



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 3: 24-26

Romans

"The Divine Dilemma"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Romans 3, 21 through 26. I've divided it because I want to spend time on three important words. We dealt with one last week, righteousness, which is the gift of righteousness, the righteousness that is imputed to the believer in justification. Dealt with that at some length. We'll deal with it again in chapter 4 and it's a major theme of the Book of Romans. But there are two other words that are very important that are in the text that we will consider from verses 24 through 26. We'll spend a great deal of time on those. This is a rather technical text, technical passage, and it calls for some thought on our part. So we'll have to apply ourselves to it, as we should with every portion of Scripture. But what I'm going to do is read verses 21 through 26 to give us the full context of the passage.

I think it was Leon Morris that I quoted last week who said that this may be the most important paragraph in the Bible. One of the other commentaries, an old German commentator said something like: this passage is the Acropolis of the New Testament. You read those kind of statements and you wonder if you're adequate to expound such a text. But we're going to do it, and we'll see. Verse 21:

But now apart from the Law 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 for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 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; 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.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for the privilege we have to be together this morning, gathered in this place as believers in Jesus Christ with the Bible before us, Your inerrant word. We have sung about the value of Scripture. We will sing about it again. It's the greatest gift that we can have, 'cause it gives us the way of salvation, introduces us to You. It is Your revelation. It's more precious than silver and gold, and we have it. We have it in our hands. We have the opportunity to read it daily and contemplate it, and we have the opportunity this morning, having read it, to now consider the meaning of this great text. And one approaches a text like this and wonders: who is adequate for these things? These are great truths that we can spend weeks and weeks and weeks expounding and considering. Bless us as we seek to do that and understand it this morning. Pray that the Spirit of God would teach us. What a blessing that is. There's the redeeming feature in all of us, Father, that we're not left to ourselves to understand these things. We could not understand them if we were. A preacher is not left to his own devices to explain and emphasize the truth of the text. That would come to nothing. We have the Spirit of God who is our teacher, who guides us into all truth. That's the promise, and so we pray that His guidance and His ministry would go unhindered this morning. May He guide us in our thinking, open our hearts to receive Your truth, things that may be difficult for some, things that some would rejoice in, others will ponder, but Father, may we be open to Your truth, may we be taught, may we think clearly, and may You be glorified in all of this.

So, we pray for Your blessings. And to that end, we pray that You would clear our minds of the details of life. There are so many details in our busy lives that can cloud our thinking and hinder us from focusing our attention on Your truth. It's just one time during the week, Father, when we should set aside the cares and the concerns of life and focus our attention on Your word because this is the book that has life. It is the book that feeds us. It's the book that builds us up. It is unique in all of literature. There's no book like this. This is supernatural. This is Your word. May we be attentive to it, Father. Teach us and build us up in the faith. Bless us.

Bless us spiritually, but Father, also bless us materially, physically. We have needs in that way as well. We pray for the sick. Give them healing, give them encouragement. Bless Your people in many ways. You do. What a great truth that is. You do exceedingly, abundantly, beyond all that we ask or think. We could spend the rest of the hour in prayer and praise for what You do for us, and we won't even have touched the surface. You bless us abundantly, and we thank You for that. Make us appreciative of that. We are debtors to Your grace. Bless us this evening as we come back to this place, and we'll remember our Lord and what He did for us. Bless us now as we consider what He did for us. Give us an understanding of it, an appreciation of it, and may the consequence of our time together be not only that we learn more, but that we rejoice in what we've learned, and we're thankful for it. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] As the German poet Heinrich Heine lay on his deathbed in Paris, he considered his life of unbelief and he said, "God will forgive me. That is His business." That pretty much sums up the idea that most people have about God. When it comes to sin, no sweat. In the end, God forgives and forgets. That's the way He is. That's His business. And when we come to our text, when we come to Romans 3 verse 24, we might think that there's something to that because Paul begins the verse with the statement: being justified as a gift by His grace. Sinners are freely justified, forgiven of their sins, and declared righteous by God. He doesn't mean by that that sinners are made righteous. That's not what justification means. It means we're declared righteous. It's not speaking of the work of God in which over a process of time, He removes all of our sin, He makes us perfect beings, and then declares us righteous. No, just the opposite. He justifies the sinner.

