

JUSTIFIED BY HIS BLOOD
ROMANS 3:24–26

INTRODUCTION

The **31st of October** marked the **508th anniversary** of the Protestant Reformation.

On 31 October, 1517 Martin Luther nailed his **95 theses** to the door of the **Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany**.

His primary intention was to debate the **sale of indulgences**, which he believed undermined the true meaning of **repentance and forgiveness**.

While the initial reaction to his call for debate was disappointing, the subsequent **translation into local languages** and the **publication** of his 95 theses set off shock waves throughout Europe as it sparked the Reformation.

What was the message of the Reformation?

In essence, the main question asked and answered was—

How does a person get right with God?

This was the central issue.

Nate Pickowicz—

“For Rome, sinners are saved by faithfully adhering to the dogma of the Catholic Church. But when the Reformers began to examine the Bible, they saw that salvation came by God Himself through the gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹

Though the Reformation **recovered great breadth and depth** of Biblical doctrine, the spirit of the Reformation is **summed up for us in five credos** known as, **‘The Five Solas’**—

sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus, and soli Deo gloria.

The initial dispute with Rome related to the issue of **spiritual authority**—whether it is Scripture as the Word of God or the Pope, as God’s self-proclaimed representative, who had the authority to **prescribe the faith and practice** of the church.

While this battle over **sola Scriptura** was where many of the first shots were fired, the fight for truth came to focus on the content of the gospel.

It has been said that **sola Scriptura** was the **heart of the Reformation’s method**, while the **heart of its content** was **sola fide**, or ‘faith alone.’²

As we learned in our study of **Romans 3:21–23** this past Sunday, the doctrine of justification by faith is **the heart of the gospel**.

¹ Nate Pickowicz, *Why We’re Protestant: The Five Solas of the Reformation, and Why They Matter* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2022), 14.

² Cf. *Ibid.*, 65–66.

John Calvin noted that ***sola fide*** was “*the first and keenest subject of controversy between us.*”

He argued that if it is removed, “*the glory of Christ is extinguished, religion is abolished, the church destroyed, and the hope of salvation utterly overthrown.*”³

Luther affirmed the same when he said, “*If the article of justification is lost, all Christian doctrine is lost at the same time.*”⁴

As we studied **Romans 3:21–23** in greater detail last week, we learned that **faith is the means** by which justification is **applied to sinners**.

The righteous God righteously righteouses the unrighteousness through the **instrument of faith**.

That is what is meant by the Reformation credo of ***sola fide***.

Today, as we study **verses 24–26**, we’ll discover the **means by which justification is accomplished**.

To connect the two sections of this paragraph—perhaps the most important paragraph ever written—we can also say that

verses 21–23 explain that the **human means** of justification is (God-given) faith while **verses 24–26** explain the **divine means**.⁵

³ Pickowicz, *Why We're Protestant*, 66.

⁴ R.C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 68.

⁵ Cf. Andrew David Naselli, *Romans: A Concise Guide to the Greatest Letter Ever Written* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 53.

What connects the divine and human means is the **union of sinners with Jesus Christ** through faith.

In other words, God connects the **accomplishment** and the **application** of justification by **uniting sinners with Christ** in order to declare them righteous.

Today, as we will learn in our detailed study of **verses 24–26**, Paul explains that **God accomplished** the justification of sinners through the **work of Christ on the cross**.

He uses **two key theological concepts** to describe that work—**redemption** and **propitiation**.

They describe specific aspects of **another key theological concept** that describes the work of Christ on the cross as a whole—**atonement**.

Atonement, as **one author** defines it, refers to, *“The death of Christ on the cross, and what it accomplished.”*⁶

The **most powerful symbol** of Christ’s atoning death is that of His **blood**.

Even as Paul refers to God’s saving work in Christ as that done **“by His blood,”** we may use that same language to refer to all that Christ did on the cross to accomplish our justification and salvation.

⁶ Gregg R. Allison, “Atonement,” in *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 28.

