

THE GOD WHO JUSTIFIES

The Greatest Sentence Ever Written

Romans Series
PBC 2025

Text: Romans 3:21-31

Our text this morning:

- Opens the 2nd major section of Romans (***Romans in five words: Euangelion, Condemnation, Salvation, Confirmation, Application***).
 - Most significant paragraph in the entire book (3:21-31)
 - **Most significant sentence in the entire Bible (3:21-26)**
 - Answers the two most important questions in life – ***“How can a man be right with God?”*** (Job 9:2; 25:4 – *“How can a man be in the right before God?”*) and ***“How can God justify sinners like us justly?”*** (Gen 18:25 – *“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”*)
- A. **2nd most important question in life is:** How can a sinful man be right with a holy God? Job wasn't the only one who asked this question.
- Rich young ruler – *“What good thing shall I do to obtain eternal life?”* (Mat 19:16)
 - Jewish Nation upon hearing Peter's sermon in Acts 2 – *“Brothers, what shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37)
 - Paul on the Road to Damascus – *“Lord, what would you have me to do?”* (Acts 22:10)
 - Philippian Jailor – *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”* (Acts 16:30)
 - And this question lies at the core of every human soul – no matter how they hide it, push it away, or suppress it. During our darkest moments – especially when we face our own mortality – our soul screams out, *“What do I have to do to be righteous before God?”*

- But if that is the 2nd most important question in life, what is the most important question? What could be more important than finding out how I can be made righteous before God?

B. The most important question in the universe is: “How can God justify people like us *without compromising His moral integrity and righteous character?*”

- Because if in justifying us, God himself is seen to be unjust, then the entire foundation on which the universe stands will collapse. This is essentially what is at the core of Abraham’s question to God in Gen 18:25 – “*Shall not the Judge of the earth do what is just?*”
- And this is precisely what this paragraph does – while it explains how we are made righteous, ***its primary focus is on God more than on us.*** Here we discover the immensity and beauty of the salvation God has designed for two important ends:
 1. To deliver us from his wrath in a just way and by a righteous means.
 2. To display His glory, particularly how His mercy triumphs over His justice, not by setting that justice aside but by satisfying it!

These two realities became the central, driving force of Paul’s life and beliefs – what He believed about God, as expressed in this paragraph, shaped everything else about him – his view of himself; his use of his life and resources; and what he dedicated himself to for the next 30 years until his martyrdom in Rome under Nero.

If this paragraph was the core of Paul’s life and shaped everything about him, ***we must ask ourselves whether it deserves our full attention and honest self-examination this morning!*** Perhaps the main reason we lack the devotion and passion we see in Paul is that we have settled for lesser glories than the magnificent glory Paul describes in these verses.

And to make sure we don't miss this greater glory, Paul sets out to answer five important questions we should all be asking about these verses!

I. What is God doing? *Manifesting His righteousness through faith in Jesus for all who believe (3:21-23).*

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.

- This paragraph is ***primarily about God*** before it relates to us! And ***the thing that is set forth about God in these verses is His righteousness*** (3:21, 22, 25, 26).
- God is the one acting in this paragraph (not us) – and what He is doing is revealing His righteousness ***by making sinners righteous in His sight*** through His grace—granting them a righteousness they do not earn or deserve! In other words, **He is justifying the unrighteous**, guilty sinner who has been condemned before Him in 3:19-20!
- God's righteousness (the one that marks His character and the one that He makes available to us in Christ) is presently being revealed in the gospel Paul is declaring and it is the central component of our salvation (1:17).
- This righteousness is how we sinners are declared righteous (***different than just being pardoned***) and recognized as innocent – cleared of all charges brought against them in 3:19-20!
- And this is how God's own righteous character is vindicated (3:26).
- **You could say it this way, this paragraph sets forth for all to see how God is justifying sinners justly! *This is what God is doing!***

II. How is God doing it? *By His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (3:24-25a).*

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.

2nd question: “How does the righteousness of God revealed and announced in the gospel actually justify a guilty sinner like me?”

A. By His Grace: . . . we are justified by his grace

- It is **unmerited** – we did not earn it.
- It is **undeserved** – we deserve its opposite: justice and wrath!
- It is **unrestrained** and **unlimited** – we can never exhaust it.
- It is **empowering** and **enabling** – it changes everything for us and about us both in this life and the next.