Later, Paul's even clearer and bolder in chapter 4 and verse 5 where he writes: "God justifies the ungodly." So it might seem from this that God doesn't take sin very seriously, that He forgives sin lightly. That's not at all what Paul means. And a full reading of Romans makes that plain. God takes sin very seriously. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, Paul wrote in chapter 1 and verse 18. He is holy and righteous. God hates sin and must punish it. And yet, He is a forgiving God.

In a sense, that is His business. He is a Savior. But how can a holy God forgive unholy sinners? How can He do that without either compromising His righteousness, or condoning the sinner's unrighteousness? That was the problem that God faced in saving sinners. We can call it the divine dilemma. How to be both just and the justifier. It's the problem that Paul takes up in our passage, verses 24 through 26 of Romans chapter 3 where he gives the solution with two key words: redemption and propitiation. God will not ignore the lost. His love is too great. His grace abounds. But He cannot simply forgive and forget. He cannot issue some kind of general amnesty to sinners. He is holy and righteous and good. And because He is, He must deal with sin and deal with it justly. The solution to the dilemma is not found in us; it's found in Him. It's found in the cross, which allowed Him to be both just and the justifier. And that is explained in these two words.

So, it is important that we know and we understand these words: redemption and propitiation, if we are to interpret correctly the cross of Christ and the gospel of salvation.

Now, the importance of that was illustrated for me from an odd little book that I came across not long ago entitled *The Word Museum*. It lists a number of words and their meanings, words like "cruddle," and, "quanked." As in, "I'm really quanked." When was the last time you heard someone say that? What about "witworm?" Have you heard that used lately? Well, probably not because those are old words that have fallen out of use and been forgotten, hence the name, *The Word Museum*. They once had a life, but now they'[re dead, and that happens a lot with words, which is fine. The world can get along just fine without "witworm." But it's not fine if the church loses its words because when we lose the words of Scripture, we lose the important words of the Bible, then with them we lose truth, which is vital to an understanding of who we are in Christ, and how we come to be in Christ, how one becomes a child of God.

But we can, in effect, lose words by not understanding them and not using them, and that is when they are forgotten, and when they die. Our text gives us very important words that we dare not let die: righteousness, or justification. The righteousness that is the gift in justification. We considered that last week. And now, two more words: redemption and propitiation. These words resolve the divine dilemma of how God can be just and the justifier of sinners. And the answer to Job's

question, which we considered last week: how can a man be right with God? How can a man be just before God?

Well, the answer to that is: all of grace. It's not found in us; it's found in God. As Paul wrote in verse 20, "By the works of the law, no flesh will be justified." Cannot produce that which will gain acceptance with God from our own efforts, from our ceremonies, from our efforts at keeping the law. By the works of the law, no flesh will be justified. And now in verse 24, he gives the positive complement to that by stating that we are justified as a gift by His grace. Salvation is completely unmerited. It is all of the Lord. God takes the initiative in salvation. He took the initiative in the cross. That is the reason that He can justify the wicked, because Christ died for the wicked. That is what Paul now explains. He justifies us through the redemption, which is in Christ Jesus.

Redemption is a commercial term borrowed from the marketplace, just as justification is a legal term borrowed from the law court. Redemption means to release, or to ransom by the payment of a price. The word in the New Testament has various forms. It's based on the same root, but it has prepositions attached to the beginning of it, so there are various words for redemption or ransom, but they all go back to the simple Greek word, "to loose." It's a word that every first year Greek student learns. *Luo*. Memorizes his declensions from that particular word and learns it all through first year Greek. Very important word though, in regard not only to Greek grammar and learning it, but in regard to theology and understanding this word, "redemption." It goes back to that, to loose. Zeus, for example, by Homer, in the Iliad, in that way, of ransoming one's life. On one occasion, one of the Trojan warriors is captured by the Greeks and he pleaded for his life. He said, "I'll loose myself." That's literally how it reads, but it's been translated correctly: "I'll ransom myself." And then he describes the treasures in his house, the gold and the other things that his father would give for his release. In fact, all through the story, Homer uses the word, "ransom."

It's a different word than the one that Paul uses in our text, and is used elsewhere in the New Testament, but it's a word that has the same sense. It's that of buying a person's freedom. And so, he writes of a worthy ransom. He writes of a priceless ransom. So, it was a common idea, this idea of ransom or redemption among the ancient Greeks and throughout the ancient world. In fact, redemption was

usually associated with the payment of money for the freeing of a slave. A slave could be ransomed. He could be bought out of bondage for a price, for a certain amount of money. That is the idea of redemption in the Bible. In the Old Testament, people and things were redeemed. They were purchased in order to be set free.