So then, as we'll learn today, the **divine means** of our justification is **the blood of Christ**.

God righteously righteous the unrighteous in Christ, by His blood, which **symbolises His atoning death** on the cross.

PROPOSITION

As we continue to study this paragraph in greater detail, we'll find in **3:24–26** that sinners are **made right with God through the blood of Christ**—
that is, through His **atoning work on the cross**.

As Paul explains the good news in detail, he provides us with **another three aspects** of the doctrine of justification.

In this section, focusing on the accomplishment of justification, we'll learn that **justification is**—

1. **Accomplished by means of redemption (24)**
2. **Accomplished by means of propitiation (25a)**
3. **Accomplished for the purpose of glorification (25b–26)**

In short, Paul will explain the **how and why** of justification and its accomplishment.

1. ACCOMPLISHED BY MEANS OF REDEMPTION (24)

With Paul referring to the **problems of sin** in **verse 23**, he continues in the same sentence into **verse 24** where the universal problem of unrighteousness is resolved by the **provision of righteousness** through justification.

The righteous God righteously righteouses the unrighteous.

As Paul explains, the righteousness of God is **both free and expensive**.⁷

Paul writes that the **manner** in which God makes sinners right with Him is **fundamentally free**—

²⁴ **being justified as a gift**

The reason why justification must be given so freely is that man is **completely unable to save himself**, or even to respond to God in any way so as to merit God's favour or initiate His saving work.

The fact that we are made right with God freely, as a gift, indicates that the **work of saving sinners is entirely God's**.

God must take the initiative because there is nothing in man to commend him to God, except for God's sovereign decision within Himself to choose those to whom He will give this gift of justification.

⁷ Naselli, *Romans*, 53.

²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace

“**Grace**” is one of Paul’s most **significant theological terms**.

Paul uses the term to refer to **God’s totally unmerited favour**, which is the favour of God that doesn’t take into consideration the worthiness of the recipient.

As **Doug Moo** explains—

“[Paul] uses it typically not to describe a quality of God but the way in which God has acted in Christ: unconstrained by anything beyond his own will. God’s justifying verdict is totally unmerited. People have done, and can do, nothing to earn it.”⁸

This is the Reformation credo of ***sola gratia***.

This is the means by which the righteous God righteously righteouses the unrighteousness.

If God’s salvation of sinners through justification is entirely by grace alone, then one important **implication** is that every other means must be supplied by God.

That is, if God justifies by His grace alone, then He is the One **who must give the gift of faith** which is the human means by which God applies the work of Christ to the sinner.

⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, Second Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 249.

24 being justified as a gift by His grace **through the redemption**

Here we see Paul explain that justification is offered by grace, **on the basis of** the work of redemption.

In other words, justification is **accomplished by means** of redemption.

Redemption is a **key theological concept** that is part of the **larger work of atonement** that Jesus accomplished when He died on the cross.

Redemption is a **metaphor** drawn from the world of **commerce and slavery**.

Redemption in both the Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts commonly referred to **freedom from slavery** after someone **paid the price or ransom**.

In our case, we are enslaved to sin, and Jesus frees us from that slavery by paying the price—his death.⁹

24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption **which is in Christ Jesus**

With these words Paul means something far **more significant** than merely teaching that our redemption was accomplished **BY Christ**.

⁹ Naselli, *Romans*, 54.

Christ accomplished our redemption, and God applies it to us when He **unites us with Christ**.¹⁰

John Murray—

“Union with Christ is really the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation not only in its application but also in its once-for-all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ.”¹¹

This doctrine is so important to us that without our union with Christ, we would have **no salvation, no justification**.

John Calvin—

“We must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from Him, all that He has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.”¹²

It is on the basis of being **“in Christ Jesus,”** through faith, that our guilt is **justly imputed** to Him, and that we are **justly credited** with His righteousness and receive all the benefits of His perfect life, sacrificial death and glorious resurrection.

