

# The Vindication of God

*Romans*

By Denver Clark

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**Bible Text:** Romans 3:21-26  
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I've headed up that ministry. It's been a real honor for several years now, and you know, this is a retirement home where we have believers and unbelievers, obviously, that are that are joined together in that community, but, you know, it's probably the most neglected group in our society, our elderly people in nursing homes. They're almost like a forgotten people and many of them are Christians who are unable to go to church each week to be in a body of believers and to sit under the preaching of the word and to sing songs and hymns and praises to our Lord and to one another. So it is a real blessing to be able to go there and to worship and to serve those people, and a natural question for a lot of people is why are you going through the Old Testament? Why Joshua? Why Judges? You know, what is the purpose? And I will say the ultimate purpose, you know, going into that ministry with the understanding of the state of Christianity as a general rule in the United States of America, there is an abundance of believers in God who are sitting under a watered-down gospel and have spent their entire lives going to church just receiving a little spiritual pep talk each week with maybe a few verses of Scripture thrown in there, topical sermons on everything under the sun, but the gospel and most importantly the attributes of God and who God is, has not been fully brought before these people. And they are believers who are hungry to know God. They have a desire, the Spirit of God within them hungers for the word of God, hungers to know God, but they haven't sat under expository preaching, and going back through the Old Testament books of Joshua and Judges, it is an opportunity to see the faithfulness of God and giving the land to his people and blessing them through the obedience. You read through the book of Joshua and what a priority that Joshua's obedience right from chapter 1 in his initial instructions to be strong and courageous, "Do not let the words of this law depart from your mouth. Meditate on it day and night, being careful to obey all that I have commanded you." And you see that obedience referenced throughout the book. It's incredible and it presents this glorious view of God that so many people have not been exposed to, and an exalted view of the Scriptures. And so in the book of Judges we see the Canaanization of the people of Israel as they don't fulfill the command to completely rid the land of the people and so they've intermingled among them, and all the warnings of God are coming true, and they're being drawn into idolatry, and we see this incredible patience and faithfulness and a God who is so willing to rescue people who are undeserving, and it preaches and points us to the gospel week after week after week.

So naturally when I was asked to come up here and preach, you know, there was a whole bunch of sermons. I want to preach on Rahab or Deborah or the fall of Jericho in Joshua 6. And now we do go into the New Testament, we do have guest speakers. I don't preach every week, praise God for that and if you feel qualified to preach and you'd like to volunteer to participate once in a while, please let me know. We are very interested in that, but we do go into the New Testament. I'll break out from time to time and go into the New Testament. Well, when we broke from that ministry with COVID in 2020, it looked like we may never come back again and then after a year's break, we had this opportunity to have an outdoor service where we would be outside, the residents would be inside. And so going back to that one glorious day where we were back together with them, I was torn on what message because I thought this might be the only, this is the last time potentially and I counseled with Pastor Ty, you know, what should I preach on because the last sermon I had preached on was on Jeremiah, where he said, "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom. Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, the strong man boast in his strength. Let him who boasts boast in this, that he knows and he understands Me." Well, I had finished part one and left them with an assignment to study that passage and what attributes of Scripture, you know, of God right here just that you can see in this Scripture, and you know, the first one being the Lord speaks, "Thus, says the Lord." That God is a God who speaks to us. He speaks to us through his word which opens the floodgates that we can know God, God wants to be known, he has made himself known. That is our highest treasure is to know God and then we got cut off because everything shut down. And so I thought, well, if you know, if this is the only message, do I want to just pick it up with part 2 right where I left off, or do I want to go back to a message that I preached several years ago which is the message that I'm going to preach today. And it was really heavy on my heart and I may preach it again at Belmont at some point, but Ty, you know, after speaking with Ty, he encouraged me to pick it up right where we left off to get things back to normal and praise God we've been able to continue that ministry.

The last thing I'll say is the hymn sing on the 14th. You know, we sing these glorious hymns and a month or two ago I told Kim, boy, I'd love to just do a hymn sing. The gospel is presented so richly and so all its beauty and majesty in these hymns that we sing and perhaps we could just take a Sunday and just trade off different people leading songs and just sing praises to the Lord, mixing some Scripture reading. So that's what we're planning on doing on August 14th. If you would like to volunteer to lead two or three songs to get up there or just join us and just sing, there's, you know, there may only be three people and there may be 20 inside those doors, but there's a speaker system and it goes throughout the building so even the workers and other residents who are not attending church are hearing the praises of the Lord through song and through the reading and preaching of his word.

