

Romans, Part 17 9-18-22

Talking Blood

Romans 3:**21-26** *But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²²even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. ²⁵whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

You may remember that last time we looked at two precious words that describe how we are saved. Justification is one. Redemption is the other. Justification comes to us from legal vernacular, meaning *to declare one as righteous*. Redemption comes to us from the language of commerce, meaning *to pay a ransom that wins one's freedom*. They solve the human problems of our guilt before heaven's court and the problem of our bondage to sin. But our next saving word, our focus for today, tells us what Jesus did to solve, not a human problem so much as a God-problem. Does God have problems? He kind of does. And our big, saving word for today tells you what God does to solve his problem and to save us from sin in the process. It is, of course, that word *propitiation*.

This entire section of Romans is dealing with the great problem of how a person who has sinned can become right with a God who is holy. We sinners certainly have a problem which, thankfully, Jesus came to solve. But, in doing so, our Savior had to deal with an additional related problem. What could be done that would permit His just and holy Father to forgive sin and be reconciled with His fallen creatures? God, you see, has a problem too. He has a stunning and inexplicable love for fallen humans, while His justice demands that they be condemned for their cosmic treason. So, we obviously have a problem; but so too does God. Whose problem did the cross, whose problem did the sacrifice of Jesus solve? You could answer *both* and you would be right, but the Lord's provision for us is far better understood than is His provision for the Father. The key to dealing with the Father's predicament is found in that word *propitiation*. Let's break it down now.

Verse 25 says God displayed Jesus publicly as a propitiation, or propitiatory sacrifice in His blood, that is, through His death. Then the next phrase is a purpose clause. One would expect it to say, *in order to relieve believers of their sin*. But that is not what it says. What does it say? *This was to demonstrate His (God's) righteousness*. Oh, so, we know then that the cross was all about demonstrating God's righteousness. But, if I had asked everyone coming in the door this morning – *why did Jesus die on the cross?* Likely not a single one of us would have said – *He died to demonstrate God's righteousness*. But, it is in our text this morning – not just once, but twice. So, there is something here for us to get that maybe we have missed before.

There are two ways Paul says the cross demonstrated God's righteousness. The first has to do with his relationship to sins that had been previously committed. This is something we don't think about much, but there had been a great deal of sin committed before Jesus ever showed up to pay for that sin. How can God explain that? Previously, sins were not thoroughly dealt with either by means of punishment or atonement. Hm! More often we read the Old Testament and get disturbed by God's rough treatment of those who disobey, but Paul is telling us that the bigger mystery is the Lord's kindness toward sinners for all those generations. Offended by God's kindness? Sure - such a thing can and often does offend us. In the news, we hear about some criminal who did terrible things and then a judge somewhere lets him off or hardly provides a sentence at all. Our sensibilities are offended by that. And yet, here we have the supposedly perfect, holy judge of all the earth withholding judgment and wrath upon people who clearly deserve it. You think of King David – committed terrible sins, but God forgave him? How? How can God do that? David himself said that it was against God that he had sinned so wickedly. John Piper asks us to imagine a plot to kill the president of our country. And it almost succeeds. Bombs blow up part of the White House but the president escapes. The assassins are discovered and the court finds them guilty, but their sentence is suspended by a federal judge and they are let go. What that would communicate to the world is that the president's life and his governance of the nation are cheap. We would be outraged. But that rather compares to the Lord forgiving David – doesn't it? How can this be? The Lord, by His grace, appears to despise His own glory. Well, Romans 3 points us to the cross as our answer. God was passing over, tolerating, sins previously committed - which choice makes God appear to be less than just. But, in the coming of Jesus and His death on the cross, we come to realize that God had not been ignoring justice, only

postponing it. The cross actually reminds us of the impossibility of God simply passing over sin. His justice is delayed – yes. But God always knew He was going to do what He did in Jesus. The Scriptures speak of Jesus as the lamb slain before the foundation of the world – Yes, He came and died in history, but in the mind of God, the sacrifice was always given. And now, the cross provides a big *Ah-ha*. Now we have some understanding of the ground for the Lord's extraordinary mercy. The cross demonstrates God's righteousness. It helps us understand God's mercy for all those centuries before Christ.

