

## The Grandeur of Christ's Saving Work Romans 3:21-31

This text is like going to a **Brazilian Steakhouse**. Have you ever been to one? The waiters just keep coming by with skewers of different meats (after you take your little trip to the salad bar first). Once finished with the salad, you have a card. One side is like red, and the other is green. If on green, that means, "Yes, please. I'm ready for some more meat!" "Filet sir? Sirloin? Lamb leg? Lamb chop? Sausage? Grilled chicken?" [We took our first wave of interns there about five years ago, and I think some of them ascended to the third heaven!].

Well, I hope you have your internal card flipped to green because the gospel meat here is soul satisfying.

With each word/phrase, Paul serves us some soul nourishing goodness.

- The righteousness of God, grace, faith, sin, cross....
- justification (the **law court**), redemption (the **slave market**), propitiation (a **sacrifice that averts wrath**)

### Context

In 1:18-3:20 we learn that we are great sinners.

In 3:21-ff, we learn that Christ is a greater Savior.

1:18-3:20 the universal problem revealed: sin.

3:21ff, the universal problem resolved: Christ.

We have already noted the remarkable significance of the book of Romans.

- And verses 21-27 may be the most important in the book of Romans!
- **What we're studying is more important than the Kardashians. More important than March Madness or the Health Care Bill!**

Regarding this text:

- Luther said that it is "the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible." Wow.
- Leon Morris says it "is possibly the most important single paragraph ever written."
- Cranfield rightly calls 'the center and heart' of the whole main section of the letter. And that we see the "innermost meaning of the cross" here.
- Bird, "The epicenter of [Paul's] gospel."

In short, we learn a lot about what makes the gospel such good news.

At the risk of being way too “listy,” I want to highlight 11 truths related to Christian salvation. Like a waiter, I'm going to keep coming by w/gospel meat.

### Christian Salvation...

#### #1: is owing to God's saving intervention in Christ (21a)

“But now.”

- Two sweet words of **rescue**.
- **1:18-3:20: shocking honesty. 3:21ff: Glorious hope.**
- This is not just a **literary** shift, but a **historical** shift.
- Something has happened!
- **God's saving power has invaded the world in the coming of the Messiah.**
- **The life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus changes everything.**
- **Ex: "But now." The big kid down the street enters the game: Game-changer.**
- **The whole world stands defeated, but now, Christ has appeared, and everything changes.**
- **The revelation of God's righteousness in Jesus Christ has given hope to sinful humanity!!!**

#### #2: is about a righteousness that everyone needs (21-23)

“the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law” (21)

The word for **righteousness** dominates this section.

- The Greek root behind **righteousness, justification**, and their various verb and adjectival forms is found more than sixty times in Romans.

**This whole paragraph is about how to be right with God.**

- “How can a man be in the right before God?” (Job 9:2).
- 2 answers: (1) **human achievement**, or (2) **divine accomplishment (Gospel!)**

**V 21:** “The righteousness of God has been “**manifested**” (that is, **in Jesus**).

**V 22:** “righteousness” given to us (v. 22) – God provides a righteousness for us in Jesus

**25-26** The cross shows “God's righteous” character– more on this in a minute.

The character of God is righteous, and our salvation is about being declared righteous before him.

**V 21:** A saving righteousness has been revealed in Christ.

- It's a **right standing** before God that has been provided by God.
- The **word** for **justified** is the same root word.
- In Jesus, God gives us a righteousness that we don't have and **we can't earn!**  
“**apart from the law**”

V. 22 – this righteousness is received by faith.

“no distinction” (v. 22) is an important phrase.

Not only are we all **equally in need; but in coming to Christ, we are unified.**

**V. 23: Why do we need a saving righteousness given to us?**

- Romans 3:23 summarizes: We are all **sinners**.
- This righteousness was introduced in 1:16-17, and the need for it in 1:18ff.
- Everyone needs God’s righteousness.
- **“falling short” means to “come late,” “be behind,” “come short.”**
- Some of you know this feeling – “I just constantly stay behind on life’s activities.”
- We are behind; **we never catch up to the glory of God.**
- We’re not just a little **“naughty by nature.”**
- We have fallen way short of the glory of God.

