

## 39. The Book of Romans 3:25-26

*Paul's Epistle to the Romans*

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

(1-24-24)

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We have just entered into the second major section of the Book of Romans.

The first major section dealt with '**Condemnation**'—whereas this new section deals with '**Justification**.'

Under the heading of '**Condemnation**' (1:18-3:20) Paul proved to us that all people apart from Christ are lost and on their way to hell and therefore need God's righteousness for salvation.

And now in this new section under the heading of '**Justification**' (3:21-5:21) Paul tells us how a person acquires God's righteousness.

And in the process, he lists—10 characteristics of God's righteousness.

### III. Justification—verses 3:21-5:21

#### A. Description of God's Righteousness— verses 3:21-31

##### Romans 3:21–26 (NKJV)

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, <sup>26</sup> to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Once again, in these verses, Paul lists—10 characteristics of God's righteousness—we've already looked at the first 8:

1. God's righteousness is—apart from the law (verse 21a)
2. God's righteousness is—revealed in the O.T. (verse 21b)
3. God's righteousness is—received thru faith in Jesus Christ (verse 22a)
4. God's righteousness is—available to all who will believe (verses 22b-23)
5. God's righteousness is—acquired by justification (verse 24a)
6. God's righteousness is—bestowed freely (verse 24a)

7. God's righteousness is—made possible because of grace (verse 24a)

8. God's righteousness is—accomplished through redemption (verse 24b)

9. God's righteousness is—satisfied by atoning sacrifice (verse 25a)

As we said last week, in verses 24 and 25, Paul mentions 4 extremely important words that are associated with how a person is made right with God—or in other words, how they are made righteous in His eyes—*grace, justification, redemption, and propitiation*.

Last week we looked at the first three—which tonight brings us to the fourth great theological concept: **Propitiation**.

The dictionary tells us that **propitiation** means, *“to appease someone who is angry.”*

If you apply that definition to the concept of biblical redemption it means that—Jesus died on Calvary's cross to appease an angry, red eyed, fire-breathing God who was about to destroy the world until Jesus appeased Him with His own blood!

However, that is not the God of the Bible nor a proper picture of redemption—

**1 John 4:9-11 (NKJV)**

<sup>9</sup> In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

It's true that God hates *sin* (because He is infinitely holy and righteous)—but it is also true that He loves *sinners* (John 3:16). God *‘so loves’* (not hates or is angry towards) the world of sinners that He gave His only begotten Son to die on Calvary's cross to save us from His eternal judgement in hell.

The word **“propitiation”** doesn't mean *‘the appeasing of an angry God’*—rather, it means *“the location or place where sins are forgiven, and God's righteousness is satisfied.”*

➤ *What exactly is this ‘place’?*

When we looked at the Tabernacle in our Exodus study, we said that every piece of furniture in it (Menorah, Table of Showbread, Golden Altar etc.)—everything in and about the Tabernacle pointed to Jesus in some way—and this was especially true of the **Mercy Seat**.

The words **“mercy-seat”** (Hebrews 9:5) and **“propitiation”** (Romans 3:25)—are the same word in the Greek (*hilasmos*)—which means that Jesus is our **“mercy seat”**, our **“propitiation”**!

**1 John 2:2 (NKJV)**

<sup>2</sup> And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Or in other words, He is the **‘Place’** where sins are forgiven, and God's righteousness is satisfied.

➤ *“Okay, but what exactly does that mean?!”*

Well, to fully understand and appreciate what Paul is saying here in Romans 3:25—we need to understand how sin was atoned for and God's righteousness was satisfied under the Old Testament, Mosaic system.

When a Jew sinned back then, God had instructed that they were to bring their animal sacrifice to the priest at the Tabernacle and later the Temple where the priest would offer it to God to make atonement for their sin—so that their fellowship with God would be restored again.

However, there was always the problem of sins that were never atoned for—many unknown and/or forgotten sins would accumulate throughout the year for which no sacrifice had been made. So, to deal with those sins, God established a '*National Day of Atonement*' called **Yom Kippur**—which literally means "*Day of Covering*."

This was the day when all unknown sins (sins of ignorance), and forgotten sins, could be atoned for and forgiven by God—a great day for the *liberation* of the conscience (see Leviticus 16). You see, the Jewish people knew that whatever sins they may have missed throughout the year would now be taken care of—the slate would be completely wiped clean (at least for a while).

Yom Kippur was a time of *release* and *relief*—a day devout Jews longed for!

On the Day of Atonement, two goats were presented at the door of the Tabernacle/Temple and one of them was chosen (by casting lots) to be sacrificed as a sin offering—that goat was slain, and its blood taken into the Holy of Holies...

Let me stop here and fill in some details about this.

It was on this day (and only on this day) that the High Priest (and only the High Priest) could enter the revered Holy of Holies. (Explain)

Upon entering the Holy of Holies, the High Priest would stand before the Ark of the Covenant.