¹⁰ “Union with Christ is defined as union, participation, identification, incorporation—terms that together do justice to the widespread variety and nuance of Paul’s language, theology, and ethical thought about our relatedness to Christ. Union conveys faith union with Christ, mutual indwelling, trinitarian, and nuptial notions. Participation refers to the partaking in the events of Christ’s narrative. Identification encapsulates believers’ location in the realm of Christ and their allegiance to his lordship. Incorporation gathers up the corporate dimensions of membership in Christ’s body.”
Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union With Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 420.

¹¹ John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), 161.

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 & 2, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 537–784.

2. ACCOMPLISHED BY MEANS OF PROPITIATION (25a)

The second **key theological concept** that we are introduced to by Paul is propitiation.

Propitiation refers to Christ **appeasing the wrath of God** against sinful people by means of His death on the cross.

As **one author** explains, “*The Old Testament background is the blood of sacrifices that was sprinkled on the mercy seat, thereby satisfying God’s wrath and ensuring mercy instead.*”¹³

²⁵ **whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation**

The Greek word (ἱλαστήριον) here translated as “**propitiation**” refers to this theological concept of **satisfying God’s wrath**, but can also mean “**place of propitiation.**”¹⁴

It’s used only one other time in the NT, in **Hebrews 9:5**

And above [the ark of the covenant] were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.

The mercy seat for the old covenant is the **gold plate** that covered the **ark of the covenant.**

It is where the **high priest sprinkled blood** each year on the **Day of Atonement** as a means of propitiating God’s wrath.

¹³ Gregg R. Allison, “Propitiation,” in *The Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 174.

¹⁴ BDAG, ἱλαστήριον.

For Israel, the mercy seat came to represent the place where, or the means by which, God took care of His people's sin problem.

Paul is saying that God displayed Jesus as the “**mercy seat**,” the place where, or **means by which**, God accomplished the ultimate propitiation.¹⁵

As **John Murray** rightly points out—

*“Propitiation presupposes the wrath and displeasure of God, and the purpose of propitiation is the removal of this displeasure.”*¹⁶

God the Son is the propitiation, and God the Father is the One who is propitiated.

Christ's sacrificial death is the means that propitiates the Father—that is, **Jesus turns God's wrath against us into favour**.¹⁷

This is why Jesus had to live a perfect life under the Law of Moses.

It was not, as we learnt last Sunday, to earn a righteousness under the Law in order to credit or impute that Law-based righteousness of Christ to sinners in justification.

¹⁵ Naselli, *Romans*, 55.

Cf. Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible*, Second Edition (Denmark: Thomas Nelson, 2019), Ro 3:25, fn33.

Cf. Nico S. L. Fryer, “The Meaning and Translation of *Hilastērion* in Romans 3:25,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (1987): 99–116.

¹⁶ Murray, *Redemption*, 30.

¹⁷ Naselli, *Romans*, 56.

Rather, it was because Christ had to be a perfect sacrifice in order to die in the place of His people on the cross.

John 1:29

On the next day, he saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

Hebrews 9:14

...the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God...

1 Peter 1:18-19

¹⁸ **...you were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver or gold from your futile conduct inherited from your forefathers,**

¹⁹ **but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.**

That being said, the **ultimate witness** to the righteousness of Christ is not the Law, though the Law certainly testifies to His **moral perfection**.

The ultimate witness to Christ’s righteousness that enabled Him to successfully propitiate the Father’s wrath was His resurrection from the dead.

Romans 4:25

He who was delivered over on account of our transgressions, and was raised on account of our justification.

²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation **in His blood**

There is a **clearer way to translate** this phrase to convey the **instrumental idea** that Paul intends—“**BY His blood.**”

Once again, we see that the death of Christ on the cross is the **means by which** He accomplished not only redemption but also propitiation.