So again, the logic of Romans:

- **God is perfectly righteous.**
- **God demands perfect righteousness.**
- **We are not righteous.**
- **God has provided a righteousness for us in Christ!**

**#3: is not obtained by works (21b)**

**“apart from the law”**

- **The word “law” is general; it’s not “the” law.**
- This right standing is **apart from earning.**
- **Following the rules -- Jewish law, or other rules -- can’t save you.**
- **The spirit of legalism crushes people.**
- **It’s a false gospel.**
  
- Paul is **not dissing the Mosaic law**; the passage shows it’s importance.
- The **law shows us our need for the Savior**. No one can obey the law perfectly.
- This is not new. He will show from the life of **Abraham in chapter 4** that justification/salvation has always been by faith apart from works of the law.

**v. 28 – *apart from works of the law.***

- Obedience to the precepts of the law can’t save.
- Following religious systems can’t save you.

**Yet, many still today preach a Jesus + gospel.**

**Bird: “In my short time, as a follower of Jesus, I’ve had people tell me that in order to be saved, I need to speak in tongues, partake of some sacrament, only read the King James Bible, subscribe to a certain confession, believe in this diagram of the end times, jump through a dozen other hoops that seem to**

serve the purpose of validating the rantings of some lunatic with an opinion and a desperate desire to force it on others. Fortunately, I was well disciplined by Christian leaders and attended churches where the pastors were committed to biblical preaching, so I never got suckered into the “Jesus plus” stairway to salvation. But sadly many do.”

Many people say that legalistic works can't save, but they certainly don't practice such a belief.

#### #4: is stated in the Law and the Prophets (21c)

##### “The Law and the Prophets”

- This refers to the **OT**. (Lk 5:17; 24:27)
- The OT teaches us about the saving righteousness of God.
- The gospel is **no afterthought**. **The cross was not plan B**.
- The OT and NT teach the **same message of salvation, not two**.
- OT saints put their faith in the **promise to come**.
- The entire **sacrificial system** pointed to a full atonement....
- **God always planned to save a people by grace in Christ**.
  - In the Law: Abraham's story (**chap 4**)
  - In the Prophets: Habakkuk (**Rom 1:17**)

“**being witnessed**” is a **present participle**, indicating it is still making known the gospel!

- The exact **way** in which his plan was made known is **recent**.
- **There is a Messianic wind that blows throughout the pages of the God-breathed Scriptures**.
- Some texts that are **so obviously Messianic**, they're **like flashing lights pointing to an emergency exit** (Bird).
  - Gen 3:15; Gen 12-15; Gen 49:10; Lev 17:11; Deut 18:15; 2 Sam 7:11-14; Jer 31; Ezek 34; Isa 53; Isa 11:1-15

#### #5: is appropriated by faith in Christ alone (22; also 25a, 26-28, 30)

##### “by faith”

Salvation is received by **faith in Christ alone** -- the Christ who was perfectly **faithful and righteous**.

- Notice the **repetition in verse 22**, “to all who believe.”
- **It's repeated throughout the paragraph: 25-28, 30**.
- Morris points out that this the first time in Romans that faith is expressly linked to Christ.
- Paul is **not** speaking of a **generic** faith, but faith w/a particular object, **faith in a particular person: Christ**.

- Throughout Romans, faith in Christ appears over and over again.
- Chapter 4 will illustrate it.
- **“for there is no difference.”** Anyone can believe!
- We are **not** put in the right before God **by working** for God but **by trusting** in the Savior.

