

## Today's Sermon

### God is Just and the Justifier

Romans 8:33, 3:26

Pastor Phil Layton, GCBC, March 27, 2022

Tonight Quarterly Family Meeting & Potluck – next week communion

Please turn in your Bibles to Romans 8 and as you do I have a question for you? Do you ever feel condemned, by others or by your own sin? Is there any charge from your past that could be brought against you, that you're guilty of and haven't made right? Is there someone you're not right with? As we prepare for communion next week, is there someone you need to pursue peace with today? Is your heart right with God? If you died today, are you sure you would be with God? If He were to ask you 'why should I let you into my perfect and holy heaven, since you're a sinful and unholy person?' what could you say? You can't say 'I've tried to do good or be a good person,' or 'I believe in God *and I...*' You're a guilty sinner before a just Judge who is holy, righteous, and wrathful (as we've seen in this series)

Look at Rom 8:33: *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?* [His chosen people] *It is God who justifies.* <sup>34</sup> *Who is to condemn?* This is the question of questions: who can condemn or bring charges? It's courtroom language. Are we justified as sinners is the question? God is who justifies as the judge, but who and how? We've spent 3 weeks in Rom 8, Corey taught on God's love, I taught on God's goodness in v. 28-32, but as we come to v. 33, what about God's law and our lawbreaking? What about the charges we are guilty of and should be condemned for? Is love enough for a judge to let a repeat offender off without consequences? If a judge is good, does he let bad people go free to keep doing bad things? No, *because God is good*, this is a problem for us who are not, and God is not just loving, He's a just judge

Go back to ch 3. God loves His law which is good, so how can we be right in His sight with all our violations of His law? Nothing we say or do gives justification for our many crimes, our sin. 3:19 *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.* <sup>20</sup> *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight ...*

All human beings violate God's law, lawbreakers in the sight of the judge, but v. 26 says God has a plan 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.*'

We've spent several weeks now looking at God's attributes in Romans, who He is, what He is. Today we'll see God is just and the justifier. Many know 'God is love,' but how many know 'God is just'? How often do we think of God as just? How a just judge justifies sinners is the question of questions.

Several times in Revelation it says God's judgments are just<sup>1</sup> (Gen to Rev). In Gen 18:25 Abraham says '*shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*' Other translations '*do what is right*' (so just = doing what is right). To say God is *just* is to say He does what is right (that context: judging sinners)

When Rom 3:26 says God is *just*, it's the same word Jesus used: '*judge with **right** judgment.*' Jesus said '*my judgment is just*'<sup>2</sup> (same word just / right). Same word in Eph 6:1 '*Children obey your parents in the Lord, for **this is right.***' Same word in Col 4:1 '*treat your bondservants **justly** and fairly...*' But what's just or fair or right for sin is to be punished, that's our problem.

**Just** = right, in the right, upright, related to righteousness in character / life. **Justify** = declare someone to be just/upright, not just innocent but righteous - our problem is Rom 3:10 '*there is no one righteous*' (same root word just). One lexicon says **justify** means 'pronounce a verdict that someone is in full accordance with the law of God.' Not just acquitted of all charges, righteous

But how can that be said of us who don't do what is right or keep His law? Rom 2:13 says the doers of the law will be justified, but we don't keep it. Lawbreakers are criminals, and a good and just judge can't excuse criminals just because he's a loving guy. We're all guilty before God, that's the point of Rom 1-3, and God says in Ex 23:7 '*I will not justify the guilty*' (HCSB). We studied the attribute of God's faithfulness, that's His faithful promise. How can we guilty sinners be justified by this God who is just? Ex 34:7 '*He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished*' (NAS). And we're the guilty!

By what means, then, can we not be punished, but instead be acquitted and accepted as justified by God the just judge? Prov 17:15 says '*Acquitting the guilty [is] ... an abomination to the LORD*' (HCSB). NKJV '*He who justifies the wicked [is] ... an abomination to the LORD.*' Rom 4:5 says God '*justifies the wicked*' (NIV). How can God do what's an abomination? That's not just. If we're guilty, wicked, ungodly as the Bible says, that's abominably unjust. The question of questions in Rom 3:26: How can He be just and justify us?