Okay, so now if you've got your Bible, I would ask you to open up your Bible to the book of Romans 3. If you don't have a Bible, there should be a blue Bible in one of the chairs in front of you and I believe you'll find that. Romans 3, we're going to start in verse 21 and you're going to find that on page 121 in the New Testament section, in the Bibles that are in the pews, the pages restart after the Old Testament into the New Testament. So 121 on the New Testament in your Bible. Alright, we're going to read the text. We're going to

pray. I'm going to offer some comments from others about this text and then we'll dive into it together.

Romans 3:21,

21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom 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; 26 for 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.

Let's pray.

*The eternal Father, Lord God almighty, we humble ourselves before the glory of Your word and of Your gospel that has brought us all together here today to fellowship and to worship You, to praise Your holy name. And Father, our hearts are so prone to wander, we're so easily entrapped by the values of this world, the concerns and cares of this world and given over to anxiety and so quick to forget, forget You in our day-to-day lives, and Father, may that not be the case this morning. We are gathered here to exalt Your name. Lord, You have exalted above all things Your name and Your word and I pray, Father, that You would send forth Your word to accomplish the work that You have intended for it. I pray that You will open up our hearts like Lydia to understand and respond to the things that are preached out of Your word. Father, I pray that the gospel will take root in our hearts in a fresh and glorious way such that it will sustain us through all of the trials and tribulations and sufferings and storms of this life that so many are going through in this room right now. Lord, may the gospel be the fountain of water that we just have our tree planted firmly by that we may bear fruit for You through every season and every time of our life. God, may You be glorified, may You plant Your word deep within us. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

All right, so a couple of comments from others on this passage that we just read. I want to start with Paul Washer. So Paul Washer has a sermon basically on these verses, he may have used a couple different ones within the passage, but his sermon was titled "The Acropolis of the Faith," and right at the very beginning, the first thing that he opened with was, "If I had to lose every passage of sacred Scripture and I were allowed to keep with me only one passage through the rest of my life, it would be this passage right here." And he says there's theologians down through the centuries have called this passage the acropolis of the Christian faith. And in his book "The Gospel's Power and Message," which I could not more highly recommend to every person in here, "The Gospel's Message and Power," if you want to go deeper in today's message, get that book. There's

three parts to the book, so parts 1 and 2 contain chapters 1 through 9, part 3 is chapters 10 through 26, it's the bulk of the book is on the acropolis of the faith, diving into what Paul is teaching us in this passage right here.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was the pastor of the Westminster Chapel in London for 30 years, and his longest series of expositions was on the book of Romans. Starting in October of 1955 and going through March of 1968, on Friday evenings, he preached to the congregation verse by verse through the book of Romans. It is a glorious study you can get. There are 14 volumes on those series of expositions, started publishing in 1970. The first one that was published was not starting in chapter 1, verse 1, it was starting right here. He felt like it was so important to get to the heart of the book of Romans, this glorious epistle that lays forth the gospel in all of its glory and fullness, unmatched in all of the Scriptures. And in three of the sermons he's preached, Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached several sermons through this section, and in three of them he referred to this as the acropolis of the Christian faith.

John Piper did three sermons on this passage, and in his third one he referenced it as the acropolis of the Christian faith, and he called two of these verses the Mount Everest of the entire Bible.

So you can imagine we're not even going to come to the foothills of Mount Everest in one little message today, but if you want to dive deeper, like I said, I could not more highly recommend Paul Washer's book, "The Gospel's Power and Message," and also Martyn Lloyd-Jones' book on, you can start with Romans 3 on justification, or you can get the Martyn Lloyd-Jones app and listen to his sermons for free, and what a glorious privilege that is. It is such a better use of your time as you're driving through Atlanta traffic than listening to music on the radio or talk radio or anything else. You will be blessed abundantly.

So now, we do not want to just dive in and start talking about the verses without setting up the context; you always need to establish the context. So we have Paul who is writing to the church in Rome, and he's thanking them, you know, he's thankful declaring his thankfulness that their faith is being proclaimed in all of the world, and he's saying he's been prevented from seeing them, but in verse 15 he just wants them to know, "I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." And then he gives us the thesis statement for the entire book of Romans in verses 16 and 17. Paul says, "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. For in it," the gospel, "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'" He sets up the theme of the entire book.

Now when Paul says, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel," he's not minimizing his feelings towards the gospel. This is a turn of phrase that would be similar to in Acts 15 when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension with the people that they were confronting, or the tempest at the end of the book of Acts when the boat is about to be shipwrecked, there was no small tempest. Ted a couple of weeks ago when he was up here, referenced some

city, I forget which city you were talking about, but you used the phrase "no mean city," using probably King James language, and what you're saying is the opposite of what your community, you're giving a negative minimalistic statement to mean and communicate the exact opposite. When Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel," what he is saying is, "I glory in the gospel. My soul is thrilled every time I think of the gospel. I can't wait. I'm eager to bring the gospel to you, to share the gospel." In fact, you can see that it's so obvious that's what he means because verse 16 starts with the word "For, For I am not ashamed of the gospel." This is connecting it to what he just said, "I am eager to preach the gospel." Paul is eager to preach the gospel, "for I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ." It's like saying you won't be disappointed, meaning you're going to be really happy.