#### #6: is given freely as a gift (24a)

##### “justified by grace as a gift”

- Paul emphasis that our salvation is due to the **grace of God!**
- It is **given freely, as a gift.**
- We **receive it as we receive a gift.**
- We don't win God's grace by meticulous Torah observance, or by religious behavior.
- **“God helps those who help themselves” is not the gospel.**
- God is not a self-help guru, helping is improve.
- He's not a life-coach.
- God is the gracious Savior, who rescues those who can't save themselves.
- It's not about trying harder/doing more; it's about receiving His grace and being transformed.
- Justification **is rooted in God's undeserved favor bestowed on sinners.**
- Salvation is all of grace, as Paul says in Eph 2:8-9.
- Pascal, **“Grace is needed to turn a man into a saint; and he who doubts it does not know what a saint or a man is.”**
- Bonheoffer: **“Grace is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.”**
- We should never get over it...
- **“Luther grasped the radical nature of God's grace precisely because he was grasped by it! Luther was a guy that who never quite got over the fact that God saved him.” (Bird)**
- Grace is what our hearts need.
- If it weren't by grace, we would have no assurance. We would never know if we've done enough to earn a good enough grade.

#### #7: involves a status change: justified and redeemed (24; also 26, 28, 30)

**Justification** – This is a law court metaphor. (notice the **frequency** of it in this passage: **v. 26, 28, 30**)

- **God is our judge. We sit before him as judge.**
- **He declares us to be in the right before him.**

- It's not that God **makes** us righteous.
- It's that he **declares** us righteous.
- **Justification: "Just as if I never sinned" is partially correct.**
- **It also means "just as if I always obeyed."**

It's not the same as pardon.

**Pardon:** negative – removal of guilt.

**Justification:** Positive bestowal of righteousness.

If you put your faith in Jesus, you are free from guilt and declared righteous.

- We go **from condemned to justified.**
- God declares that we are **forgiven, acquitted, and put into a right relationship with God** based upon what Christ has done.

Through this work of justification, **God changes our status**, gives us a new identity, places us into a new people, who will enjoy a new creation.

**Justification** is **not a process**, like **sanctification**.

- **It's an instantaneous legal declaration in which God thinks of our as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us; making us thus righteous in his sight.**

It also has **future orientation** as well, for **justified people don't have to fear final judgment.**

- **We have already heard our verdict!**
- By faith in Christ, we will never hear "condemnation." We hear, "righteous!"

**Redemption** – This image is associated with the release of captured prisoners or slaves from service.

- **Paul:** Rom 8:23; 1 Cor 1:30; 6:20; Eph 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col 1:14; 1 Tim 2:6; Ti 2:14
- **NT:** Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; Lk 21:28; Heb 9:15; 1 Pet 1:18

"**Redeemed**" is not a word you hear on the street a lot.

(**Exception: Dumb/Dumber**)

- **But in the NT times, it was a word on the street.**
- In NT times, people had slaves. One of features of slavery that distinguishes slavery from American history, is that **slaves could buy their own freedom. They could "redeem" themselves.**
- They could **pay the money and go free.**
- **Redeemed means to be freed from slavery, but there's a cost.**
- **What's the cost? For us, it was Jesus' life and death. "in Christ Jesus."**
- **Our redemption is tied to the work of Christ.**

- Jesus paid the price so that we could go free.
- Jews most important picture of salvation was that of release from slavery: the exodus (Ex 6:6).

Result: Galatians 4 – **not slaves, but sons**. A new identity. A new status.

Do you know the power of this? – to have your status changed!

- Here's Paul, murderer of Xians, saying "There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"....
- Not: "I need to atone for my past." Guilt? Gone! Status? Righteous!

**#8: is paid for by Christ's propitiatory sacrifice (25a)**

**"whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith"**

- The Father put the Son forward. He initiated this.
- Jesus death was public.
- It was sacrificial.
- The cross involved appeasing the righteous wrath of God (propitiation).

While salvation is free, it wasn't cheap. It cost Jesus everything.

- In his body, the Son bore the penalty for and paid the price that sinners owed to God.
- His death involved penal substitution. He took our penalty.
- Jesus satisfied the just demands of the law, bore the Father's wrath against sin, and reconciled believers to the Father.