One way that was done was by a person called the kinsman redeemer. Under Jewish law, property was to remain within the family. That was the inheritance. And so it was passed on from family to family. It was to remain within the family or within the clan. But sometimes, due to hardship, due to debt, due to misfortune, the property was lost. And when that happened, it was the obligation of a member of the family, a kinsman, to redeem it, to buy the property back and restore it to the family.

You have an example of that in the Book of Ruth where Boaz is the nearest kinsman who buys the land, buys the piece of land for Naomi and restores her land to her. Sometimes the redeemer bought a member of the family out of the slavery into which he had fallen. Leviticus 25 describes that and the responsibility of the kinsmen to do that. But whether it was people or property, freedom was gained by a payment. This is the main idea of redemption or ransom: to purchase, to buy. That is clear in the New Testament. That is how the saving work of Jesus Christ is described. For example, in 1 Peter, chapter 1 and verse 18, Peter writes: you were not ransomed with perishable things like silver or gold as a slave would have been ransomed. You were not ransomed by these things, from your futile way of life. But, with the precious blood, the blood of Christ.

That is what bought us and made us children of God, and the Lord spoke of His own mission and spoke of Himself in the same way. In Matthew 20 and verse 28, He said the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life, a ransom for many. He is the ransom that was paid, and He paid it with His own blood by His death. He did it as our substitute. We know that the wages of sin is death. Paul will tell us that. Chapter 6 and verse 23. We've known that already. We know that if we read the Bible because we go back to chapter 2 of Genesis and God tells Adam: "In the day you eat of the tree, you will surely die." That's the wage of sin. If we're to pay that wage, we pay it at an eternal cost.

We cannot pay that wage. We cannot pay that price and live. And so Christ has paid our wage. He has paid our debt. He has done that by dying in our place as our substitute, and that idea of substitution is in the very statement that He made in

the preposition of the statement, a ransom for many. The meaning of that preposition, which in Greek is *anti*, is in the place of. A ransom in the stead of many. He was the payment that obtained the release of His people from the captivity of sin and Satan, by dying in their place, suffering the punishment as their substitute.

Paul has another word that he uses for the same idea, the word for purchase, or the word for buy. And we find that, for example in 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 20 where he writes, "You have been bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body." When Christ died, He bought those for whom He died. Is that not clear from 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 20? You have been bought with a price. What price? Well, Peter tells us what price that was: the precious blood of Christ, His own blood, His own life that He laid down for us. You have been bought with a price. He bought those for whom He died. That's what Paul says. He ransomed them out of captivity from the power of sin and Satan and made them His property.

Now, that is what Christ's death accomplished. He did not die to make men savable. That's often times the way the cross is explained. What did Christ do? What did He accomplish? Well, He died in order to make everyone in the world savable. He didn't save anyone, but He made them savable so that they could then choose to believe. And in choosing to believe, make Christ's death effective for themselves. Christ does part of the work, but the rest of the work is done by us.

Well, we read this, and we don't find that. He did not die to make things possible or make salvation a mere possibility. He died to make people His possessions, to buy them back from slavery and buy them into His freedom. You have been bought with a price. Now, think about that for a moment. Think about what takes place when you make a transaction, when you go to the store to buy some item. When you purchase an item, when that purchase occurs, it is effective, is it not? If you go to a store, buy some items, buy some groceries or something else, you stand in line to pay. As long as you're standing in line to pay, those items aren't yours. If you walk out of the store at that point, you'll be apprehended. You've taken something that's not yours. But once you come to the cashier and you make the payment, and the transaction occurs, that item is yours, and you walk out freely. It would be wrong to be stopped because the transaction, the payment, the act of buying is effective. It accomplishes what was intended. When payment is made, what is bought becomes the property of the buyer.

And that is what happened at the cross. Christ successfully bought all those for whom He died, for whom He paid the price. Now, of course, not all people belong to Christ, which indicates that Christ did not die for all without exception. You can say He died for all without distinction, for all kinds of people, but He did not die for all without exception. He did not die for every member of the human race. His death was for a definite people, for the many, as He put it. He came to ransom them from slavery, the many. Now, that's the scope of Christ's death. It was limited to the elect of God. It was designed for His people.