So they call that a litotes, I'm not sure if I pronounced that correctly, but it's a way of communicating that we don't want to misunderstand. And what's interesting is you'll see the connection of everything that flows into our verses that we're going to examine today. Look at the word "for," it connects 16 to 15, and he goes right onto verse 17, "For," in it. Verse 18, "For the wrath of God." Verse 20, "For since the creation." Verse 21, "For even though they knew God." And we see again in verse 24, "Therefore." Verse 25, "For." Verse 26, "For." It continues right up through chapters 1, chapter 2 and really through the entire book. That's why we don't want to helicopter in and take things out of their context.

So what is this gospel that Paul was so eager to bring and to preach to the people in Rome? Where do we begin with this gospel? Where does God want him to begin as the inspired author of this letter? He starts with the wrath of God in verse 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who," by their unrighteousness, "suppress the truth." And so "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven" is the starting point of the gospel and there are so many people here today who don't want to hear that message. There are many Christian preachers who are unwilling to preach that message because it is not a palpable message for the lost person to hear. We don't like to hear about the wrath of God. That is not a God that people want, a God who is just and wrathful, and yet, Paul, this man who was so full of grace, grace pouring out of every word that that flows through his mind, begins with the wrath of God. He starts by imprisoning the entire world under the penalty of sin.

And you have a question: what happens to people who die who've never heard about Jesus Christ? What happened to the people in Old Testament times that God had not revealed himself to? What is their condition? Well, Paul is giving us the answer right here: they are without excuse, and they stand condemned before God. That is the reality. People ask me what do I think happens in these situations? The answer is it doesn't matter what I think. My opinion is not relevant here. Who am I to tell you about God and who are you to give me your opinion about God? The question is what does God say in his word? That is where our authority lies is in the word of God, and God's word says that all men have enough revelation through general revelation to give their thanks to God, to know that they have a Creator that they owe their life to, and they all universally suppress the truth about God in unrighteousness, and they exchange the truth

about God for a lie, and they worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever. That's the truth. That's the condition of mankind throughout the world.

Now he turns in chapter 2 to the Jews who have the special revelation of knowledge given to them by God, and they had a tendency within their culture to look down on the Gentiles because they didn't know God, they had no knowledge of God. They thought they were better than the Gentiles, special people set apart, and Paul turns to them and says, "Okay, well what's your situation? Well, you also are without excuse and under the condemnation of God." He says right here in verse 1 of chapter 2, "Therefore you have no excuse. You judge another, you condemn yourself because you practice the same things. Do you think you're going to escape the judgment of God," in verse 3. "Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing the kindness of God is meant to lead you to repentance. But because of your stubbornness and the unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed."

In chapter 3, he brings this all together. This is probably maybe one of the most concentrated, extensive, concise condemnations of the whole of humanity in the Scripture, and so he's borrowing from several texts in the Old Testament. But let's look at how he ties all this together, starting in verse 9 of Romans 3. "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin." All Jews and Greeks, everybody is under sin. "As it is written," here's the authority of the word of God, "There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God. All have turned aside," and it goes right on through and ends it all with, "There is no fear of God before their eyes," in verse 18. "Now," verse 19, "we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law," what's the point? What is the purpose of the law? What does the Scripture say? "So that," here's our purpose statement, "every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

So this is why Paul begins by painting a dark, bleak picture where there is no hope, there is no avenue of escape, that we are all under the condemnation of the law of God, we are all guilty of violating his law, we are all sinners standing before him without any hope of justifying ourselves by the works of the law. That's the point of the law. This is why evangelists and preachers through the centuries, starting with the Puritans, they emphasized the importance of the law work, working through the law, to work with people, to what did Dalton reference, the hymn, "Come ye sinners, weak and weary," is it weak and wounded? There's a wounding of sinners that takes place through the preaching and the exposition of the law of God, the demands of God's righteousness and how we fall short of those demands. That is the point of the law is to stop the mouth and that is a good litmus test for every Christian, has your mouth been stopped? When you're confronted with your sinfulness through the word of God, is there an, "Amen," or is there a, "Why do you keep harping on my sin? This is so negative. I don't need to hear about that." there's a difference between the Christian's response and the unregenerate person's response through the hearing and the preaching of the law of God.

