast with the preceding verse, “...since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” (3:20) The purpose of the law is to reveal our sin. It cannot save us from it. **But now** means something has changed. Something is contrasted with that statement.

The law cannot save, it only reveals our sin. But now **the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law**. God has shown us that while the Law cannot save, there is something that can. There is something that brings about the righteousness of God. It’s not adherence to the law, **although the law and prophets bear witness to it**. They pointed to this. They spoke of this.

Verse 22, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction. It is God’s plan of redemption made visible in the person of Jesus Christ – His life, death, and resurrection – that manifests God’s righteousness.

The righteous, without exception, Jew & Gentile alike, live by faith, Paul says in Romans 1:17. **There is no distinction.** Why is there no distinction?! **Verse 23** says, **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**

Being a Jew meant they were part of God's set apart people. They were distinct. They had the great advantage of receiving the oracles of God. But the oracles of God reveal how much like everyone else the Jews really were. As Paul painfully reiterated in last week's passage, none is righteous, no not one. Not a Jew, not a Greek. **All have sinned.**

Sin is the violation of God's holy standard, a standard that exists to His glory. Thus, when we sin, when we break God's Law, we violate not only the standard, but **we fall short of the glory of God**

We all sin and we all need rescue. We need another way of coming to God, because we're never going to make the way ourselves.

WHAT IS JUSTIFICATION?

Verses 24-25a continue **and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.**

What is **justification**? R.C. Sproul says, "It is not an act of divine pardon." In a pardon, a guilty person is released from the consequences of their transgression or crime. However, Sproul says in justification, "God makes a legal declaration. It is an act whereby God declares a person to be just. Justification is that act by which God judicially declares a person to be righteous in his sight."

In justification, it is not simply that God chooses not to punish you for your sins. Instead, He treats you as if you had not sinned in the first place.

You may be wondering how it is possible that God would look at a person who sins grievously and declare him or her to be just? To be holy, to be right with Him? How is this possible that sinners are declared righteous?

Paul tells us that we **justified by His grace** through **faith**. It is a gift from God because faith is not a work by which we earn God's declaration of righteousness. Rather, faith is the simple act of trusting in Jesus.

Faith is trusting that you do not have anything to offer God that would cause Him to deal favorably with you, but Christ does, and accepting Christ's offer to give you His righteousness in exchange for your sin.

Your sin debt is transferred to Christ, who died for your sin. In exchange, His righteousness is transferred to you. You are covered head to toe in the righteousness of Christ – and you always will be! This is so much more than a pardon!

REDEEMED AT A COST

We are justified **through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**. Salvation is being bought back. And this redemption didn't come cheap or easy for Jesus. It cost Him His life. In Matthew 28:20 Jesus said He came to serve and to give His life as a ransom to many.

Ransom: the payment of a price to secure the redemption of a person held captive. What a glorious picture of salvation!

God put [Jesus] forward as a propitiation by His blood. As far back as Genesis 3 and all through the Old Testament, it is clear – **blood** must be spilled for sin to be atoned for. Something had to die

to take away sin. In Genesis 3, God provided the skin of an animal to cover Adam and Eve's shame and nakedness. To get the skin, that animal had to die.

That was the first of many blood sacrifices which were necessary to cover man's sin. For as God says through Moses, *"For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life."* Leviticus 17:11

Peter tells us we were ransomed by the precious blood of Christ. (1 Peter 1:19)

God put Jesus forward as a propitiation. God was the offended party, yet He is the One who initiated our redemption, in Genesis 3 and in Christ.

Propitiation means to legally satisfy the demands of justice. It means to fulfill the requirement necessary to turn away God's wrath. Jesus became our substitute, dying in our place.

How do we receive the benefits of His shed blood? Paul says this is **to be received by faith**. Whoever comes to an end of themselves and recognizes their inability to save themselves receives Christ's propitiation on their behalf.

GOD'S DIVINE PATIENCE

Verse 25 continues, **This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.** The story of redemption, of Jesus stepping into flesh and taking upon Himself the wrath of God due to us, demonstrates the righteousness of God.

In God's **divine forbearance** – in His great patience – **He had passed over former sins.** To state this simply, God waited patiently, and continues to wait patiently, rather than pouring out His wrath on sinners right there on the spot. His patience provides opportunity for us to repent. To arrive where David did and finally declare, "Against you only have I sinned."

Verse 26 continues, **It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.** This great redemption bought by the blood of Christ shows us how God masterfully deals with the problem of sin and the desire to save.