Do you believe that? Because the only option is to say that He came to save and free all, but failed to do so. His payment was not effective and His purpose was not achieved. But the Bible doesn't support that conclusion. Let me give you an example. One of the great texts of the Old Testament, I would say the apex of Old Testament prophecy regarding our Lord is Isaiah 53. Prophecy of the suffering servant. And there, we have set forth what He would do, His substitutionary death, that He would be pierced through for our transgressions. And then we come to the end in verses 10 and 11 and we read about the result of it all. Isaiah says, "He shall see His seed." Meaning, the fruit of His work. He will see it and be satisfied. How could He see His people for whom He died in everlasting torment and be satisfied? How could He die for all, see multitudes not being saved, in torment, and be satisfied with that?

Commenting on this, Charles Spurgeon stated: "If it was Christ's intention to redeem all men, how deplorably He has been disappointed." Of course, He's not disappointed. Isaiah tells us He's not disappointed because it was not His intention to redeem all men. He came as the angel told Joseph in Matthew 1:21, to save His people from their sins, and He accomplished that, because the payment He made with His blood was an effective purchase, as every payment is. That is the meaning of redemption. It means to release by the payment of a ransom price. Christ bought us with His own blood at the cross. He made His people His own possession.

The second word in our text that explains the cross of Christ and how it is that God can declare the unrighteous, righteous is propitiation. It's found in verse 25. Redemption looks at deliverance from captivity; propitiation has to do with deliverance from wrath. Redemption has to do with our slavery to sin; propitiation has to do with our guilt of sin. Redemption frees sinners; propitiation satisfies God.

Redemption has man as its object; propitiation has God as its object. It is a satisfaction of His justice. That is the idea of propitiation. It means to placate God's anger. It means to turn away His wrath. That is what Christ's death did for all those for whom He died when, as Paul writes, God displayed Him publically as a propitiation in His blood.

This word, propitiation, is a controversial word. There are many who cringe at the idea of an angry God who must be placated. It seems unworthy of Him. It even seems pagan. The word "propitiate" was used in secular Greek of placating the Gods. They would become angry with men, but their moods could be changed, could be manipulated by a sacrifice or an offering. That doesn't fit the God of the Bible. And, so some have changed the translation of the word from propitiation to expiation, which means to remove sin. His death was not a propitiation. By dying, Christ did not propitiate God. He expiated sin. That's how, for example, the Revised Standard Version translates this verse, "Whom God put forward as an expiation by His blood."

The problem with that translation is it's not true to the meaning of the Greek word that is used here, *hilasterion*. It doesn't satisfy the context of the passage. Paul has gone to great lengths to explain the human predicament. He spent from the middle part of chapter 1 through the middle part of chapter 3 explaining man's predicament. And the problem is not just sin. It is also God's wrath against the sinner. It is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Chapter 1 verse 18, chapter 2 verse 5. Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath. Chapter 3 verse 5. God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? May it never be.

Paul taught divine wrath. In fact, read through the whole Bible. From the earliest chapters through the last chapters. From Genesis to revelation, you find the wrath of God taught. That wrath, which is very real, must be turned away if sinners are to be saved. That's what happened at the cross, and that is what propitiation describes. It has nothing to do with the pagan notions of bad-tempered Gods whose mood swings are controlled by sacrifices and offerings. It has to do with God's holiness, which is the reason for His wrath against evil.

What would we think of a God who was indifferent toward evil? We see it every day on our television sets on the news. We read about it in the newspaper. We're exorcised over it. What would we think of God if we learned: oh well, He's

completely indifferent toward that. He's not indifferent toward it. God's wrath is real because God hates evil. He hates sin, and because He is a holy God, He must punish it. Sin is no small thing, but God can simply dismiss like some indulgent parent. He is righteous, as I said, He must deal with sin righteously.

But also, the biblical idea of propitiation is not like the pagan idea because with the pagans, it was man that placated the gods. They had it within their means to change the disposition of the gods toward them. In the Bible, man does not propitiate God. God propitiates Himself. Mankind has no means of doing that.

What did he say in chapter 3 and verse 20? By the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in His sight. We cannot justify ourselves. We cannot placate God in any way by the things that we do. We don't have the means of doing that. Our deeds, our offerings are not sufficient to ransom ourselves from the grip and the power and the slavery of sin. They're not sufficient to turn away God's wrath. Only God can do that.