So through the law comes the knowledge of sin, this is an understanding of sin, a grasping of sin, and there's a priority on understanding that we need to grasp. There are so many people who don't understand the gospel and understanding, like I said, there's a premium. If you look at Jesus's parables in Matthew 13 where he gives the parables of the soils, when he gives the explanation of the parables to the disciples one of the key distinctive differences between the person with the good soil and the other three is the one with the good soil hears the word of the gospel and understands the message. There's an understanding. You'll see that priority and premium throughout the book of Proverbs. You'll see when Philip went to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, the first thing he said when he saw he was reading out of the book of Isaiah, he said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" And he said, "No, how can I unless somebody guides me to it?"

And look at this laundry list of sins back in Romans 1. If you look through 39 through 32, I'm not going to read the whole thing, but in this mixture of just descriptions of the ungodliness and unrighteousness, look at verse 31, "without understanding." That's right in there with slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedience to parents. Without understanding is just as wicked as all of those other sins that are listed. Look at look at chapter 3 we just went through in verse 10 and 11, "As it is written, 'There is none righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands.'" Lost sinners are blind to their status. They are completely blind to the holiness of God, to the law of God written upon their heart with their conscience bearing witness, they're continually suppressing the truth about God in unrighteousness, and it is through the preaching of the law, the preaching of the wrath of God, and the exposing of sin that God uses that to bring understanding and to prepare the heart and the soil for the receiving of the gospel.

All right, that's the context. Now let's get into starting with verse 21. It starts with, "But now." Martyn Lloyd-Jones says there are perhaps no two more wonderful, glorious words in all of the Scripture than these two words right here, "But now." Oh, how Paul loves to paint that dark bleak picture, leave you imprisoned without any hope. There's nothing I can do to work for my righteousness, all of my righteous deeds are counted as filthy rags before a holy God. I'm full of sin. I'm condemned. What is my hope? There's no hope. At the end of verse 20, "I'm done. I'm closed off. There's nothing that I can do here to get out of this predicament. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ."

I want you to see how what he's done is he's going back and he's restarting the whole message. In chapter 1:2, he ends verse 1 with saying, "set apart for the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets," that's what he's talking about. The entire Old Testament is pointing us to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and there's whole studies you can do with the prophecies and the types and the shadows pointing us to and giving us pictures of this glorious gospel. It is not a Plan B by God. It was the plan from the very

beginning and from the very beginning of God's revelation, the gospel was being brought forth through his written word to the people of God.

So it's apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested. This righteousness of God, this is the very righteousness that we need to be clothed with. Our problem isn't just that we are sinners who have the wrath of God abiding upon us, our problem is we also need a positive righteousness to be in the kingdom of heaven otherwise we would be like the man with the wedding garment that Jesus talked about who entered into the wedding hall but he had no garment and the king said, "How did you get in here? You have no wedding garment. Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness." The gospel of Jesus Christ is not only about God removing our sins, but it's about God giving us the very righteousness that he demands, the very righteousness that we could never create, we could never work for, we could never earn. God is giving it to us through faith in Jesus Christ.

What a glorious message that is and so we go to verse 23 and let's look at the components in Romans 3:23, "or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." What a concise and full statement on the condition of man. Now, if we understood the verb tenses, once you pay attention to the verbs that Paul is using we get a little more of a clear picture of what it is that he's teaching us here. "For all have sinned," is a one-time, completed, past tense action. This is an event that has happened in the past. Everyone, man, woman and child has sinned. Period. When did this happen? In chapter 5, verse 12, he tells us: we all sinned in Adam. Adam was our representative in the garden. He was created in the image of God, to know God, to fellowship with God, to worship God, to live in obedience with God. He was given the command not to eat from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and he ate, and in that fall we all sinned with him. We are all guilty in Adam's sin.

Now some people will bring a natural response to that and say, Wait a minute, how is that fair? I wasn't even there. You know, I didn't sin. How am I guilty for what somebody else did on my account? I had no say in that." And I love it was R. C. Sproul and I can't remember what teaching it was but I listened to R. C. Sproul address this very issue. It was the best response I'd ever heard. He said, "You know, let me ask a question. Can you be justly convicted of a murder that you did not commit? Somebody has been murdered, you did not commit the murder, and yet you are being tried for that murder. And is it possible that you can be justly and rightly convicted of that murder?" Now, our first instinct might be to say, "Well, no, that's not just. I didn't murder somebody. Why would I be charged with it?" He said, "Well, yes you can be justly charged with that if the person who committed the murder you had hired and appointed to act on your behalf. You paid for that, you arranged it, you appointed it to happen. Then yes, you can be justly accused of murder." And in the same way Adam was our representative in the garden. He was acting on our behalf. To which a natural response again might be, "Well, wait a minute, I never voted for Adam to represent me. How is that right?" And he turns around and R. C. Sproul said, "And that just proves the depth of your wickedness and blindness because of the one who appointed him to be your representative. You were never better represented than you ever could have been in the garden because it was God



himself who made that appointment. Do you honestly think you could have done better?" The law was given to stop every mouth. These are biblical truths, and we dare not fight against them.

All have sinned, all are guilty in Adam, but then he goes on, "and fall short of the glory of God." Now this is a continuing ongoing action that is continual for all of us. We are continually falling short of the glory of God. That's really how we should almost read this. All have sinned in the garden in Adam and are now presently continually falling short of the glory of God. We are continually falling short of God's glory. We were made to behold the glory of God, to treasure the glory of God, to love the glory of God above all things. The first Catechism question, "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." And universally what are we guilty of? Let's go back to Romans 1. You read verses 29 through 32, I'll just give you some highlights, "filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil, full of murder, envy, murder, strife," on and on it goes. These are all just fruits of the great crime. The one great crime that everything flows from is right here in verse 21 of chapter 1, "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man." This great exchange, we exchanged the glory of God for created things.

And then it says over and over, "For this reason, God gave them over to degrading passions," in verse 26. God's response in verse 28, and since "they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind." This is the justice of God, the judgment of God, the wrath of God is in giving people over to their heart's desire. Their heart has no desire for God, to know him, to behold his glory, to rejoice in his glory, to care about his glory, but instead to live for self and to cast the Lord behind our back, to suppress the knowledge of him, push him out of our mind. The Scripture says the carnal mind is enmity with God, very hostility itself. It says that we are enemies of God in Romans 5. You just put your conscience on the trial on the witness stand and what thoughts about God have you had in your life even as a believer? Is it not true that there are times that you wish God were not the way that he has presented himself in Scripture, that you wish universalism were true, that you wish the bar were a little bit lower, that you wish the demands of his righteousness weren't so strict. In other words, you wish he were not who he is. You don't want God when you're rejecting him and wanting him to be different or wishing at any point in your life that there were no God. What further hatred could you have for another person than to wish for their annihilation and that they didn't even exist, that they weren't who they are? We must take God for who he is and who he has presented as himself in all of Scripture, and that is something where in John's prologue, "We beheld His glory, glory as of the only One of the Father, full of grace and truth." It is beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and treasuring him that gives us back something of the glory of God. All have sinned and are continually falling short of the glory of God.

Now let's turn our attention to verse 24, "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." All right, let's consider three components of this

glorious verse. The three components would be 1) salvation is defined for us; 2) would be how is that salvation made available, how do we take part in it; and 3) how is this made possible by God?

So part one, salvation defined. Being justified. Being justified. Being justified is a legal term. This is a forensic declaration. There is a day of judgment that is appointed to all men, and we will stand before our Creator and we will have to give an account of every thought, every word, every deed done in secret, and there will be a judgment that is rendered to every man and that will be either you will be condemned under the law of God and cast out of his glorious presence for all of eternity, or you will be declared justified, you will be declared right in the courtroom of God.

Being justified now we need to pay close attention. 1. There's nothing we are doing. This is something being done to us, being justified. God is the one who is justifying. We are not doing anything to take part in this. It is God's justification. Now be careful that you don't think of it like you would saying being beautified, like this kitchen needs to be beautified. If we beautify the kitchen, it means we make the kitchen beautiful. Well, being justified does not mean that God is making us just and righteous as if we are now never going to be dealing with sin again. This is a legal declaration in the courtroom of God, his verdict, his just judgment, and if we don't understand this correctly as believers, Satan is going to just have his way with you over and over again. As you study the word more and you get to know the Lord more, you start to see your sin more and you start to see your sin before you came to Christ in a way that you never did before, and that you become more sensitive to your sin. And Satan will bring to your mind, it's like all of us by nature kind of revert back to a salvation by works even as believers because we get so troubled over our standing with the Lord because the fact is, we still have these idols in our hearts that just keep popping up and we can't seem to shut them down, and Satan will remind you of all of your imperfections and how short you fall of the glory of God every day and you can't possibly be a real Christian, there's no way.

And that's where Martin Lloyd-Jones just, I love hearing him talk about this. You fight back with those two words, "But now." Satan is like he gives this story of Michael with his foot on the head of a snake. The snake is wriggling and trying to break free so he can turn around and bite him and accuse him of all of his sin and his ungodliness, and he has no part with God, and God would never have anything to do with you, robbing him of his fellowship with the Lord. And Michael is keeping his foot firmly down that boot on the head and the neck of that snake saying, "Yes, that was all true, but now, but now the righteousness of God. It's apart from the law. But now it's because of Jesus Christ. Yes, I'm a sinner, but it is not my works, it is the works of Jesus Christ."

Turn over with me if you don't mind to Ephesians 2. I'm just going to give you two examples of other places where you can use this in your fight. He says, you know, the fight of faith is sometimes just like unbelief, being held down, this unbelief that keeps wanting to pop up out of our soul and you keep holding it down by the word of God and fighting back with the word of God. In Ephesians 2 read verse 12 and 13, "remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel,

and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Once again, here we are, we're in a dungeon, we're trapped where there's no hope, there's no hope in the world. And what does he say in verse 13, "But now. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." You were formally far off, but now you have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Look in chapter 5 when Paul says, "Let no one," this is in verse 6, "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light." But now. You sing that glorious song, "Amazing Grace. I once was lost, but now I'm found." But now, you continually fight back. This concept of justification is a legal declaration by the word of God that we are in right standing in his courtroom. It does not mean we are made different on the inside, that's a whole other topic for other days on regeneration and sanctification.

So how is this salvation available to us? The answer is in the next phrase in verse 24, and that is, "as a gift by His grace." This is how we receive the justification of God is as a gift by his grace, and here we find one of the major dividing lines between Christianity and all the other religions that are man-made religions. Man-made religions that come from the ideas of men on the topic of salvation, there's only one of two categories you're going to find: category one, salvation is not even a concept. It's not something to even worry about or talk about. There is no such thing as salvation. There is no eternal judgment waiting when we pass through this life. That's either one, or if salvation is a thing, it is earned through the merits and the works of the individual. That's all man-made religions have those two foundations and the religion that comes from heaven, how is salvation received? It is as a gift by his grace. There's nothing we can do to earn or merit this gift of salvation from God and, in fact, the words used here take us right back to when Jesus was quoting the Old Testament and talking. He says, "They hated me without a cause." Without a cause, there was no cause that Jesus Christ ever gave anybody to hate him. And in the same way, there was no cause in us that prompted or moved or motivated God to initiate our salvation. Our salvation flows and springs forth from the eternal love of God who is himself love. God is love and the agape love that flows from the heart of God, there is nothing in the object of that love that calls forth his love. It springs forth from the abundance of this glorious, gracious, loving, merciful heart. That is the wellspring, that is the source of our salvation. Never ever ever think that you are not fit to come to Jesus Christ, the only fitness he requires is that you feel your need of him. That is it.

It is earned. It's earned by nobody. It is as a gift by his grace, "through the redemption." Now how is this salvation made possible? This word "through" means "by means of." This is in connection with. It is the redemption of Christ Jesus. God cannot just simply say, "I forgive you. We're good to go." There are so many people who have this picture of God who think, "Well, God is love so why can't he just forgive you? Why is Jesus the only way to the Father? Why is Christianity so arrogant to say that all those outside of Christ will perish? Who are they to say that? If God is love, this God of love and mercy

and grace, He wants all to come in." No, it is accomplished through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

That word "redemption" carries in it, it is the payment of a price for the release of a captive. It can either be in these times back then it would be a slave on the trade market who is in chains, and somebody comes and purchases their freedom. They are released, a prisoner of war. That's who we were. We were prisoners of sin and of Satan, slaves, blinded, dead to God, and it is the blood of Jesus Christ that has redeemed us. We were redeemed not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. That is our redemption. It is through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Now here we approach what many have said are the two most important verses in all the Bible. This is the the purpose. We need to realize that Paul could have, if he wanted to, I suppose he could have just stopped at the end of verse 24. Could have just stopped right there, "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." But he doesn't stop there. He wants to take us deeper. He wants to take us into the very heart of the gospel. He wants to take us and expose to us and open our eyes to the vindication of God. The gospel is about the vindication of God. It says, "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness." This was to demonstrate his righteousness. The setting forth of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary was to demonstrate the righteousness of God himself because in the divine forbearance of God, he passed over the sins previously committed. He set them aside. All of the sins in the Old Testament, forgiveness is there in the Old Testament. Forgiveness is not a new concept in the New Testament, but there's something, there's a problem with this. This is what Paul Washer calls the divine dilemma. The divine dilemma, which runs through virtually every page in Scripture, but the divine dilemma is this: if God is just, he cannot forgive you. If God is a just judge, how can he forgive sinful men? It doesn't compute. They don't go together. That is a dilemma. That is a problem without a satisfactory solution, that's what a dilemma is.

Now let's look at a couple of places where this dilemma should be brought a little bit closer into our minds. In Exodus 34, when God was passing before Moses to declare his name, God says to Moses, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished." Do you see the contradiction? Forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, triples it up. There's no sin too great for God to forgive. God is willing, eager to forgive iniquity, transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the righteous. Well, wait a minute, if you're forgiving my iniquity, transgression and sin, by definition you're clearing the guilty. It seems that way. How does this work? How are you punishing the guilty and at the same time forgiving? So beautiful that God wants to lead with his forgiveness in this declaration of who he is.

Turn with me to Proverbs, the book of Proverbs 17. If you're not familiar, the middle of your Bible, if you open your Bible straight to the middle, you'll be right square in the book of Psalms. Proverbs is the next book to your right. Proverbs 17:15 says, "He who

justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD." Let me read that again, "He who justifies the wicked is an abomination to the LORD." It wasn't the act that is an abomination to the Lord. It is the very person. That person is an abomination to the Lord. "He who justifies the wicked." A judge who is in the capacity to execute justice, who looks at a wicked criminal standing before him and says, "I'm a loving judge, you're free to go," is an abomination to the Lord.

In Ray Comfort's sermon, "Hell's Best Kept Secret," he goes through an example of witnessing to the lost and exposing their sin using the law of God, and after they've acknowledged that they are a liar, a thief, a blasphemer, fornicator, guilty of breaking God's law, and then he asks him, "So do you think you're going to go to heaven or hell?" And most people will say, "Well, I'll still go to heaven." Well, why is that? Because you think God is good and he's going to overlook your sins? And they say, "Well, yeah, that's why." So, well, try that in a court of law. You're guilty of rape, murder, drug pushing, very serious crimes, yeah, all the evidence is in, you're guilty and you stand before the judge that says, "You're guilty. Do you have anything to say before I pass your sentence?" And you say, "Well, yes, judge, I think you're a good man, a loving man. I'd like you to forgive me and overlook my crime. Sorry for what I did." And he says the judge is going to look at him and say, "You're right about one thing, I am a good judge. I am a good man and because of my goodness, I'm going to see that you're punished, because of my goodness, I am going to see that the law is going to be enforced. The demands of justice will be satisfied." The very thing that sinners are hoping will save them on the day of wrath is the very thing that is going to condemn them because if God is good, he must by his very own nature punish murderers, rapists, thieves, liars, fornicators, blasphemers.

He's going to punish sin wherever he finds it, and those who are outside of Jesus Christ are going to discover that what the Lord said through the prophet Nahum to the people of Nineveh is absolutely true. He wasn't playing around, that the Lord is a jealous and avenging God. The Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord keeps vengeance for his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry. He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither. The bloom of Lebanon withers. The mountains quake before him. The hills melt. The earth heaves before him. The world and all who dwell in it, who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him. The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble. He knows those who take refuge in him, but with an overflowing flood he will consume the adversaries and he will pursue his enemies into darkness. And as the lost of this world lives their life suppressing the truth about God in unrighteousness, casting the Lord of glory behind their back, ignoring all of his patience and his kindness, misinterpreting it as acceptance of their sinful and wicked life, going on eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until that fateful day when their life is snuffed out and they will stand before the Lord condemned outside of Jesus Christ. That is the only destiny of every man.

And here we have the vindication of God is contained in this word "propitiation." The word propitiation. Paul Washer says he thinks maybe perhaps besides the names of God this might be the most important word in all of the Scriptures. To propitiate is to avert the wrath. John Owen when he taught on propitiation said there's four things that are needed for a propitiatory sacrifice, these are obvious when you think them through. 1. There is an offense that must be dealt with. There's an offense that must be taken away. 2. There is an offended person whose wrath must be placated. 3. There's a person who is guilty of the offense. And then 4) is a sacrificial offering of atonement to pay for that offense.

Now we have earned through our works the justice and wrath of God through all of the sin throughout our life, and in our place Jesus Christ stood on that cross, and under the wrath of God, he who knew no sin became sin on our account. It pleased the Lord to crush him Isaiah says in Isaiah 53, when his soul makes a guilt offering for sin. Jesus, the suffering of Christ on that cross, the agony that he went through when the sinless, perfect, spotless Lamb of God bore our sin is unimaginable. Unimaginable. And people can say, "Well, how is it just, how does it satisfy the justice of God for one man to die, to suffer for a few hours on the cross, to die," he was raised a couple days later, so he didn't stay dead. So as your mind starts working through these things and you will, you'll have to work through these with people as you witness the gospel to them. And there is an answer to that question. If you read in 2 Samuel, I think it's chapter 18, David is wanting to go out to war with his troops and they respond back to him saying, "Oh no, you know, even if half of us, half of your army dies, they wouldn't care but you are worth 10,000 of us. Your life is more precious and important than 10,000 others." Take that Belshazzar in Daniel where he was weighed in the scales of God's justice and found wanting. We'll take those scales and we put every sinner who is saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, every sinner who was saved from an eternity of suffering who's brought into the family of God, who is restored into the kingdom, every one of those sinners on the weight of the scale of value in God's sight and add to them all of those who are lost in hell, add to that all of the animals and the birds in the sky. Have you seen the pictures that have come from the latest space telescope that's out in space? It is literally breathtaking. You take all of the glory of God's creation and you put it on one side of the scale and then you put Jesus Christ on the other side and what will happen is that the slingshot effect of the disproportionate weight would fling every man, woman and child, in all of creation at such a force off of those scales that they would disintegrate into nothing.

