

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 2-21-10 PM
 “THE HEART OF THE GOSPEL”
 ROMANS 3:24-26
 #19 in Series, “Verse by Verse through Romans”

Most Christians are intellectually lazy. We generally don't like to think deeply and struggle with hard truths. Some of that can be tied to the conditioning of our culture. Almost everything in our culture is geared toward our emotions and away from our mind. Books must be filled with illustration after illustration or they won't be read. Movies must be filled with action and other things to stimulate the emotions or they won't be watched. There is no time to really develop characters because the audience gets bored. Then there is the church in America. Most of the fastest growing churches have pastors who give life lessons filled with illustrations and stories. Doctrine is considered a dirty word and thus largely ignored. Exposition of Scripture involves some pretty deep digging and most would rather hear a “life lesson” with lots of interesting stories. The result is large churches that are a mile wide and an inch deep. There is no real foundation and when the storms of life come to a family or individual, those life lessons about being successful and all the stories they've heard seem totally irrelevant when the wheels are falling off their life. Over the last 10-12 years I have been drawn to reading the Puritans. These people were not intellectually lazy! They thought deeply and didn't run away from the hard passages of Scripture. Today we are into “quick fixes” wherever there is a problem. Let's take for instance the issue of assurance of salvation. We tend to work with struggling people with simplistic formulas – “Did you ask Jesus into your heart? Did you mean it? Is God a liar? If you answered yes, yes, no then you gave the right answer; you're saved”. Yet when you read the Puritans and their spiritual descendents a century or two later, you find some horrific struggles they went through to gain an assurance of their right standing with God. Yet, when the assurance finally came, they were rock solid in this area and had a deep communion and intimacy with God and were tremendously used of God.

The book of Romans is not for those who want shallow life lessons and stories. There are some deep and difficult passages that we will be wrestling with in weeks and months and even years to come before we finish this book. In my opinion, Romans 7, 10, and 11 are among the most difficult sections of Scripture and chapter 9 might be **the most** difficult passage in the entire Bible. In chapter 8 we struggle with God's election and man's responsibility. In chapter 12 we will struggle with how to respond to evil. In chapter 14, we will struggle with questionable areas – issues that are not specifically dealt with in the Scriptures. That's just a few of the things we will struggle with and maybe it is not too strong to say “agonize over”. Here's what I can promise you. If you stick with it and are faithful to come from this point on and read and study in Romans yourself, then when we come to the end of this book, you will have a grasp of every major doctrine of Christianity. You will have a foundation upon which you can build as you study the other books of the Bible. There is no more important book of the Bible than Romans.

Tonight, we are going to look at three of the key words in Scripture and see what they mean and how they fit together. The words are justification, redemption, and propitiation. Of the three, the key word is justification; redemption and propitiation tell us how justification takes place and why God is not unjust in justifying those who repent and believe on Jesus. Repent of intellectual laziness if you're guilty and let's dive in as we look tonight at “The Heart of the Gospel”.

I. The Source of Justification (V24a)

I have preached time and time again on justification, but it is such a foundational truth that I don't think we could ever spend too much time on it. Here is the official definition. **Justification – An act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Christ on the basis of the finished work of Christ on the cross.** Let's look at that definition a little more closely. Justification is an act of God. It is

not experiential. It is a legal declaration that God makes. It has nothing to do with our merit or deservedness. We cannot justify ourselves. It is God declaring that the demands of the law have been met on our behalf. Justification is not a process; it is an act that takes place at a point in time. That point in time is when the spiritually dead sinner is born again and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. The phrase “being justified” is passive. That means that the subject is acted upon. God does the justifying. Many people get justification and sanctification mixed up. They are separate but complimentary truths. In justification, God *imputes* Christ’s righteousness to the believing sinner at a point in time, and in sanctification He progressively *imparts* Christ’s righteousness to the saint as he / she grows in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). Let me make a distinction between justification, forgiveness, and justice by use of an imperfect illustration. Suppose a young woman incurs a huge debt at a department store that she will never be able to pay back. If the store demanded payment, that would be justice. Now suppose that the department store sees her circumstances and realizes she will never be able to pay it back and cancels her debt. That would be forgiveness. Once the debt is forgiven, she is no longer liable for it, but her conscience would still bother her and she would never feel comfortable going back in that store to shop. Suppose however that while she was awaiting justice for her non payment, she met and married the son of the store’s owner and he personally paid her debt in full. Now there is no legal claim against her and if she was taken to court she would plead “not guilty” and the court would determine that she was justified in that plea and the case would be dismissed. That is justification! Yes, our sins are forgiven, but we have also been given the righteousness of Christ so that we stand accepted, righteous before God in Christ’s imputed righteousness.