B. Freely: . . . as a gift

- The term “gift” means “freely” – literally “without reason or cause.” This term shows up in John 15:25 when Jesus observed, *“They hated me without cause.”*
- In this text, God justified us by His grace **without any cause** in us! There is **nothing in us or from us** that would serve as a cause or reason for God to justify us and still remain just Himself!
- What we deserve is justice, and justice means we get what we have earned when God judges us according to truth (2:3) and according to deeds (what we have done, 2:6). **And what we have earned is a “death sentence” (6:23)!**
- **Why do we need this gift? Because we have fallen short of God’s purpose for our lives** – the reason he created us, designed us, gifted us, etc. That purpose was to glorify Him. (3:23)
- And 1:18-3:20 shows that no person on Earth, including God's chosen people who had His life-giving words, has truly glorified God with their lives.
- Instead of glorifying God, they either denied Him, rebelled against Him, resisted His Word, or used Him for their own purposes. **They sought their own glory and used God to achieve it!**
- And we do the same – we want 3.00 worth of God. Just enough to make sure He is there to serve us, but not enough to radically reorient our lives so they look more like Paul’s did!
- And what people who spend their life falling short of living all out for the glory of God merit at the end of their life is death!

- ***But somehow, these kinds of people get life! And they get it without charge to them (2 Cor. 11:7) and without any payment from them (2 Thess 3:8).***
- So, how can God grant them this gift of life?

C. Through the Redemption that is in Christ

- Redemption = ransom. Term shows up in two other contexts: 1) Jesus did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many (Mk 10:45; Matt 20:28); and 2) Peter reminds us we were ransomed from our futile ways . . . with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-20).
- Term refers to a price that does three big things for us:
 - It releases us from the guilt of sin
 - It releases us from the penalty of sin
 - It releases us from the bondage of sin
- **So what did God do through Christ in order to “ransom” us?**

D. By His Blood that atoned for our sins and propitiated God’s Wrath . . . Whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood.

- ***“By his blood”*** – a reference to more than his violent death; a reference to the kind of death it was – a sacrificial, atoning death that was prefigured in the Old Testament sacrificial system. What Paul refers to here is prefigured in Leviticus 16!
- ***“Set forth as a Propitiation”*** – On the day of atonement, the entire nation would assemble before the high priest – a unblemished goat would be slaughtered, and a second unblemished goat would be sent out into the wilderness bearing away the sins of the nation.
- The high priest would take the blood of the sacrificial goat and sprinkle it on the top of the Ark – a place called the “mercy seat” and all the sins of the entire nation would be atoned for and the wrath of God would be appeased or “propitiated.”
- This OT ceremony had to be repeated year after year until one day God sent His own Son who willingly died on the cross and shed

his blood to make an eternal atonement for our sins, to remove them from the sight of God, to fully satisfy the wrath of God by bearing all of on himself, and to make it possible for God to declare us righteous. In other words, God fully satisfied (propitiated) the demands of His wrath by pouring it all out on Christ when He willingly took our place on the cross!

In other words, just as God provided a means for the atonement of Israel's sins every year by the atoning blood of a slaughtered lamb sprinkled on the ark of the covenant to "cover" Israel's sins from His sight so that He could show them forgiveness and mercy THEN in OT times, NOW He has provided a final atonement for the sins of the world through the atoning blood of His own Son (the Lamb of God) that would forever cover the sins of His people (both Jew and Gentile) so that mercy and grace and forgiveness and blessing could come from His hand instead of judgment and wrath!

- This incredible exchange is best described in one amazing, breathtaking statement Paul made in 2 Corinthians 5:21: *"For our sake He made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him, we might become the righteousness of God!"*

E. To be received by faith (not works)

- Pagan people have to stop looking to their idols!
- Religious Jews need to stop looking to Moses!
- Everyone must turn to God by looking only to the Son He sent to deliver them from their sins, Jesus!

NOTE: Faith is more than just what we say we believe with our mouths. Faith involves turning away from our own efforts and fully surrendering to Christ—what He has done for us by dying on the cross and who He has become to us through His resurrection from the dead—***Our Savior and Lord! This is why Paul describes salvation as the "obedience of faith" (1:5).***

III. Why is God doing it this way? *That He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (3:25b-26).*

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.

- The reason God designed salvation in this way to demonstrate (prove) two important realities about Himself.
 1. ***That He was just then*** when He forgave sins in the former times before the obedient life and sacrificial death of Jesus (v. 25b).
 2. ***That He is just now*** in this present age when He forgives the sins of anyone who has (present tense) faith in Jesus (a particular historical person who lived and died and rose again) – (v. 26).
- The biggest issue before God in our justification was not how to forgive us or how to show mercy.
- The biggest issue before God was how to do it justly — in a way that satisfied the demands of His righteous character expressed by the Law set forth in Scripture.
- And the reason God must justify sinners justly is that if His justice and righteousness are compromised in the process, the moral foundation of the universe would be permanently broken, and everything would fall apart because the entire universe is built on His righteousness.
 - ***Heb 1:1-3*** – Christ, in his role as the radiance of God's glory and exact imprint of His nature, upholds the universe by the word of His power (authority).
 - ***Psalms 89:14*** – extols God's faithfulness, righteousness, and holiness as being celebrated in heaven as well as on earth. Verse 14 states, *"Righteousness and Justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you!"* (Ps 97.2 repeats this statement).
 - ***Proverbs 16:12*** – this is why it is an abomination for earthly kings (whose power is derived from God) to commit wickedness: *"for the throne is established by righteousness."*

- o **Psalm 45:6-7** “Your throne O God is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness!”