Some translate the word "**propitiation**" "**expiation**" (RSV), "**atoning sacrifice**," or "**mercy seat**." There's a lot of debate surrounding this word "**hilastērion**."

**Expiation means the cleansing /canceling/wiping away of sin..**

- (Ex: Bowling score)
- Jesus does cleanse us from sin.
- But is that the best rendering of this word?
- Many opt for it because they loathe the idea of substitution and wrath.
- Some argue it's an idea ripped out of pagan religions – appeasing the gods.
- CH Dodd prefers expiation, and wants **no allusion to God's wrath**.

**Propitiation** (Jesus is a pro-pitcher? No) **means to appease or satisfy wrath.**

- This is what the word (*hilastērion*) means in ordinary Greek – "**means of propitiation**."
- Jesus propitiated God; Jesus appeased God's wrath; he satisfied God's wrath.
- God has righteous anger against us because of our sin; and his wrath must be appeased or satisfied (cf., Prov 16:14).

**Mercy seat** (the lid of the ark where blood was sprinkled as a symbolic means of atonement) is possible but it's not solidly based (Morris).

- It could on occasion mean this (Heb 9:5) but not always.
- In Hebrews there's a definite article (the mercy seat or the place of propitiation); but not Romans simple has the word *hilastērion*.
- And in Hebrews there's a whole context about the sacrificial system, but not here in Romans 3.
- The idea of sacrifice is clearly implied with the phrase, **“by his blood.”**
- So Paul **may have an allusion to the mercy seat in mind**. It certainly fits with the ideas of appeasing wrath and cleansing from sin by means of blood.

With all that said, **“propitiation”** is the best option because

(1) **the meaning of the word**

- Christ was put forward “the means of propitiation”
- Leon Morris points out that this word and its cognates cannot be separated from wrath

(2) **the context of Romans.**

- **God's wrath:** beginning in **1:18**, and continues in the **next verse** talking about God's righteous judgment.
- If someone doesn't take our punishment, we are still under God's wrath.
  - “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for the wrath of God remains on him.” (Jn 3:36)
  - Those who reject Christ, are targets of God's wrath.
- Wrath and propitiation go together.
- We have offended the **King of the universe and he will punish sin.**
- The good news is that Jesus satisfied the Father's righteous wrath.
- **The Son of God died to save us from the wrath of God. (Rom 5:9)**

The picture is **not** the Father is angry old man, and Jesus is nice and mild and offers to satisfy the anger of his crazy dad.

- Notice there is **unity** in the action, the Father puts the Son and the Son willingly obeys the Father. **Love and justice** motivate them together.
- What is the ultimate cause of the atonement? Both love and justice. And they are displayed at the cross.

A lot of people **hate this idea** of the atonement/substitution/propitiation.

- **Sproul story of preaching class. The Prof protested, “How could you possibly preach a sermon on substitution&satisfaction in this day and age!”**



- **Robert Funk calls the doctrine of atonement a “monstrous doctrine.” He says, “The doctrine of the atonement—the claim that God killed his own son in order to satisfy his thirst for satisfaction—is subrational and subethical.”**
- **The PCUSA removed the hymn “In Christ Alone” from their hymnal after Townend & Getty refused to change the line about God’s wrath being satisfied.**
- **Michael Gungor said that the idea “that God needed to be appeased with blood is not beautiful. It’s horrific.” It’s ironic that the guy who sings “beautiful things” rejects the most beautiful thing in the world. He said, “I would love to hear more artists who sing to God and fewer who include a Father murdering his son.” Again: “If you can't think of anything to sing to God other than gratitude for taking your shame away through bloodshed, stop singing”**
  - **I beg to differ. I agree with Charles Wesley, “Oh for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise.”**
- **William Paul Young, author of the *The Shack*. In his *Lies We Believe About God*, he says this about Christ’s death:  
Who originated the Cross? . . . If God did, then we worship a cosmic abuser, who in Divine Wisdom created a means to torture human beings in the most painful and abhorrent manner. Frankly, it is often this very cruel and monstrous god that the atheist refuses to acknowledge or grant credibility in any sense. And rightly so. Better no god at all, than this one.**
- **A “cosmic abuser.” That’s the most popular “Christian” author of our time.**

Well, we beg to differ.