Then, secondly, and more relevant to us we will understand that the cross demonstrates God's righteousness in that it provides a salvation for sinners that is entirely consistent with God's holy character. The gospel story is the product of God's wisdom to find a way for Him to be both just and the justifier or believers in Jesus. You see, the father loves us before we are justified, but He cannot pardon us until or unless our debt is paid, and our sins punished. The gospel is more complex than just *God loved us a lot so He forgave us*. No-no. That would uphold the Lord's love, but expose Him as an unjust judge who lets cosmic treason go unaddressed. There must be a way for God to be both loving and just. That way is the gospel. That way is the cross. That way is an atoning sacrifice. That way is propitiation. There is a verse in Psalm 85 that comes to mind. Psalm 85:**10** *Lovingkindness and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other*. These virtues of God which seem at odds when relating to sinners, meet at Calvary and are reconciled by the plan of God. And so, wonderfully, as we unwrap the mysteries of the gospel, our appreciation of the love of God actually grows. We discover how broad and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus. And, at the same time, we appreciate God's holiness and His antipathy to sin. Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it this way: *So, the cross does not merely tell us that God forgives, it tells us the way in which we understand how God forgives...How can God forgive and still remain God? That is the question. The cross is the vindication of the character of God. The cross not only shows the love of God more gloriously than anything else, it shows his righteousness, his justice, his holiness. They are all to be seen shining together there. If you have not seen them all you have not seen the cross*. This is why we value hymns such as the Getty's *In Christ Alone*. There we sing, *Till on that cross as Jesus died, The wrath of God was satisfied - For every sin on Him was laid*. Not many hymns mention the wrath of God toward sin, but that understanding truly matters. Another hymn reflects on the justice of God and says *Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free; for God the just is*

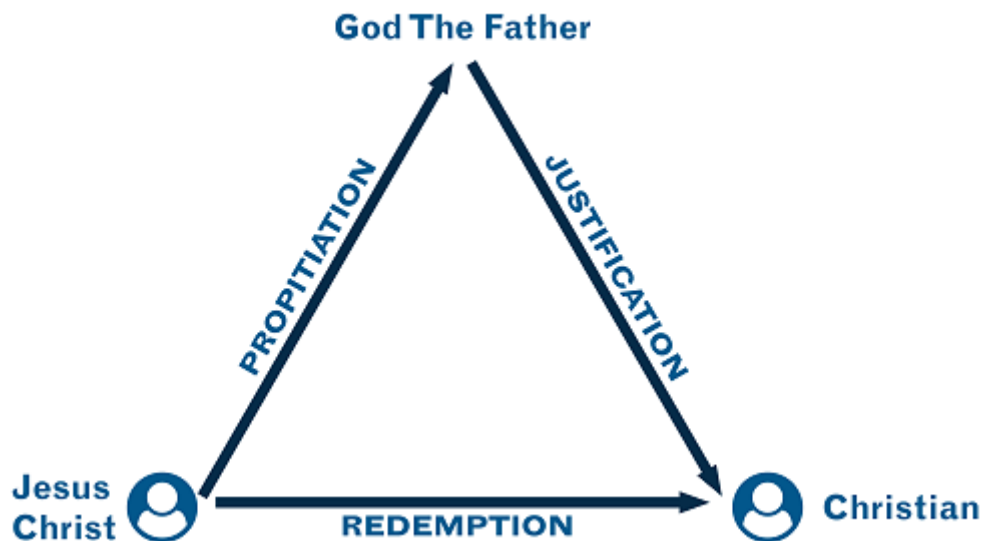
satisfied to look on him and pardon me. And not just, look on Him, but lay my sin upon Him, and pour out the penalty which I deserved on Christ.

Now, we are ready to explore more precisely the meaning of *propitiation*. To propitiate means to placate one's anger. The word itself presupposes that God is angry as Paul has told us He is. Chapter one says the wrath of God is revealed from heaven. Now we read that the righteousness of God is revealed and the second takes care of the first. But to do so it must go through the cross where the penalty for sin is not ignored, but fully paid. The wages of sin is death. Normally we would expect the sinner to pay that debt, but from Genesis to Revelation we read of the deep magic, the mystery of sacrifices for sin. It happens for Abraham on Mt. Moriah where God supplied the ram to die for Isaac. It happens in Egypt at Passover, when the lamb is slain to send death packing. It happens for the Israelites in the dessert as they are given the Day of Atonement. And what happened on that day? The priest would take a spotless bull, confess over it the sins of the people and then kill it because that is what sin deserves. It is a picture of propitiation. God is rightfully angry, compelled by justice to punish sin, but able to punish a substitute, pour out his wrath on a sin-bearer, which enables the violator to be pardoned and received again into the favor of the Lord. James Boice puts it like this: *Propitiation means turning the wrath of God aside. In the Biblical framework this is never a case of mere human beings appeasing the divine wrath, but rather of God himself satisfying his wrath through the death of his own son. In pagan rituals, sacrifices were made by people trying to placate God. In Christianity, it is never humans who take the initiative or make the sacrifice. It is God himself who, out of his great love for sinners, provides the way by which his wrath against sin may be averted.* You will remember that all the Old Testament sacrifices were given by God, not invented by men. God takes care of His own wrath. As I John 4:**9-10** *By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