With that review of justification, let’s focus in on the source of justification. The source of justification is not our merit but God’s grace! Grace is God stooping down, loving us, and coming to our rescue through giving His son to accomplish what we never could. The initiative for grace always lies in God alone. Grace does not respond to any merit or potential merit in us. It truly is God’s completely unmerited favor. We can’t deserve grace; we can’t earn grace, and we can’t add anything to grace. Notice that this justification comes to us *freely* by His grace. The same Greek word translated “freely” here is translated “without a cause” in John 15:25. This grace that provides our justification is without a cause. It comes freely at God’s initiative! The hymn writers are correct when they describe it as amazing grace, wonderful grace, and matchless grace. Grace is not only a free gift to one who doesn’t deserve it; it is a free gift to one who deserves the opposite – God’s wrathful judgment.

II. The Price of Justification (V24b-25)

As we will see in the last point, God could not just arbitrarily declare a sinner righteous and be consistent with His attributes – with who He is. We are justified freely by His grace, but our justification came at a great cost. That cost is summarized in two words – redemption and propitiation.

A. Redemption (V24b)

Whereas justification is a legal term borrowed from the courtroom, redemption is a commercial term borrowed from the marketplace. When I say marketplace, I refer not to the market where groceries are purchased but primarily to the slave market. Redemption has in it the idea of paying a ransom to set someone free who is a captive or a slave. Throughout church history, lots of false doctrine has sprung up around this concept of a ransom being paid to redeem us out of slavery. The most prominent heresy that sprung up is that Jesus paid the ransom price of His blood to the Devil who held us captive. It is not against Satan that we sinned; it is against God. The ransom price is to God. It is to God that we are in debt. Another error sees this as a drama being played out in the Godhead. God the father sets out to destroy us, but God the Son steps in and satisfies God’s wrath and redeems us. That is borderline blasphemy against God! Remember that it was God who sent His only begotten Son. When Jesus came to die, He clearly states over and over that He was doing the will of the father. Redemption is God paying our bill through the sending of His Son so that we might be free and He might remain just. God can justify us because the redemption price has been paid. That price as we will see next was His blood. **Revelation 1:5b (ESV)** “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.” Peter

describes it in **1 Peter 1:18-19 (NKJV)** “¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” The price of justification was first redemption.

B. Propitiation (V25)

There is probably as much controversy over the concept of propitiation as any other word in the Bible. If a person is wrong about propitiation, it is like a stream being polluted at its source and the result is a whole river of error that comes from that polluted source. Every word of verse 25 is important. Let’s look at the phrase “whom God set forth”. The “whom” refers to Christ. The phrase “set forth” means to display publically. The Amplified says “Whom God put forward before the eyes of all”. The NASB says, “whom God displayed publically”. This was the central event in history. Every Old Testament believer looked forward to this event and every saved person since that time has looked back on it as the work that accomplished their salvation. This event was not done in secret or in the confines of a temple. It was open and public. Later on in verse 25, he tells us that it was a “demonstration of his righteousness”. The cross demonstrated to all that God takes sin seriously and that He loves us amazingly. At the cross, the wrath of God and the love of God are perfectly demonstrated. Let’s examine the word “propitiation” itself. To propitiate someone is to appease or satisfy them. The Father is angry over the sin of mankind. As a matter of fact, His wrath burns against sin and sin has separated man from God. If there is ever going to be a reconciliation, God must be appeased, satisfied, propitiated. What could propitiate the wrath of God for sin? It could be propitiated only by that wrath being poured out on a substitute. The Puritan theologian John Owen said that there four things that are essential elements in any propitiation:

1. There must be an offense to be taken away – The offense is our sin that has offended and angered and stirred up the wrath of God.
2. There must be a person offended who needs to be pacified – Our sin did not just create some kind of heavenly disturbance; it offended our Holy God.
3. There must be an offending person who is guilty of offense – Paul spent Romans 1:18-3:20 proving that all mankind has offended God and stands guilty before Him without excuse.
4. There must be a sacrifice or some means of making atonement for the offense – That is exactly what Christ’s death did.

Jesus’ death was that atonement, that propitiation to appease God’s wrath for our sin. The Greek word translated “propitiation” is interesting. About 270 BC, the Old Testament Scriptures were translated into Greek. The translation was called the Septuagint. The Greek word they used to translate the lid on the Ark of the Covenant (mercy seat) is the word used here for propitiation. We could translate verse 25, “Whom God set forth as a mercy seat by His blood...” Let’s look a little more closely at this mercy seat in the Old Testament. When God gave instructions on the building of the Tabernacle in the wilderness and all of the furniture in it in Exodus 37:1-9, He instructed that Bezalel make a box of acacia wood 3’9” long, 2’3” wide and 2’3” high. It was overlaid with gold and inside it was the tablets of the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Ark was placed in the innermost part of the Tabernacle where the manifest presence of God dwelt called the Holy of Holies. The illustration or object lesson is this: The law is the standard by which we are all judged. No one measures up and so no one is qualified to come into the presence of God. God also gave instructions that a lid of pure gold be made to put on the Ark over the tablets of the law. Then later He gave Moses instructions about the Day of Atonement when all the Israelites gathered at the Tabernacle and the High Priest after offering a sacrifice for his sins and the sins of his family took two goats. On one goat, he placed his hands on its head and confessed the sins of the nation. This was symbolic of placing the sins on an innocent one as the substitute. The other goat was then killed and the High Priest took the blood of that sacrifice and went through the holy place into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood on that mercy seat to make atonement for the people. The other goat was led out into the wilderness never to return which pictures forgiveness. Do you see the symbolism of the mercy seat? The mercy seat with the shed blood stood between the sinful people who had broken God’s law and the