- The Ark of the Covenant was made up of two separate pieces—the lower 'box' and the lid that went on top.
- The bottom box measured 3'9" long by 2'3" high by 2'3" wide—and originally held 3 items:
- *The two tablets of stone* upon which were written the Ten Commandments; *A golden pot containing some manna*; and *Aaron's rod that had budded* (Heb.9:4).
- This box was covered with gold inside and out and topped with a lid made of solid gold called the **Mercy Seat**.
- On top of the Mercy Seat there were cherubim (two angels), one at each end kneeling facing each other with their heads bowed down and their wings outstretched upward and nearly touching tip to tip directly above the Mercy Seat.
- It was on that Mercy Seat between the cherubim that God was symbolically understood to dwell—it was His '*throne*' on the earth.
- The lid was called the **Mercy Seat** because on the Day of Atonement the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice upon the Mercy Seat.

This was intended to atone for all the '*sins of ignorance*' (Hebrews 9:7) committed by God's people throughout the year which then allowed God to show mercy to them because their sins had finally been atoned for (covered).

- The shed blood of the animal-substitute met (temporarily) the righteous demands of Holy God.
- The High Priest then put his hands on the head of the other goat and confessed the sins of the people upon it.
- Then the 'scapegoat' was taken out into the Judean wilderness and set free to symbolize the '*carrying away of sins*.'

This is probably what the Psalmist had in mind when he said—*"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us."* (Psalm 103:12)—the Judean wilderness is west of Jerusalem where the Temple was located.

During the Old Testament period, the blood of animals could never *take away* sins—they could only *temporarily cover* those sins—but God allowed this 'inferior' sacrificial system so that His people could maintain fellowship with Him by providing atonement for their sins (until God's ultimate sacrifice could be offered).

You see, God said to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden—*"the soul that sins shall surely die."* (spiritually—immediately; *physically*—eventually) When Adam and Eve sinned, they tried to cover the shame of their nakedness by sewing fig leaves together—but God didn't accept that covering.

Instead, He killed a couple of animals and covered them with the skins of those animals to establish the law that the guilt of man's sin could never be covered by the works of his own hands (religion)—it would require a blood sacrifice—the *innocent* dying in the place of the guilty.

Under the Old Covenant God provided a sacrificial system whereby the blood of animals could be *substituted* for the guilty person to atone for their sins so that they wouldn't have to die. But that blood was never able, and was never intended, to **cleanse** or **take away** the offender's sin permanently—as the writer of Hebrews explains, *"It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."* (Hebrews 10:4)

That's why, as you study the Tabernacle and Temple, you will quickly see that—there was no seat or chair in either—because the priest's work was *never finished* and so he never sat down! The reason for that was because the blood of animals could never *take away sin*—it could only temporarily cover sin until the next time sin was committed.

Consequently, the priests never sat down because their work was never done—that is until Jesus, our Great High Priest, offered Himself for our sins! **He was the Lamb of God whose blood didn't just cover but completely took away our sins** (John 1:29) **once and for all time** which meant His work was done—as He Himself stated from the cross, *"It is finished!"* (John 19:30)

#### Hebrews 1:3 (NKJV)

3 ...and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

But understand, biblical redemption has always been based on blood sacrifice in both the Old and New Testaments—

**Leviticus 17:11 (NKJV)**

<sup>11</sup> For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it *is* the blood *that* makes atonement for the soul.’

**Hebrews 9:22 (NKJV)**

<sup>22</sup> ...without shedding of blood there is no remission (of sin).

The Bible is clear that because of Jesus’ death on the cross as payment for the sin of the world—God now offers sinners ‘redemption.’

As we looked at last week, in the first century Greco-Roman world, redemption always referred to the price paid to redeem a slave which meant gold or silver or some other commodity that possessed worth. When it came to the redemption of humanity out of the bondage sin, death and Satan—gold and silver were of no value—

**1 Peter 1:18-19 (NKJV)**

<sup>18</sup> knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like* silver or gold, from your aimless conduct *received* by tradition from your fathers, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. (sinless)

The penal substitutionary death of Christ—i.e., that He suffered in our place that we might receive redemption and forgiveness for our sins is the very foundation upon which the gospel is built.

**Ephesians 1:7 (NKJV)**

<sup>7</sup> In Him we have redemption **through His blood...**

As one author said,

*“Because Jesus paid the price of redemption (our debt) it satisfied (propitiated) the righteousness and justice of God. That allowed Him to show us mercy by releasing us from the wrath and condemnation of God which we deserved—through faith!*

*Understand, faith was not the propitiation. There is nothing special about faith itself. Faith is simply trust. Even when we talk about salvation—faith doesn’t save us—it is the object of our faith, Jesus Christ who saves us. Faith is the ‘conduit’ through which salvation flows from the Savior to the sinner.”*

**Ephesians 1:7 (NKJV)**

<sup>7</sup> In Him we have redemption through His blood, **the forgiveness of sins...**

The word ‘**forgiveness**’ basically means to ‘*send away*.’ It is a legal term which meant to ‘*satisfy a debt*’, to ‘*grant a pardon*’—but the basic idea was that of ‘forgiving a debt’ (sending the debt away so that it was no longer held against the person).

In the Jewish mind all sin was looked upon as a debt that was owed to God (even as Jesus taught us to pray—“*And forgive us our debts (sins)...*” Matthew 6:12) which is why they brought God an animal as payment.