Look at end v. 26: '*just and the justifier of **the one who has faith in Jesus.***'

God the just doesn't justify the one trying to keep the law, or trying to be a good person rather than a guilty person, it's the one trusting in Jesus alone.

<sup>28</sup> *For we hold that one is **justified by faith apart from works** of the law.*

Justification isn't by faith in Christ plus works, religion, etc., it's faith alone in Christ alone. That's what those 2 banners mean, sola fide, solus Christus. Historians consider *sola fide* (faith alone justifies) the 'material cause of Reformation.' The Reformers said a church would rise or fall based on its understanding of justification, 'a doctrine no less essential than the Trinity.'<sup>13</sup> Luther said all other doctrines flow from it, and it 'preserves, and defends the church of

God, and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour.<sup>14</sup> Calvin called justification by faith alone 'the main hinge on which religion turns.'<sup>15</sup> Another said it's 'the Atlas upon whose shoulders rests the entire Christian faith...the most important thing for a Christian to know.'<sup>16</sup>

**MLJ called this text the most important gospel verses in the Bible**

<sup>23</sup> *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* <sup>24</sup> *and are **justified by his grace as a gift**, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,* <sup>25</sup> *whom God put forward as a **propitiation by his blood**, to be received by faith* [that's the lead up to v. 26 how God can be just and justify the unjust]

**Outline:**    1) **Christ's Propitiation**  
                   2) **God's Justification (those 2 really go together)**  
                   3) **Our Application**

What's with the big words like propitiation and justification? 5-syllables is a mouthful. A Pastor named Milton Vincent says the vibe he gets from some Christians when he uses these words is "'whoa, pastor, you lost me there. I'm shuttin' down on you.' And they're not interested. But what's amazing is sometimes you can talk to that same person about...medications they're taking. And it's amazing...the milligrams and esoteric names [they throw out that are even bigger words than Romans ses]...'well, pastor, I've got osteoarthritis.' That's 6 syllables. And I guarantee you a person like that ...in the doctor's office [when] the doctor says '...you have osteo-arthritis,' I guarantee you they're not like 'whoa, doc, you lost me there. I'm shuttin down on you [and not listening anymore].' No they're like 'what is that? Am I gonna die from it?' And they're pumping the doctor with questions trying to find out everything they can about [what they have]. And then they're not even content with what the doctor says, they go home and read books, they [go online and use technology at their disposal to find out what it means for them] research...what causes it and...they become experts at osteoarthritis."<sup>7</sup>

That's how we should be with what the Great Physician tells us we have, what our condition is, and how it should affect how we live. It's for our good and spiritual health to know what *justification* means. We need to tune in, not tune out, at words like *propitiation*. We need to study and be experts in what God does in salvation in us and what it now means for our lifestyle.

**1) Propitiation** = how God's just wrath toward sin is pacified and satisfied

Ps 7:11: ***God is a just judge, And God is angry with the wicked every day.*** <sup>12</sup> *If he [the wicked] does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready.* <sup>13</sup> *He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts* (NKJV)

God would be just to bring down the sword of divine judgment on sinners. It's sharpened, His instruments of death are ready, the fiery arrows are lit. Jonathan Edwards famously preached<sup>8</sup> 'The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere [will] of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from ... your blood. Thus all you that never passed under a great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls...are in the hands of an angry God...O sinner! Consider...'

Look at 2:5: *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you **are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath** when God's righteous [or just] judgment will be revealed ...<sup>8</sup> but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, **there will be wrath and fury.***

God's wrath is revealed as rebels suppress His truth. How can the arrow we justly deserve be turned away? 3:23 says our sin deserves death, that's the wages or payment required for sin. The end of 3:19 says we're guilty and accountable before God, and accounts payable will justly come to collect.

But v. 24 says we can be justified as a gift, freely, meaning we don't pay.

v. 25 explains how, it says God puts forward Christ Jesus **as a propitiation**

*Jesus paid it all in His blood, 'it is finished'='paid in full'*

PACIFIER – don't think of a bad movie. Don't think of a baby's binky.

Propitiation has an OT background of payment to pacify an offended party.