Ephesians 1:7

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our transgressions, according to the riches of His grace

Hebrews 9:12

...not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, [Christ] entered the holy places once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

Revelation 1:5

...Jesus Christ... who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood

However, we must be careful to understand that it is **not the literal blood** of Jesus that atones for our sins and propitiates God's wrath.

The blood **symbolises the life** that was sacrificed.

Leviticus 17:11

For 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 that makes atonement by the life.

John MacArthur—

“There is nothing mystical... about the blood of Christ. It saves us only in the sense that His death was the sacrificial death of the final Lamb....

Proper biblical teaching on the blood of Christ simply is that His physical blood has no magical or mystical saving power. It is not some supernaturally preserved form of the actual blood of Christ that literally washes believers of their sin. The blood of Christ is applied to the believer in a symbolic sense, by faith...”¹⁸

When we read, for example, in **Hebrews 9:22** that, **“without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness,”** that means much more than just bleeding.

If mere bleeding could atone for sins, then why did Jesus not imply bleed without dying?

The shedding of blood refers to Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross.

²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith

“**Faith**” is the **human response** to the atoning death of Christ that is necessary for God’s saving work to become effective.

As we have already learned, this faith includes more than simple **understanding** and **ascent**, but is primarily about **trusting** that God has accomplished the atonement by means of Christ’s death in order to justify sinners.

¹⁸ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Colossians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 62–63.

3. ACCOMPLISHED FOR THE PURPOSE OF GLORIFICATION (25b–26)

Having explained the **HOW** of justification and its accomplishment, Paul adds a third aspect that explains the **WHY**.

In **verses 25–26**, we remember that Paul uses the key phrase “**the righteousness of God**” with a different nuance from **verses 21–23**.

Where Paul has been using it in the sense of **what God gives**—His gift of a **legal right standing or status** before Him—he now uses the phrase in the sense of **who God is**—**His character**.

This is the main doctrine of his letter to the Romans, as he first introduced it in **Romans 1:16–17**—

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “BUT THE RIGHTEOUS WILL LIVE BY FAITH.”

Here in **3:25–26**, Paul explains that God’s saving righteousness is revealed in the gospel precisely because He **vindicates His own righteousness** through the cross of Christ.¹⁹

¹⁹ Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification*, ed. D. A. Carson, New Studies in Biblical Theology (England: Apollos, 2000), 48.

In other words, the cross **accomplishes** the righteousness of **what God gives** while **displaying** the righteousness of **who God is**.

As we've learnt, the gospel is the good news of the righteous God righteously righteousing the unrighteousness.

That is why **justification by faith and by the blood of Christ** is the **heart of the gospel message**.

²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith, **for a demonstration of His righteousness**

The purpose for which Christ atoned for the sins of His people through redemption and propitiation is not only to justify the unrighteous, but also to **justify God Himself**.²⁰

Of course, God was never and will never be unrighteous and in need of a changed legal status, but God is justified through the cross in the sense that it **demonstrates the righteousness of who He is**.

In other words, God's righteousness is displayed in the sacrificial death of Christ by which He justifies sinners so that **His character is vindicated**.

Simply, the cross provides "**evidence** of God's righteousness."²¹

²⁰ Cf. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 48.

²¹ Stanley E. Porter and David I. Yoon, *Romans: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, ed. Lidija Novakovic, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023), 74.

As we **think more broadly**, Scripture does not often refer to God's justification but **tends more often** to refer to the same concept with the **language of glorification**.

As **one theologian** clarifies, "*The glory of God is the outward display or manifestation of His inherent perfections or attributes.*"²²

In other words, God is glorified when His works display His character.

Therefore, the cross not only justifies God, but it glorifies God as His work of righteously righteousing the unrighteous **displays His perfect righteous character**.

As **John Piper** rightly comments, Paul is describing here "*God's absolute faithfulness always to act for His name's sake and for the preservation and display of His glory.*"

Therefore, as **Piper** says, in the atoning work of Christ, "*The glorification of God and the salvation of His people are accomplished together.*"²³

We need to understand then that salvation is **first and foremost a way of glorifying God** and so justification is accomplished on the cross **for the purpose of glorifying God**.