IV. What does it require of us? Through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe (3:22, 26).

Romans 3:22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus **Christ for all who believe.**

For there is no distinction:

Romans 3:26 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.**

So, how do I receive this free gift of God’s grace, by which I am declared righteous through the redemption that Christ secured for me by dying on the cross in my place? **Obtaining the gift requires belief/faith:**

- that we submit to God’s true assessment of us.
- that we abandon our own efforts to obtain righteousness.
- that we obey the Gospel by repenting of our sin and coming to Christ by faith in His work and not by our human effort/works.
- that we believe God – fully entrust ourselves to him – and commit ourselves to be lifelong, faithful disciples of Jesus who treasure Him more than anything else in our lives, including our own life!
- **What happens when God is vindicated in our sight as the justifier of sinners in His sight?**
- It transforms our view of God – we value and cherish Him above all earthly treasures and temporary pleasures.
- It transforms our view of ourselves – we are no longer content with a little spiritual sack containing 3.00 worth of God! We want all of Him in all of us!

V. What does it accomplish in us? (3:27-31)

A. It Produces Humble gratitude by killing all human boasting – It kills Pride and Arrogance in Us! (3:27-28)

Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ *For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*

B. It Unites Believers by removing all sinful discrimination – It brings Loving Unity and Spiritual Acceptance among Us! (3:29-30)

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,³⁰ since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

C. It Promotes Grace-enabled Obedience by excluding all self-gratifying antinomianism – It results in joyful obedience (3:31)

Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Conclusion

Whatever is at the center of our life becomes the anchor that keeps our life steady and the compass guiding everything we do. Since whatever is at the core of our life defines who we are, we must evaluate whether what is at the center of our life aligns with what God says should be there.

This paragraph shows us what this center must be if we are to fulfill the purpose for which we were created – ***to live out the supreme value and satisfying beauty of God's glory!*** For this to happen, Jesus can't be on the fringes of our lives; He must be at the very heart of who we are as people.

And this will only happen if we believe that the God who justified us is, in fact, just in all His ways and in all His dealings with us!

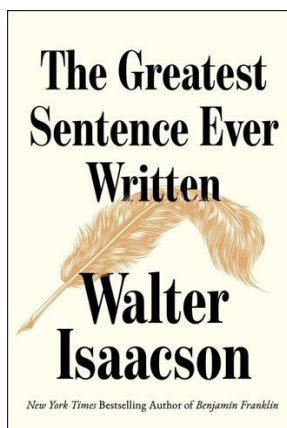
- Do you believe God has been just toward you in all things – including the things that caused deep pain and sorrow?
- Does your life – your words, attitude, spirit, and deeds – confirm to those around you that you truly believe God has been fair in His dealings with you?
- ***How do I come to see that God is dealing justly with me now?*** By looking at what this text reveals about the lengths to which God went to be just and righteous in justifying you by His grace and mercy – through the death of His own Son in your place. This is why Paul

declared, *“He who did not spare His own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”* (Rom. 8:32).

Alternative Introduction: The Greatest Sentence Ever Written

In 2025, Walter Isaacson wrote a NY Times Bestseller celebrating America’s 250th anniversary. The title of the book was “The Greatest Sentence Ever Written.” Well known for his historical biographies of men like Benjamin Franklin, Alfred Einstein, Henry Kissinger, and more recently, Elon Musk – Isaacson set out to explore the crafting and meaning of what he believes is history’s most powerful sentence. Drafted in June of 1776 by Thomas Jefferson, edited by Benjamin Franklin, and polished by John Adams, this sentence laid the foundation for the Republic that would become the United States of America. It would become the cornerstone of both the nation and the American Dream.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”



There is an even greater Sentence written 2000 years ago by the Holy Spirit through the pen of Paul that establishes the foundation of a kingdom much greater than the United States. It serves as the cornerstone for a liberty and freedom far superior to that sought after

by the writers of the Declaration of Independence. This sentence stands at the apex of the entire story of the Bible – the story of redemption.