- Gen 32:20 Jacob gives gifts to *pacify* angry Esau (same word in LXX)
- Eze 16:42 *I will calm My fury...I will be pacified and angry no more<sup>9</sup>*
- In OT Greek, the word propitiation is usually translated 'mercy seat'

The temple is where the mercy seat was where the priest brought a sacrifice, where Israel could pray for mercy. Jesus used the root word for propitiation and justify from Rom 3 in this story: "*Two men went up into the **temple** to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, **unjust**, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'* But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, **be merciful** to me [verb form of propitiation], a sinner!' *I tell you, this man went down to his house **justified**, rather than the other"* (Lk 18:10-14).

That man knew he was unjust, and that God was just, but he begs God for mercy at the temple of the mercy seat (propitiation) and is justified that day.

Propitiation is a big word, but the big idea is a place where sacrificial blood was spilled. The law called for blood atonement by an unblemished life, an eye for an eye, a life for a life. A death could pacify and satisfy that demand

*And 'on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied'<sup>10</sup>*

The payment for sin is death, but God can justly accept payment by another. God's law allowed for substitutes. His wrath 'passed over' a lamb's blood. There was a place for atonement and appeasement of the God who is just. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest went into that most holy place to cover the mercy seat with blood, and the guilt of the people symbolically was put on a scapegoat that was sent away, picturing bearing their sins away.

We sang earlier and 'took the blame for me ... dying He saved me, buried He carried my sins far away Rising, He justified freely forever'<sup>11</sup>

That's the glorious day of Rom 3:24. Let me read v. 24 in the NKJV: *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 ...* In the OT, priests did that privately, but God did this publically on the cross.

**He did to demonstrate He's just and the justifier of believers in Christ**

Remember the image of God's sword and arrows ready to pierce sinners? Another psalm says God '*will crush...on the day of his wrath*' (110:5 NIV).

God must do that with sin because He is just, Isa 53 shows how He justifies: the suffering servant Messiah '*was **pierced through for our transgressions**, He was **crushed for our iniquities**...the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him... For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due...**Like a lamb** that is led to slaughter...the LORD was pleased To **crush Him**...as a guilt offering...He will see it **and be satisfied**...will **justify the many**, As He will bear their iniquities'* (NASB). That's His propitiation.

God's justice is appeased, Jesus is crushed and thus the Father's pleased  
Christ drank Gods' wrath on sin, then cried "It's done!"

Sin's wage is paid, propitiation won<sup>12</sup> [that's how God is just and justifier]

Heb 2:17 says Jesus as our substitute was like us '*in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*' Both fully God and fully man, Jesus paid the price to pacify **and satisfy** the Father's wrath against our sin.

Rom 8:4 NLT: *God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have...as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the **just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us ...***

We sing 'because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free  
For God the Just is satisfied, to look on Him [Jesus] and pardon me'<sup>13</sup>

Rom 3:26 says God is just and the justifier. That's because 3:25 says Jesus by His blood was the propitiation, the place of atonement by a substitute, the payment that legally satisfied justice by a sacrificial death in our place. OT sacrifices pictured transfer of guilt and an unblemished lamb substitute.

**2) Justification** = God the judge declares a person to be just/righteous

– not merely innocent/not guilty – the verdict is just/righteous in God's sight. Having our sins paid for keeps us out of hell but doesn't get us into heaven.



Not being a convicted criminal doesn't mean you get to be with the King.

**'Christ's righteousness alone' is how we 'faultless...stand before the throne'**

**Our 'hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness'<sup>14</sup>**

Propitiation does away with wrath, but we need to be righteous to see God.

Our demerits were paid by Christ's death, but we need the merit of His life.