Last time we were on these themes in Romans 3 I showed you Boice's Salvation Triangle. At the time we had not covered propitiation so we should go back there today. Here is the picture that may help us grasp what is conveyed by the saving words – *justification, redemption, propitiation*. The top point of the triangle represents God the Father. The bottom left point represents Jesus, with ourselves on the bottom right. Each of the three sides of the triangle represent one

of the three salvation doctrines from Romans 3. The line at bottom stands for redemption. It links Jesus with human sinners and describes what He does for us. He redeems us. He purchases us with His blood. We show that with an arrow pointing from Jesus to us. It is what He does for us. The line on the right side of our diagram, of the salvation triangle, connects God the Father with us and this represents justification. God justifies us because of what Christ has done with regard to him. So, this diagram speaks to how God saves sinners. You will see that we contribute nothing. We are “saved.” That is a passive verb. We are the recipients, the beneficiaries of justification and redemption – both of which flow to us from the work of Jesus on our behalf.

Now - the line on the left, connecting the Lord Jesus with God the Father stands for *propitiation*. It is there because this is what Jesus did for us in relation to God the Father. Jesus does it for us, of course. But more directly, He does it for the Father. As the sin-bearer, as the one who takes the wrath of God, He enables God to be just – righteous as a judge and still be the loving, saving justifier.



Before we wrap up today there is one more word for us to contemplate. That is the word *blood*. Our passage says Jesus became a *propitiation in His blood*. Paul writes often about how we are saved through the blood of Jesus. What is meant by that? Well, the whole mystery of redemption goes back to the Old Testament. The gospel is there from Genesis to Revelation. Blood sacrifices – through the taking of animal life, was part of worship starting even before

Abraham. God says this in Leviticus 17:**11** *The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.* You see blood represents the laying down of a life. The NLT is helpful on this verse – **11** *The life of the body is in its blood. I have given you the blood on the altar to purify you, making you right with the Lord. It is the blood, given in exchange for a life, that makes purification possible.* From the garden of Eden what did God say was the just consequence of disobedience? He told Adam – eat the forbidden fruit, you die. The wages of sin is death. That is what Biblical justice requires. Therefore, when a human sins, he or she dies or else the Lord must provide a substitute to die instead. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament was to drive this principle home for the Lord's servants. Hebrews 12:**24** (NLT) *You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel.*

Remember Abel? The brother of Cain? Abel was murdered by his brother and Genesis said the blood of Abel cries out – meaning, it calls for vengeance on his murderer. It was talking blood. But the gospel points us to a different talking blood. This blood does not cry for vengeance but for what? For pardon. As Hebrews 12:24 says – *it speaks of forgiveness.* Charles Wesley wrote a wonderful hymn all about this speaking blood. It says of Christ - *He ever lives above, for me to intercede; His all-redeeming love, His precious blood to plead: His blood atoned for all our race, And sprinkles now the throne of grace. Five bleeding wounds He bears, received on Calvary; They pour effectual prayers; they strongly plead for me: "Forgive him, oh, forgive," they cry, "Nor let that ransomed sinner die!"* Talking blood. We are saved by talking blood – the blood of Jesus. And what does that blood say? It says that this sinful soul has been purchased, has been covered, has been liberated. The price was paid. A life of infinite value has been given in his place, in her place. This blood speaks to the Judge who sits on the throne and assures him that justice has been done. This blood speaks to the sinner who knows his guilt and assures him that his debt is paid. This blood speaks to the devil who wants to accuse and reminds him that he has no claim. Praise God for talking blood. And trust your soul to its cleansing power. *For nothing good have I, whereby thy grace to claim. I'll wash my garments white in the blood of Calvary's lamb. Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, he washed it white as snow. ///What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. For my pardon this I see – nothing but the blood of Jesus. Nothing can for sin atone – nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

This is all my hope and peace – (say it with me) nothing but the blood of Jesus.
May God give us faith, may His Spirit work in us a total confidence in this talking
blood that can defend us with an irrefutable eloquence on our day of judgment.
Make this your prayer and your song – *Just as I am, without one plea, but that thy
blood was shed for me and that thou bidst me come to thee O Lamb of God I
come. I come. Just as I am, and waiting not, to rid my soul of one dark blot, to thee
whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*