By putting forth His own Son as a propitiation by His blood, God is able to be both **just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.** He is able to punish sin and declare the sinner not guilty. He is able to hold accountable and acquit. He is able to execute and exonerate.

All of this is a gift of God's grace given to those who by faith, believe. I love F.F. Bruce's definition of faith, "faith is that simple and open-hearted attitude to God which takes him at his word and gratefully accepts his grace."

I want to leave you with three things to consider this morning:

THE SERIOUSNESS OF SIN

The seriousness of sin – God hates sin so much that He poured out His full wrath upon His one and only Son. Does sin rise to this level for you? Not other people's sin. It's easy to hate sin someone else's sin. But do you hate your sin? I've said before, the object here is not perfection, but that you come to hate your sin. You and I will never be perfect this side of Heaven. But you don't have to be satisfied with that. You don't have to be comfortable in your sin. Sin is so serious in God's eyes that He crushed His Son to death in His wrath. I ask again, do you understand the seriousness of sin?

THE JUSTICE OF GOD

The justice of God – To declare you and me righteous based solely upon our faith in Christ is an act of divine righteousness. He doesn't count you righteous at first and then rely on you to maintain it. You've already lost it this morning. You've already sinned. And God hates sin. Yet, He has completely satisfied His wrath on the cross of Christ. Thus, when He sees you in Christ, He sees you clothed in the righteousness of His Son.

You will always be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, no matter what you do to mess this up. To be sure, a born-again believer shudders at the thought of sinning against the God who redeemed them. Anyone who hears this as a free pass to sin is likely not a new creation in Christ. But it does not diminish the reality – in Christ, God is just to declare you righteous, always and forever!

THE SUPREMACY OF THE GOSPEL

The supremacy of the Gospel – Of all things that you and I could ever live for and give our time, talents, and treasure, the greatest is the Gospel. It is far superior to a luxurious life and an ample and early retirement.

It surpasses material prosperity and personal achievement. It is greater than family. It is more significant than life. All these the Lord Jesus has called His followers to hold loosely and be willing to lose for His sake.

Church, this is our mission. This is our purpose. We exist to connect people to God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And I'm not talking about the mission of the staff and elders. That's our mission as a congregation, all of us.

That is your mission according to God's Word. "Seek first the kingdom of God!" "Make disciples of all nations!" You and I have the same mission – to proclaim to the world: Jesus Christ saves sinners.

This is why you raise a family and this is why you remain single. This is why you work and it's why you play. It's why you go to the grocery store. Go to the gym. Take the boat out. Everything in your life revolves around the greatest reality in life – you were a sinner who was saved by grace through faith and you've been set on mission with others just like you to go out and find more sinners to be saved by grace through faith.

A GREAT MISSION, A GREAT OPPORTUNITY

Look around you. God is doing incredible things in the Quad Cities through Wildwood Church. What a privilege to be used by Him in Gospel ministry.

This year our congregation is sending out 60 short-term missionaries to Texas, Haiti, and Kenya. This is more than we've ever sent out. We're bursting at the seams in this worship center and in our kids' and youth ministries. We're exploring how to maximize space. We're seeing people come to faith in Christ and then bring their friends who are getting saved.

These are things we cannot take for granted. God is moving in our church and there is a lot of work to be done. You saw how many leaders it takes to do the work. Volunteers are the life blood of any church. But volunteer work and ministry takes a lot of administration. The elders are discussing how to best support our current staff while posturing for growth in the future and accommodating the growth of the past year.

Our ministry staff desires to be freed up of administration to shepherd our people. But the tyranny of the urgent is as real on a church staff as it is in the home and the workplace. So, the elders are discussing what we need as a staff to lead you in even more effective ministry.

It's an incredibly exciting time at Wildwood, but the truth is we need more hands on the rope. We need more people to agree that the Gospel is supreme in their life.

To give their time in volunteering, to utilize their God-given talents to take the Gospel across the street and around the world, and to contribute their treasures, the money and resources God has given them, to advance His mission in the world.

We don't need those already doing all this faithfully to do more. What we need instead is more hands on the rope. More people uniting themselves to this body and this mission and pulling in the same direction. We need your help!

As we transition to communion now, part of the observance of the Lord's Supper is to examine your heart – to ask yourself if you really understand and appreciate what Christ has done and what it means to follow Him.

It is a moment for us to acknowledge we are part of a body and see these are the people with whom God has knit you together and given one glorious mission.

Is the Gospel that important to you?

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