Our negative score is cancelled but that only brings us to zero on the test. God's standard is 100%, *'be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.'*<sup>15</sup>

Jesus lived a life as perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. He came to fulfill all righteousness, He said, not to abolish the law but to fulfill it.<sup>16</sup> He not only died to pay the fine for our crimes, He kept the law for us. And He died, *'the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God'* (1 Pet 3:18 NAS). God can justly let His Son into heaven, and any who are in His Son. In Adam we're guilty before a just judge, but in Christ we're treated as sons

Look at Rom 5. It talks about how Adam's sin impacts us and Jesus impacts us in the free gift of His righteousness. **5:18** *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men [all in Adam's sin], so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men [all in Christ whose righteous life died so they could live in Him].*<sup>19</sup> *For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.* So not just His death, Christ's obedient life for us is crucial

We need another big word, imputation=transfer of sin and righteousness. If God is just and the justifier, justice must be served on sin and righteousness is needed. Not just crimes off my record, I need Christ's life on my record, to be declared righteous. To be justified isn't 'just as if I'd never sinned,' it also means God now sees me 'just as if I'd lived the perfect life of Christ.'

2 Cor 5:19 says in justification God was **'not imputing their trespasses to them... For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him'** [Christ]. Jesus had no sin but God imputed our sin to Him on the cross and imputed His righteousness to us. In a great exchange, He dies for my sinful life and gives me His righteous life.

Imputation is a 2-way transfer of guilt for grace on the account of believers.

4:22 *That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness" ['imputed ...righteousness' in NKJV]*<sup>23</sup> *But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone,*<sup>24</sup> *but for ours also. It will be counted [or imputed] to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,*<sup>25</sup> *who was **delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.***

We've seen Christ's propitiation, God's justification,

### **3) what's our application**

5:1 *Therefore, since we have been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and **we rejoice in hope...***

The truth God is just and justifier should make us rejoice and really sing:

*In Christ alone we're **justified**; **His righteousness** is all our plea;  
Your **law's demands** are satisfied; **His perfect work** has set us free.<sup>17</sup>*

v. 1 says this gives us peace. v. 2 says we can stand in this grace, because it's never based on our standing on our own, it's based on being in Christ and His standing before God. We stand in grace, you've heard our best days are never beyond the need of His grace and our worst days are never beyond the reach of His grace. It's not a relationship based on our performance, it's always based on what Christ performed for us in His life and death. End of v. 2 says this can give us joy and hope, and v. 3 says we can rejoice even in suffering, knowing God isn't unjust, it's for our endurance, character, hope.

If you're in Christ, but feeling crushed or condemned by sin, listen to Rom 8:1 *'There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ...'* This takes us full circle to where we started. 8:33 *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn?* No one. Not the past. Not even demons. No condemnation or separation.

Look at Rom 10:4, if you're not in Christ and recognize you're guilty by God's law. 10:4 ***For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes...** <sup>9</sup> because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes **and is justified ...***

For believer, 1 John gives 2 more applications. What if we struggle in sin?

1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful **and just** to forgive us our sins ...*

Not faithful and loving, but just, He justly forgives by the cross. 2:1 *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, **we have an advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous [legal term before just judge] <sup>2</sup> He is the **propitiation** for our sins*

...

4:10 *In this is love, not that we have 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. That's our application as we go, how can we love another?*

Propitiation puts away wrath, we need to put away wrath and forgive one another, and serve one another in love. As you do, remember God is just and Heb 6:10 says *'God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints...'*

What a comfort in an unjust world to know God is just and the justifier.

## Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Revelation 15:3, 16:5, 7, 19:2, etc.

<sup>2</sup> John 7:24, 5:30.

<sup>3</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, (Baker), 18–19.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology* (Concordia, 1559), 2:702-4, 15.

<sup>5</sup> George Finch, *A Sketch of Romish Controversy*, p. 220.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Horton, *Faith Alone*.

<sup>7</sup> Milton Vincent, 2011 "Psalm 119 Conference, " <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVvCbiO4DyI>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/edwards\\_jonathan/sermons/sinners.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/edwards_jonathan/sermons/sinners.cfm)

<sup>9</sup> NASB.

<sup>10</sup> Getty Music, "The Power of the Cross."

<sup>11</sup> "One Day / O Glorious Day."

<sup>12</sup> Chris Anderson, "His Robes For Mine."

<sup>13</sup> Charitie Lees Bancroft, "Before the Throne of God Above."

<sup>14</sup> Edward Mote, "The Solid Rock."

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 5:48.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 3:15, 5:17.

<sup>17</sup> Bob Kauflin and Tim Chester, "Reformation Song."