Remember once again, that the word ‘**forgiveness**’ basically means to ‘send away’—which the Jews saw as illustrated with the sins laid upon the scapegoat and then sent far away into the wilderness.

But look, that enactment, as beautiful and meaningful as it was did not actually remove the people’s sins—as the Jewish people well knew. Of course, we know it was but a picture of what only God Himself in Christ could do.

Through the shedding of His own blood, Jesus Christ actually took the sins of the world upon His own head, as it were, and carried them an infinite distance away so that they would never be remembered anymore!

**Colossians 2:13-14 (NKJV)**

<sup>13</sup> And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, <sup>14</sup> having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

That is what Paul means when he says that the *propitiation* of Christ demonstrates God's righteousness—let's read it in context:

**Romans 3:24–26 (NKJV)**

<sup>24</sup> **being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,** <sup>25</sup> **whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed** [speaking of the O.T. saints], <sup>26</sup> **to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**

*"What about all the sins that were committed before Jesus died on the cross, how could God be righteous in forgiving them—in other words, how did the Jews get saved in the O.T. period?"*

One author commented on this—

"So, the O.T. period was a time of the **forbearance of God**. For at least 4000 years He held back His judgment on sin. Then in the fullness of time He sent His Son to be the Sin-bearer. When the Lord Jesus took our sins upon Himself, God unleashed the full fury of His righteous, holy wrath on the Son of His love. Sin had to be paid for but the Holy Judge of all the earth knew that sinners couldn't pay for their sins. And so, God, the Judge, stepped from behind bench and came to earth to be man's Savior. It reminds me of a story:

*A seventeen-year-old was arrested for reckless driving in a rural community. As he was brought into court, he was relieved to see that his father was the presiding judge. An hour later, the judge rendered his decision. "Your reckless driving," he said, "has endangered the people of our community. Consequently, justice must be served. You will either pay one thousand dollars or serve one year in jail."*

*"Dad," the boy said. "You know I don't have a penny to my name."*

*"Young man," said his father, "in this court you will address me as Your Honor. I am your judge." And down went the gavel as the boy stood incredulous before the bench.*

*The bailiff approached. He was ready to take the boy to jail when the judge stood up, took off his robe, and left the bench to stand by his son. "Behind the bench," he said, "I am your judge. But here beside you, I stand as your father." And he took a checkbook from his pocket to pay his son's fine.*

That's precisely what the Lord did for us when He left the bench of heaven to come to earth as Jesus of Nazareth—to write the check of redemption, to pay the price of propitiation. It's fabulous. It's perfect. It's beyond comprehension that God would have come up with a plan so beautiful that it confirms both His light and His love without compromising either one.

Now, if the young man in the illustration, following his dad's offer to pay his fine, said, "Get out of here, Dad. Why did you have to pronounce such harsh judgment in the first place? I'd rather take my chances in jail than to accept charity from you," no one would feel sorry for him; no one would shed a tear on his behalf. So, too, no tears will be shed for those who say, "I couldn't care less that God became a Man and was slaughtered on the Cross for my sin. I've got places to go, things to do, a career to pursue," because the price paid on their behalf was offered so lovingly and would have cleansed them so completely."

**10. God's righteousness—authenticates His character (verse 26)**

**Romans 3:25–26 (NKJV)**

<sup>25</sup> whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, <sup>26</sup> to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Now with regard to this, there are those people who would immediately respond to this idea—

*“But how could God do this righteously? A sinless Substitute had not been slain. The blood of a perfect Sacrifice had not been shed. In a word, Christ had not died. The debt had not been paid. God’s righteous claims had not been met. How then could God save believing sinners in the OT period? The answer is that although Christ had not yet died, God knew that He would die, and He saved men on the basis of the still-future work of Christ—as Revelation 13:8 tells us that Jesus was a Lamb slain—‘from the foundation of the world.’ Even if O.T. saints didn’t know about Calvary, God knew about it, and He put all the value of Christ’s work to their account when they believed God’s promise of a coming Savior who would atone for their sins thru His sacrifice thus allowing God to redeem them out of their bondage to sin, Satan, and death.*

*In a very real sense, O.T. believers were saved on credit. They were saved on the basis of a price still to be paid. They looked forward to Calvary; we look back to it.”*

The question of the ages is—“How can a righteous God justify sinners and still be just?” The answer is—He had to have a basis, or in other words a sinless, innocent substitute had to die in place of the guilty party or parties—and that substitute was Jesus.

*“When Jesus suffered the wrath of God on the cross for the sins of the world, He fully met the demands of God’s Law, and also fully expressed the love of God’s heart.”*

**Psalms 85:10 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup> Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.

- How can God show mercy to fallen man by not sending him to hell and still be true to His Word—“*The soul that sins shall surely die?*”
- How can a righteous God ever have or make peace with unrighteous sinners so as to enter into fellowship with them?

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If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower—please reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Want to know more? Click [here](#).

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The answer of course is Jesus Christ and the cross—He is ‘the Place’ where God’s righteousness was satisfied and sin was forgiven—through the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ!