

Righteousness Through Faith

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 March 2010

Preacher: John McIntosh

[0 : 00] Now to the chapter we read, Romans chapter 3, if it's the same as in my Bible, it's page 1131, and to verses 24 to 26.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.

He did this to demonstrate his justice because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Now I suppose really one of the fundamental things which strikes us from day to day as we listen or watch the news, and that is that there is an immense amount of wickedness of one sort or another in the world in which we live.

And that very wickedness of course and its prevalence, whether it's abuse of children or the actions of tyrants of one sort and another, it's so often taken as sort of evidence if you like, that if there is a God, and so many of course want to argue that there's not a God, it's the case that so many people say, well that proves that he's not very powerful and he's not very loving and he doesn't really pay much attention to what happens in the world, and he certainly can't be a just God.

[1 : 40] And we all have heard, haven't we, people say, well how could a God who has any interest at all in justice allow that to go, to happen, or allow that to go unpunished?

Well of course that's one of the things which all religions have to face, have to grapple with. There's a problem about the idea of holy gods, or holy people, whatever it happens to be, and the fact that there is just plain so much badness, sin, wickedness, evil, call it what you want, in this world in which we live.

Well the great thing about the Christian religion is that basically it says if you want the answer to that, then you've got to go to the cross of Christ where all things are made clear.

So from verse 21 onwards Paul is dealing with the nature of God's work of salvation, how God saves people from sin.

How God saves people from sin. And in these few verses he basically says that God saves people through the cross of Christ, and the salvation which Christ brings actually is to be seen, he says, in three different ways.

[2 : 50] He says, first of all, that we are to see salvation as justification. He takes, if you like, an illustration, an analogy from the law courts, and he says that's the first way in which you can understand the salvation comes by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then he takes a second type of illustration, he takes an illustration from the slave market, and he says you can see salvation as being redemption, or if you like, ransoming, as I was suggesting to the young people.

And then he says, and this is perhaps the most difficult one nowadays for people to get to grips with, he says that salvation come is to do with the averting of God's wrath. The Lord Jesus, when he died on the cross, averted, turned away God's wrath from those who put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus.

And the translation we have here is that the Lord Jesus is a sacrifice of atonement. The traditional word which was used to describe that, which perhaps is the more literal translation from the original Greek, is propitiation.

The Lord Jesus is our propitiation. He is the one who averts wrath, the wrath of God for our sin from resting upon our heads.

[4 : 12] So that's what I want to do today. I want to look at these three aspects of salvation, which Paul introduces, which he depicts here in these verses of Romans chapter 3.

Let's then first of all look at salvation as justification. And this concept of the justification of sinners is really the great, as I said, the great basic problem for all religions, all faiths.

God is good. Men and women, young people, are not. How then can a man or a woman stand before the high and holy God in whom there is no trace of sin whatsoever?

Nothing but pure, absolute, unqualified holiness. And the day is coming when every single one of us, every single person in the whole world are going to stand before that God.

What's the answer to it? How can we avoid the consequences of this? Every religion has to answer it. And as I said, what characterizes Christianity, what characterizes the Christian religion, is that its answer centers on the cross.

[5 : 25] Now, justification does not occur, does not happen, does not take place, because people in some way or other work their way out of sin.

It's not like that. One of the great human misapprehensions across the religions is that basically men and women can get out of the consequences of sin by what they do.

But that's not the Christian answer. It's not the Christian answer at all, because men and women cannot work their way out of sin, and they do not work their way out of sin.

But God can provide a way out of sin. He has provided a way out of sin, and he does deliver people from sin. Now, Paul, inspired by God himself, remember, sees justification as brought about by Christ's death, because it's in this manner, and in this manner alone, that our sin is done away with. And using the metaphor, using the illustration from the law courts, Paul is saying that we are acquitted, we are declared not guilty, we have the penalty remitted, we don't have to bear the consequences of our sin.

[6 : 45] Yes, of course, it's not that we haven't committed any sin. We've all committed sin, we were all sinful from the very moment of our conception, that's what the Scripture tells us. But for those who put their trust in the Lord Jesus, we don't have to bear in ourselves the consequences of that.

But the moment Paul says that, the moment he says that if you trust Christ and name his name as your Savior, that God's going to, as it were, say you haven't sinned.

What he says is that sins are remitted. They're covered by the righteousness of Christ. They're banished from the sight of God. But then you see immediately, and people still face this problem, Christians still face this problem today, the temptation is to say, well, if we are pronounced not guilty, we don't have to worry about sin, we can go and do what we want, because all our sins are forgiven.

There are some people, thankfully not too many, but there are some people who say, well, that's the case, I don't have to worry too much about sin. In fact, I don't have to worry about sin at all. That's what's called antinomianism.

That's what the theologians call it. There have been times in the history of the church when antinomianism has been a real threat, because people who say, I'm saved, I have faith in Christ, I'm saved, so I can do what I want.

[8 : 05] And Paul has to deal with that. And that's why he then goes on to say here, that it's not that sin doesn't matter. No one, in fact, says Paul, who takes the cross of Christ seriously can ever say that sin doesn't matter.

But the cross means that sin has been dealt with and has been put away. That's what justification means here.

That's why Paul says that Christians are justified freely, justified freely by his grace and so on.

What he's saying is that sin no longer remains to disqualify people from the blessings of heaven.

And because of that, they can be said to be justified.

Being justified by the way of the cross means that God saves us in a way that accords with right. He doesn't save us at the price of saying morality doesn't matter.

[9 : 09] You can do what you want. It's the case that people, although people have sinned and do sin, they will be accepted just as they are. He's not saying that at all.

He's saying when we speak of justification, we are saying that sin has been dealt with. And it's no longer something which comes between us and God.

It doesn't mean, as some people think, that we've been made righteous. Justification declares that on the basis of God's saving work, believers are right with God.

Some of us will remember the words of the Shorter Catechism in answer to the question, what is justification? Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, credited to our account, and received by faith alone.

Not due to our own merit, and it's not due to our own merit because it's been done freely. God gives it to us in the manner of a gift. It's not earned. We receive it as we receive a present, as we receive a gift.

[10:23] And it's by his grace, free, unmerited favor of God. That's what justification is. It comes from the generous goodness of God to those he has made.

So Paul is saying, when he says here in verse 24, justified freely by his grace, he's saying that believing sinners are tried at the bar of God's justice, and when that happens, they will be acquitted because of Christ's saving work and their faith and trust in it.

Now, it's not the entire way of understanding salvation, this legal illustration or this legal metaphor, but it's a valid perspective, and it's one which clearly means a great deal for Paul, because all through his epistles he keeps talking about justification, believers being justified by faith.

And it's to do with this reality. One day, every single one of us are going to have to face God face to face, and we will have no merits of our own, because how can any one of us look God in the eye? We can't. None of us can. But what we can do is that we can declare at the judgment seat of God that we are trusting the Lord Jesus and his righteousness.

[11:58] And you know, that's all. That's all we need. That's the wonderful gift that the Lord Jesus Christ has given us. He's met the full claims of the law, the full claims of God's requirement of absolute obedience to his law.

He's met them all on our behalf, and we will be acquitted. It's marvellous, isn't it? We don't think about it often enough. Every time we find somebody on the television, in the papers, whatever, coming out of a law case.

I was looking at the Press and Journal yesterday where I was staying, and there was this woman who had been acquitted, found that the child wasn't going to go on, she'd been charged with fraud or something like that.

And she wept. And she said, I've got nothing to say. For the moment, I think, or something like that. Well, it's like that. Tears of joy is what's going to be flowing down our cheeks as we stand there.

And as we admit, we've got nothing of our own to bring, but we are clinging to the righteousness of Christ on the cross. And all we'll be able to say or to do is to praise him for what he's done for us.

[13:10] Justification he's done. Second thing. Salvation is to be seen as redemption. Well, you know, this word redemption, it's really a sort of picturesque statement.

It really, really is. The origin, of course, is in the release of prisoners of war on payment of a price. That's the ransom. That's the illustration. It doesn't just happen in our day and age.

It was going on, it's probably been going on since the beginning of time almost, when people and nations have been fighting each other and capturing each other and trying to improve their position as a result of it.

So that's certainly what Paul's got in mind. I want to suggest also, you know, that there's probably, possibly even more than that. Paul has in mind the freeing of slaves.

You know, I think it's really very difficult for us just to grasp the impact which slavery had on the ancient world and in particular on the Roman Empire and therefore on people like all the apostles really.

[14:26] It was such a devastating, debilitating, absolutely inhuman thing, slavery in ancient Rome or in the Roman Empire. You know, we think about, well, we probably take our illustration of slavery from the slave trade in the 18th century, taking slaves from Africa to work on the sugar plantations of the Caribbean and North America, the southern states of America and all that.

But, you know, compared with Roman slavery, that wasn't so bad. People who were slaves under the Roman Empire, in Roman society, it wasn't just that they had to serve their masters without payment.

It wasn't just that they had no rights at all. It's that they were just utterly disposable commodities. If you had a slave, even if he'd worked for you for 30, 40 years and he became sick, you just kicked

him out of the house, into the gutters.

No Roman would ever think, never cross their minds to have got a doctor for a slave. He just got another one. And this is the society that Christianity came into.

And this is why slaves welcome Christianity as something which we find very hard to believe, very hard to comprehend. Because suddenly, here was a religion that actually didn't differentiate between them and free people.

[15 : 54] Here was a religion where the people actually welcomed slaves into their communities, into their fellowships. This was a community where slaves could even become the spiritual leaders of it. You know how, well, we all know that one of the Roman governors, was it Pliny Olivia, I can never remember, wrote back to the emperor and said, these Christians are turning the world upside down.

Now, one of the ways, and one of the main ways in which they were turning the world upside down was that they were giving de facto liberty and recognition to slaves. So, I think that an actual fact, when Paul uses this word redemption, that came by Christ Jesus, what was probably even more in his mind than freeing prisoners of war, was freeing slaves.

And that's why he talks about the slavery of sin. It fits in. There's another dimension, too, amongst the Hebrews, amongst the Jews.

The term could be used for the release of a prisoner under sentence of death. Go back to Exodus 21, verses 29 to 30, and you can see, and you see there, that even somebody condemned to death, in certain circumstances, could be freed on the payment of a price.

But Paul is saying that another way, a second way of looking at the cross of Christ, is this way which brings out certain aspects of Christ's work, which are to be described as redeeming, paying of a ransom, to deliver into freedom.

[17 : 36] It's not to be pressed in every way. You can't take ransoms, and you can't take freeing of slaves, and say this is exactly what the cross of Christ means, and what Christ did on the cross.

But St. Paul says, this is a relevant, correct way of looking at it from at least one perspective. And it tells us that a great price was paid to purchase sinners out of their slavery, yes, slavery, to sin.

He says the same thing again, in chapter 7 at verse 14, where he says, we know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.

He says the same thing in chapter 6 at verse 23 as well, where he says that, for the wages of sin is death, that the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You know, remember Martin Luther King and his great speech at one stage in the civil rights campaign, made in front of the Capitol, the Washington Memorial, was it, in Washington, D.C.?

[18 : 52] And he finished his speech by saying, free, free, free, thank the Lord, free at last. Now that's the way it is with sin. That's what Christ has done. He's delivered us from sin.

And when every person comes to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, that really is what they should be saying. And that's what really I think we do say, although we mightn't put it as extravagantly as that. But that's what the cross of Christ does for us. When a person puts their trust in the Lord Jesus, instead of trying to work out their own salvation themselves, then really what surely comes into their hearts are those same sentiment, free, free, free at last.

Praise the Lord. I'm free at last from sin. And that's why you find people, when they've been converted and converted dramatically, they tell you that they walk home and they see colors like they've never seen them before, and they hear birds singing in completely different ways.

Why? Because they're free from the slavery that exists in them for sin. That's why Paul says, yes, the second way that you can think about what Christ did when he died on the cross, the second way you can think about salvation is redemption, paying the price for sin.

[20 : 04] And now they're to live in freedom. Freedom from sin. Freedom from fear of that second death from which there's no return at all, no way beyond.

Notice too, there's that connection. There is a connection here, I think, between what Paul's talking about here and what he goes on to talk about in chapter 8, verses 23, when he talks about the believer being set free with the freedom of the glory of God's children in redemption.

You know, I don't know if any of you like classical music and like opera, but Beethoven's only one opera called Fidelio. Perhaps the crowning point of the whole opera is when, as it were, the ransom is paid and the prisoners start to come from their deep and loathsome and utterly dark dungeon and they start to walk out of it towards the light, which gets brighter and brighter and brighter until they're

absolutely encapsulated in this light.

Well, that's the way it is. That's the freedom, the glorious liberty of the sons and daughters of God. Marvelous. Felt it, haven't you? Perhaps you haven't even realized just how tremendous it is.

But that's what Paul's talking about. That's why he says the second way to see salvation is redemption. The price has been paid and freedom belongs to the one who has it.

[21 : 39] And then lastly, there's the third thing. Well, this is difficult because the traditional word for what Paul uses is this word propitiation.

Now, propitiation, it's not a well-known word today. It's hardly ever seen today. And certainly when it is seen, it's not necessarily all used.

It's not necessarily well used. But propitiation is a word which was common in Greek and Roman thought, in the thought of the ancient world at the time.

And it means the removal of wrath. Now, the New International Version here talks about the sacrifice of atonement. You've got to sort of unpick what that word.

And I think it's translated like that sacrifice of atonement because propitiation is such an unusual word today. But it's a word also which people don't like. There are plenty of people who are Christians who don't like using this word because it's to do with divine wrath, divine hatred, hatred, the anger of God against sin.

[22 : 55] Remember, he's a high and a holy God and we mustn't try to play that down. I was at a conference once years ago and there was a man there.

He actually virtually lost the place. A professor of divinity he was and he hammered the table and he said, God is love. That's the end of the story. There's nothing else to worry about.

God is love. And that's only a fraction. It's an important truth. Absolutely it's important. It's because God is love that he sent the Lord Jesus in the first place to die for us.

He loved us before we ever first loved him. But there's much more to it. The scriptures also speak about the anger of God, the wrath of God against sin. The Lord Jesus spoke about it often.

So we mustn't wipe it out of scripture. And Paul is saying that on the cross of Christ, the Lord Jesus turned away the anger of God against our sin.

[23 : 57] He turned away the anger of God against my sin, the anger of God against your sin. It's really crucially important. In fact, from verse 18 of chapter 1 through to verse 20 of Romans, Paul has been forcefully arguing that all are sinners and all are subject to the wrath of God, Jews and Greeks alike, and Romans and so on.

So, unless this is true of the cross of Christ, then basically Paul has, we all have to face the fact that if what Paul says about Christ's death not turning away God's anger, anger, then the anger of God against your sin and my sin is resting on our heads still.

And that's a fearsome thought. That's a fearsome thought. This God who cannot bear to look upon sin sees the sin which we've committed, the sins which we are characterized by, and his anger, his wrath, is resting absolutely on our heads.

But it's not if you trust the Lord Jesus because the Lord Jesus has turned it away. How has he turned it away? By targeting it on the head of the Lord Jesus as he hung on the cross.

Go back to Isaiah 53. The word which Isaiah uses is a military word. It's like a narcher aiming his arrow at the head of the Lord Jesus.

[25 : 40] God is as angry with sin as that. Crucially important, this concept of propitiation, this concept of the removal of wrath or the turning away of God's anger.

And therefore, we must never forget that we must remember that a third thing which the cross of Christ means is that the Lord Jesus turned away the absolute wrath of God against the sin individually of his people.

It's wonderful. It's wonderful. And it's something which we don't tend to hear very much today about. So do bear in mind that that's one of the great things which the cross of Christ does.

It justifies us, it redeems us, and it turns aside God's anger for our sins from us.

The last part of this section is where Paul talks about the purpose of God bringing salvation this way.

[27 : 01] You know, people often reflect, why did the Lord Jesus have to come? God could have done it some other way, people say. But he didn't.

He did it this way, and it's important to reflect for a moment or two, and to go on reflecting, about why God did it the way he did it. And Paul says that he did it to demonstrate his righteousness or

his justice.

The saving act, Christ dying on the cross, did many things. But one of those things is that it showed that God is just.

You see, it's the case that God is a forbearing God. That's what Paul says in verse 25.

He did this to demonstrate his justice because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

[28 : 14] The Lord is not in a hurry to punish every sinner. That's why so many people sin and sin and sin again and God doesn't seem to do anything.

That's why so often we wonder why God lets some of the iniquity that exists in this world of ours go unpunished. It's worth remembering that sometimes the greatest persecutors and the greatest tyrants and the greatest evildoers do repent of their sins.

That's God showing God's forbearance. It shows him to be merciful or loving. Now when we think about that, when we think of the wicked, the great wickednesses that occur, we can say, well yes, we see how it's the case that that shows that God is merciful and he is forbearing and he is patient beyond our ability to understand why he does it.

But how can that be just? Seems so often to mean that God condones evil or doesn't seem to be too bothered about it. Justice demands that the guilty be punished, just as mercy demands that the innocent, and justice demands too that the innocent go free.

So can God be accused of being unjust? Well, Paul says not anymore, not anymore. The cross shows us God's inflexible righteousness in the very way in which sin is forgiven.

[29 : 56] And that point means a huge amount to Paul. Paul, he repeats it again in verse 26. He says in verse 25, he did this to demonstrate his justice, and then he says in verse 26, but he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just, and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus Christ.

The natural thing would be if God just simply punished sinners. but that would have left a question mark about his mercy, wouldn't it?

While leaving no doubts about his justice. But the God of the Bible is both just and merciful, and Paul says that the cross shows us both.

But God forgives by the way of the cross is conclusive. Grace and justice come together. God saves in a manner that is right as well as powerful.

And at the cross the claims of justice as well as the claims of mercy are satisfied. That's really the answer, you see, to those who say, look, what is God doing?

[31 : 17] Why doesn't he deal with all the sin that's in the world? Why doesn't he just come down and punish sinners on the spot? Well, the answer is that God is both just and is merciful, and if you want to understand how that's the case, then go to the cross of Christ.

Because there you see how he is just, how he's given a way out of sin, how he's given a way into the eternal, never-ending blessings of heaven, even for those who have committed terrible wrong, terrible sin.

And he shows that sin is punished by virtue of Christ being punished on the cross. God is and he shows quite clearly that there is an answer, and the problem is that so many in the world don't want to receive it.

It also tells us why it's so important that we should be committed to mission work, evangelization in every aspect of its existence. Missions abroad to people who haven't ever heard the gospel. Missions where we can go to places where the gospel is suppressed like so many places in the Islamic world. Evangelization, mission work to the people we know but who don't know Christ.

[32 : 32] Absolutely crucial, because God's provided the answer, and great swathes of mankind don't want or aren't able to hear it.

And every single one of us has a huge responsibility to do it, because we don't want to hug this freedom from sin to ourselves, do we? We want everyone to know about it.

So the person who is saved is the man or the woman or the young person who has faith in Jesus, who literally who is of faith in Jesus.

The end of verse 26. He's the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. It's not simply the person who believes in their heads, it's the person who's characteristic, the person who is characterized by faith, whose whole position, whose whole lifestyle proceeds from faith.

You know, there's a sort of difference, you know, in the scriptures, belief is sometimes used in faith, and sometimes they seem to be interchangeable. Let me suggest just this. There is a difference. [33 : 46] Belief is knowing something to be true. Faith is preparedness to act on it. Now, I'm sure many of you, perhaps all of you, have thought of that, but that's hugely important.

There are plenty of people who say, yes, I believe the Bible, yes, I believe Jesus is the Son of God, but it doesn't make any difference to them. It doesn't really impact on their lifestyles at all. but the person who has a saving belief, if you like, in the Lord Jesus is a person of faith, and that person is a person who is prepared to act on the basis of that faith.

You know, I suppose many of us have a highland background or an island background of one sort or another. This does have an application, I think, to people who know these things to be true, and who indeed are on their way to heaven, but who won't make a profession of faith.

They're not really prepared to act on it, and that's really what gives clear evidence that they are people of faith. A person who has faith, a person who is of faith, is a person who acts on the basis of it.

[35 : 03] It's true. It's true. That's what Christ meant when he said, don't just be hearers of the word, but doers of it. Hugely important. That's what Paul's thinking about.

So, these are the things. Everyone who was saved is a person who grasps something, and really, preferably, more and more of this, of what justification means, what redemption means, what the turning away of God's wrath, his anger against sin means, and a person who is a person of faith, who actually knows these things and acts on the basis of them.

Are you all people of faith? That's a great question. I'm sure you all know at least something about these things that I've been talking about.

But are you acting on it? that's what Paul's wanting. That's what the Lord Jesus is wanting. That's what the triune God, three persons in one, is wanting too.

May it be so for us all. Let us pray. Wherever you tick■■ you! homepage. Hands up! More of■■ gig sessions Khalid foe assum Galid Generally sean Chun mechan employed exhibitions installations at sociales destiny ■■■■■■ don't