- **Such ideas *dishonor* to the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us, and such ideas demonstrate the height of human *pride*.**
- **How about this attitude instead: “Amazing love how can it be that thou my God should die for me?”**
- **No, give me all of Christianity, or give me none of it.**
  - **We believe all of it...**

The cross of Jesus is at **the heart of our faith**.

- **It displays the ineffable love of God, the complete unity of the Triune God, the unfathomable grace of God, and the infinite wisdom of God.**
- **Some in their pride see it as barbarous; we by faith see it as glorious.**

Some say, **“Well I’m a Christian because I follow Jesus’ teaching, but I don’t take the cross seriously – just symbolically.”**

- **That’s *not* Christianity.**
- **Keller: “People think a Christian is one who follows Christ’s teaching and example, but Jesus is not primarily a teacher. *He’s a rescuer*.”**

You can't have **Christianity without a cross**... That's not Xianity.

- Instead of, "I resolved to know nothing **but** Jesus X and him crucified" (1 Cor 2)
- They say: "I resolved to **have nothing to do w/ Jesus X and him crucified.**"
- It's old liberalism in new clothing - fatherhood of God, brotherhood of man and no cross.
- To remove the cross is to rip the guts out of the gospel.

**Many if you are passing through IDC:** Can I just say to you, when you move on, join a church that boasts in the cross of the Lord Jesus.

- That's infinitely more important than music style, children's programs, and other matters of preference.
- **This** is priority.
- If you don't have the cross, you don't have Christianity; and if you don't have exalt in the work of Christ, you are not a church.
- **Such a church would be unrecognizable to 1st century believers.**
- Andrew in Seattle: "The biggest challenges is not the lostness of the people; it's the types of teaching among so called Christians that exists here"

**What's the result of embracing the biblical teaching of the propitiation?**

**What's the result of seeing Jesus satisfying the Father's wrath?**

- **We have peace with God; we aren't enemies of God.**
- **We are reconciled to God.**
- **J.I. Packer's 3 word summary of the gospel: "adoption through propitiation."**
- The wrath of God has been turned away so that we may be recociled to the Father and brought into his family of God.

In rejecting the atonement, these critics are rejecting the greatest news in the world.

**Christian...**

- **You** never have to live a day in *fear* of the Father's anger.
- He disciplines his children out of love; it's not *punitive*.
- We are the father's kids. He loves us.
- On our worst days we can run into his presence and he will not tell you "**Get out**" but "**Welcome, my child.**"

**#9: magnifies God's just/righteous character (25b-26)**

**25b-26: twice: "...show God's righteousness"**

Romans 5:8 – the cross as a demonstration of **love**.

Romans 3:26 – the cross as a demonstration of God's **righteousness**.

Romans 5:8 is a **human** perspective, you might say.

Romans 3:25-66 is a **divine** perspective.

Piper, “Did Christ die for us or God?” My 23 year old self said, “Huh”

Well he did for sinners out of love, but he also died for God – that is to uphold the righteous character of God.

**God has vindicated his own righteous character and at the same time bestowed a righteous status on sinners.**

**“This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.”**

**That is, to demonstrate that he was *not* unrighteous when he passed over sins committed in earlier days – the period of forbearance.**

**How could God possibly tolerate the sins people committed before the cross of Christ? (cf., Acts 17:30)**

- Well, **God did** punish before the cross. Just read the OT (flood, Babel, etc).
- **But he did not exact the full penalty for sinning against his glorious character.**
- **He was showing mercy and patience with a view toward showing his righteousness in the future at the cross.**
- The cross has a **retrospective** and **prospective efficacy**.
  