²² John F. Walvoord, "Glory," in *The Theological Wordbook*, ed. Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, Swindoll Leadership Library (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, Inc., 2000), 138.

²³ John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1993).

25 ...for a demonstration of His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed

The reason why God's character needed to be justified/ vindicated is because in the Old Testament period, He did not punish sins with the **full severity** He should have.

People who sinned should have suffered death and damnation because they did not yet have an adequate sacrifice to atone for their sins.

But as Paul says, in His mercy God "**passed over**" their sins.

However, in doing so, **God acted against His character**, which requires that He punish sin with wrath.

At the same time, Paul also affirms the **validity of the OT sacrifices**.

They were valid not because they accomplished any atonement in themselves, as the author of Hebrews states in **Hebrews 10:4**—

It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Rather, the Old Testament sacrifices were valid in God's mind because they were **based on Christ's future sacrifice**.²⁴

²⁴ Andrew David Naselli, "The Righteous God Righteously Righteouses the Unrighteous: Justification according to Romans," in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 222.

We can think of the OT sacrifices as a **form of credit**—
God justified sinners in the OT on credit which Christ paid in full when He dies on the cross.

26 for the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time

God's character is perfectly just and righteous—

Deuteronomy 32:4

The Rock! His work is perfect, // For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, // Righteous and upright is He.

Since the gospel is **no longer a mystery** but a fully revealed plan of God to save sinners through the atoning death of Christ on the cross, His righteous character is on **full display in the gospel.**

26 for the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

The theme of righteousness is carried through with another correspondence between the words Paul chose.

We can translate the end of the verse—

“so that He would be **righteous and making righteous** the one who has faith in Jesus.”²⁵

²⁵ Porter and Yoon, *Romans*, 74.

God presented Jesus as a propitiation for **two purposes**.

The first purpose was to demonstrate that God was righteous for leaving the sins committed before the cross unpunished—**He is justified**.

The second purpose was to demonstrate that God is righteous to declare that believing sinners are righteous—**sinner are justified**.

Therefore, as **Piper** said, “*The glorification of God and the salvation of His people are accomplished together.*”

At the end of Paul’s defence and explanation of the gospel through **11 chapters** of Romans, he breaks out into **doxology** in **Romans 11:33-36**—

33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

34 For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counsellor?

35 Or who has first given to Him that it might be repaid to him?

36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

CONCLUSION

Once again, the question before you is **whose work are you trusting in** to make you right with God?

Are you trusting in your own merits, in your own efforts to earn God's favour, in your own righteousness that you seek to accomplish?

If so, your hope for justification and salvation is nothing more than **self-deception and vanity**.

The only way to be right with God is **through faith in Jesus Christ**.

That faith is what unites you to Christ so that all that He accomplished through His atoning death on the cross will be applied to you.

God justifies sinners by means of the redemption and propitiation that Jesus accomplished by His blood.

You must, therefore, **trust in God's work of making you right** with Him by the blood of Christ.

Understanding the **how and why** of justification—the heart of the gospel message—will help you understand why you cannot trust in your own work to save yourself.

You must trust, as the Reformers taught, with ***sola fide*** in the good news of ***sola gratia, solus Christus, and soli Deo gloria***.

In his beautiful hymn, **Not What These Hands Have Done**,
Horatius Bonar wrote—

*Not what my hands have done
Can save my guilty soul;
Not what my toiling flesh has borne
Can make my spirit whole.
Not what I feel or do
Can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers and sighs and tears
Can bear my awful load.*

*Thy grace alone, O God,
To me can pardon speak;
Thy power alone, O Son of God,
Can this sore bondage break.
No other work save thine,
No other blood will do;
No strength save that which is divine
Can bear me safely through.*

BENEDICTION

2 John 1:3

**Grace, mercy, and peace [be] with [you],
from God the Father
and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father,
in truth and love.**