Jesus Christ alone is worth more than all sinners combined together. The demands of God's justice have been satisfied. God is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Glory to God. This is the heart of the gospel. The heart of the gospel is the vindication of God. On the cross of Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ vindicated God because God is a God of love. God is a God of grace. God is a God of mercy. God is a God who takes no delight in the death of the wicked. God loves to pour out his grace. All of heaven rejoices when one sinner repents and is restored into fellowship. The glory of God is magnified, and you can never know the depth of the truth of the lyrics of the songs that we sing unless you understand the wrath of God, you understand the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who by the way, Jesus Christ was vindicated when God raised him from

the dead. Paul tells us that in in chapter 1, he was vindicated by God. He was declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection.

And this gospel, this powerful gospel, the word "power" is used three times in Romans 1. The first one is he was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection of the dead in verse 4. The third time is when it's it says that they, although they knew God, and it says his divine power and eternal nature has been clearly perceived by the things that have been made. The third one is the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

This gospel is the very power of God unto salvation. It is a Triune work of God. Please do not fall into the error as some do of having a picture of God in your mind where God the Father is continually ready to pour out wrath upon you. Jesus Christ is your intercessor in heaven standing there in the breach, holding back God's wrath, pleading with him, begging him to forgive you because of him. There's a lot of Christians who have that view and it will hurt your walk with the Lord. I've heard it from pulpits before where preachers have inadvertently or maybe that is their view, but that's a false picture.

Let's finish this up by just looking at the summary of the verses we looked at today. God, the Father is the initiator of all of this. It's not that God is wanting to pour out wrath and Jesus is standing in the way. No. It is the righteousness of God. When Paul is saying God, he's saying God the Father. The righteousness of God has been manifested. The righteousness of God in verse 22. It is God who justifies in verse 24. It is God's grace. It is God who displayed publicly Jesus Christ as a propitiation in his blood. It's God's righteousness that had to be demonstrated. It's God who is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. It is God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. It is God who was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Jesus Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, or the just for the unjust. Why? So that he might bring us to God.

This is a full Trinitarian gospel. Let's not lose one member of the Trinity over the others. It is a full relationship with your Creator and I would just call you today again that we haven't even scratched the surface on the things that we could go into. Boy, do I commend some of those resources that I recommended at the beginning and, you know, I read a recent survey, 66% of professing Christians in the United States think that all religions are basically the same. And something like 58% believe that people can get to heaven based on their works. And I'll tell you, if you have conversations with people in your walk, you're going to find that to be true. I like to ask, I ask that all the time in conversations to find out where somebody is. What do you think happens to somebody who's never heard about Jesus? You know, Jesus said he is the only way, what do you think about that? And the vast majority are reluctant to answer it. And we need to be prepared. It is unloving to not tell people about the predicament that they're in if they don't turn to Jesus Christ and receive the salvation that God offers through him.

But when we see this and we understand it, we sing our songs like the second stanza, I think it's the second stanza in the love of God, if you don't understand the wrath of God

and the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ and God's justice, how are you going to feel in their depths of your soul?

"Could we with ink the ocean fill  
And were the skies of parchment made  
Were every tree on earth a quill  
And every man a scribe by trade  
To write the love of God above  
Would drain the ocean dry  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole  
Though stretched from sky to sky."

Ted's going to lead us in closing hymn. To God be the glory. Oh please don't let your mind wander as you read and you sing to one another and in praise to God what he has done for us in Christ.

Let's pray.

*Dear heavenly Father, O Lord God, we thank You so much for Your eternal love, Your grace, Your mercy, all the glory of Your attributes that are so beautifully displayed in the cross of Jesus Christ. Your sovereignty, Your holiness, Your righteousness, Your faithfulness, Your love, Your mercy, Your kindness. O God, Your eternal wisdom. We are so small and we are so needy and I just pray, O Lord, that You will give us a greater love for Christ, a greater love for Your word, a greater love for the gospel. Give us a boldness to bring this message out into this dark and dying world so full of sin. O God, help us to be lights. O Lord, I just pray that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit will be with us now this day and through the rest of our journey through this life until that glorious day when we get to behold our Savior face to face. It's in His name that we pray. Amen.*