wrath of God over that broken law. Jesus is our mercy seat and instead of the blood of an innocent animal, He shed His own blood that the wrath of God, poured out on Him might be appeased.

It is amazing how the enemy has sought to twist and water down what I have shared with you. All the rejections of this great truth are united around rejecting that God must be appeased by the pouring out of His wrath on His Son. One example of false teaching is those that say that the concept of propitiation by God's wrath being poured on his Son is nothing more than divine child abuse. It is not abuse, because the Son of God took on flesh for this very purpose. Whether it offends a person or not, that is what the Bible teaches. Isaiah prophesies of the cross in **Isaiah 53:10 (NASB)** "But the Lord was pleased To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; if He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering, He will see *His* offspring, He will prolong *His* days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand." Those who reject the propitiation by His blood usually teach that Jesus' death was simply an example of being willing to die for what you believe. His death was nothing more than an example for us. No, it was propitiation, not an example.

Let me deal quickly with that last part of **Romans 3:25b (NKJV)** "...because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed". The Greek word translated "passed over" means to overlook intentionally. What is that referring to? It is referring to those under the old covenant who believed and it was counted unto them as righteousness. The Old Covenant sacrifices never gave a full forgiveness of sin. Yes, there was forgiveness, but not in the fullest sense. **Hebrews 9:13-14 (NKJV)** "¹³ For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" The Old Covenant sacrifices when offered in faith purified the flesh but could not deal with the conscience. When Jesus died, the flesh and the conscience were cleansed. I think that is the main reason verse 25 says that Jesus was openly, publically set forth as a propitiation for sins – not just those who would come after Him, but those who believed before the cross. Referring to this last part of verse 25, Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "What he is saying is that under the old covenant, the Old Dispensation, there was no provision for dealing with sins in a radical sense. It was simply a means, as it were, of passing them by, covering them over for the time being. Those old offerings and sacrifices gave a kind of purification of the flesh, they gave a ceremonial cleanness, they enabled the people to go on praying to God. But there was no sacrifice under the Old Testament that could really deal with sin. All they did was to point forward to this sacrifice that was coming and that could really do it, and could cleanse the conscience from dead works and truly reconcile man unto God" [Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Romans", Page 102].

III. The Means of Justification (V25b "through Faith")

We looked at this truth last week in verse 22, so I'm just touching on it briefly tonight. Since justification is provided freely by God's grace, it is received by faith alone. Faith is not a work, it is a means that we connect with Christ's provision, Christ's propitiation which saves us. The means of justification is faith. In TELL we use faith as a acrostic to describe it:

Forsaking

All

I

Trust

Him

IV. The Justice of Justification (V26)

From a human perspective, God faced a dilemma. In reality God has no dilemma, but from the human way of seeing things He did. Here is the dilemma: How could God Justify sinners and still be righteous? To put the dilemma in other terms, how is it possible for the righteous God to declare the unrighteous to be righteous without compromising His righteousness or condoning their unrighteousness? [From John Stott, Page 112] If a judge rules that a guilty person is not guilty, he is a poor judge. How can God save

sinner and still be a righteous judge? Do you see the dilemma? We see a startling statement in **Romans 4:5 (NKJV)** “Him who justifies the ungodly”. The answer to this dilemma is Christ crucified! The cross is the vindication of God. He can justify the ungodly and yet continue being just because Jesus took the sins of the ungodly and suffered the wrath that justice required and then in addition to forgiving the sins of those who believe in Him, He clothed them with his righteousness. Now, God is just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

CONCLUSION

You have just heard the heart of the gospel. There is certainly more to say about the gospel, but that is the heart of it. Through faith in Christ and the propitiation He provided, we who were ungodly can become righteous, accepted by God. So many Christians struggle with assurance of salvation because they wonder if God is satisfied with them. That’s the wrong question: The right question is. “Is He satisfied with Jesus and His offering of Himself as the propitiation for our sins?” The answer is, “Yes, He is satisfied and the resurrection proved it.” The only question for you is “Have you savingly believed in Him?” (3428)