- **God didn’t overlook sin because he is **fickle** or **forgetful** but because of his **kindness** and **patience**, desiring for people to **repent** (Rom 2:4) and because **he planned to act in the cross.****
  
- **The question everyone asks is the problem of “**evil.**”**
  - How could a loving God send anyone to hell?
- **The question no one asks is the problem of “**good.**”**
  - How could a holy and just God forgive anyone?
- **The real “problem” for Paul was this: “**How can a holy God accept sinful men without violating His justice?**”**
- **The difference is one's **view of sin.****
  - One thinks of sin has trivial;
  - One thinks it as horrible, worthy of eternal judgment.
  - Because of Paul’s view of sin – he marvels at grace and patience. He marvels at the cross.

**26: At the cross, God both upholds his just character, and God accepts sinners as righteous before Him.**

- **He is just, and the Justifier.**

**His righteousness is vindicated, and believing sinners are justified.**

- **How will God save unworthy people, and remain just?**
  - The answer: *the cross*.

**Jesus occupies a unique position.**

**Only He could both save sinners and satisfy God's wrath.**

- He represents **us as he takes our punishment** and **He represents God in giving us perfect righteousness**.
- Paul has been presenting a tension thus far – the good news of salvation (1:1), and God's intention of punishing both Jew and Gentiles for their guilt (1:18ff).
- How will this happen?
- **How can God justify the ungodly, and also punish?**
- How can God be the impartial cosmic judge, and be faithful to his promises to save through the Messiah?
- Answer: **God is both the judge and the deliverer.**
- He pardons and he punishes.
- Both can be seen at the cross.
- In the language of Romans 3: God is the justifier and the Just judge.

**#10: excludes human boasting (27)**

**“Boasting? It is excluded.”**

If all of this is true, then how can anyone boast?

- All reason for boasting is destroyed!
- Did you earn this salvation? No!
- Did you work for it? No!
- Are you righteous by yourself? No!

**The Five Solas of the Reformation – this text has them all.**

- **(1) Scripture, (2) grace, (3) faith, (4) Christ, (5) glory of God.**
- This is “the glory of God alone” category.

One of the signs that you get the gospel, is that you give praise to God. You recognize that the greatest thing in the world has been given to you by grace – that you didn't earn it.

**The Giver** gets the glory.

Humility is cultivated in our hearts, and we begin to grow in grace.

**27b: “the law of faith” that is, “the principle of faith.”**

Not works done in obedience to the law.

## #11: is the basis for Christian unity (28-31)

“the God of the Gentiles too....”

- All human beings – Jew and Gentile alike – are saved the same way, and therefore united in the gospel.
- If the Jews could attain it in some special way, there would be separation, but they can't.
- The cross destroys discrimination.

**V. 30:** God will justify **both by faith.**

- This is why racial hostility is so out of step with the gospel.
- The ground is level at the cross.
- The gospel changes everything – not just our vertical relationship with God, but our horizontal relationships with others.

**The gospel is the heavy artillery that destroys the barrier between us and God, it destroys the barrier between races.**

- Jesus Christ unites the races by his cross-work.
- His forgiveness enables us to forgive and love.
- His grace enables us to be *gracists*, not racists.

**31: “we uphold the law” but not as a means of justification.**

Paul is saying that the cross, which makes salvation possible, not only does not nullify the Law but confirms it. It's consistent with it.

- The gospel doesn't replace the law.
- The Law never was a means of salvation.

The cross confirms (it's consistent with) the law because...

(1) It sends us to Jesus for salvation.

(2) It confirms the law in that we see the penalty for law-breaking paid.

(3) It opposes *antinomianism* (salvation without any expectation of obedience).

The Spirit now empowers us to obey God as justified people.

### **Applications:**

1. Unbeliever: Do you see your need? Do you see that Christ is sufficient? Trust him.
2. Believer: Rest in this grace. Rejoice in the work of Christ. Re-tell this good news to the world.

*Nothing can for sin atone,*

*Nothing but the blood of Jesus;*

*Naught of good that I have done – nothing but the blood of Jesus.*