That is what Paul says God did. He displayed His Son publically as a propitiation in His blood. God did it. Man cannot do it. John Stott wrote; "God in His undeserved love has done for us what we could never do by ourselves. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement." That is what John Stott writes. That is the meaning of the apostle Paul's statement, and that is what the rest of the apostles taught. The apostle John, for example, taught that very thing in 1 John 4 and verse 10. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

It's all of God. Not that we had some love for God that moved Him to love us. When we were rebels, Paul will explain in chapter 5, that when we are at enmity with God, when we were hostile toward God, that's when God loved us, and that's when God saved us. It's all of God, out of His own love, He propitiated His own holy wrath through the gift of His own Son, who took our place in judgment and bore the penalty of our sin in our place.

That is the basis on which the righteous God can declare the unrighteous, righteous, because we have a substitute who stood in our place and bore the punishment in our place, which satisfied God's justice. In that way, He turned away the wrath of God. That is propitiation, a very important word. But interestingly, a word that is only used twice in the New Testament: here, and in Hebrews 9:5. Now, I

know I read in 1 John 4:10 propitiation, but it's a different form of the word.

*Hilasmis* is that word. This is *hilasterion*, and that word is only used here and in Hebrews chapter 9 and verse 5. And there in Hebrews, it means mercy seat. In fact, in the Old Testament, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, this is the word that is used for mercy seat, which was, as you know, the gold slab or the gold lid that covered the top of the Ark of the Covenant that was kept in the holy of holies of the Tabernacle. Inside the Ark were the stone tablets of the law. Over them, at each end of the mercy seat were the two cherubim, angels without stretched wings where God dwelt symbolically with Israel. That was His throne.

And the imagery there is very important. Below God is the law that man has broken. So when God looks down upon man, what does He see? From the mercy seat, from the cherubim, He sees the broken law. He sees what we have violated. He sees that which condemns us. But God provided His people with a solution. He provided them with a sacrifice. And once a year on the day of atonement, the high priest entered the holy of holies to make propitiation for the people. In fact, that word, propitiation, is, as I said, the word for mercy seat.

After offering a sacrifice on the altar, he brought the blood of that sacrifice into the holy of holies and sprinkled it on the mercy seat so that between God and the law was the blood of the substitute. That made atonement. That satisfied God's justice. It was symbolic. It was a symbolic satisfaction. The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins. It pointed to Christ who is the ultimate, the final propitiation. He is our mercy seat. The cross is the place where atonement is made, where God is satisfied toward the sinner. That is what Christ has done. He has satisfied God's justice by His death. He has taken away our sin and guilt and turned away God's wrath, from those for who He died.

Now once again, that brings us to the subject of the extent of the atonement. Because if Christ's death was a propitiation, if it did satisfy God's justice and turn aside His wrath, then we must ask: for whom did Christ die? That's a question that theologians have asked down through the centuries, but I don't think anyone put the question quite as well as the Puritan divine John Owen who put it this way: "Christ suffered the wrath of God and the pains of hell for either all the sins of all men, or all the sins of some men, or some of the sins of all men." Let me read that again: "Christ

suffered the wrath of God and the pains of hell for either all the sins of all men, or all the sins of some men, or some of the sins of all men."

Well, the first option is universalism. If Christ died for all the sins of all men, then all must be saved, because all of their sins have been paid for. There's nothing to suffer for. But we know that's not true. The Bible's very clear. People perish in hell. So maybe the last option is true: He paid for some of the sins of all people. But if that were so, then men still have sins to answer for. Christ's atonement is not complete, and no one is saved. The Bible doesn't teach that. Christ's atonement was complete. He died for all our sins. He made that very clear from the cross, did He not, when He declared triumphantly, "It is finished." Everything that needs to be done for God's people has been done. It is finished. That leaves only the second option: He died for all the sins of some men, some people, for all the elect, those who God chose for salvation.

Now, someone will object. Yes, I understand your reasoning. I understand your logic, but a person must have faith. That's true. So, is it not possible that He died for all of the sins of all people, but due to their unbelief, those who perish, perish. They perish because they don't believe?

Well, Owen had an answer for that, and the answer was: is unbelief a sin or not? Well, of course it's a sin. In fact, unbelief is the root of all sin. Romans chapter 14 and verse 23. Whatever is not a faith is sin. Every sin grows out of unbelief. It's the effect of unbelief. So yes, of course, unbelief is a sin. So if He died for all the sins of all men, then He died for their unbelief and they cannot be punished for that sin. Christ did die for all of the sins, of those for whom He died. The fact that all are not saved is the proof that He did not die for all. It's not the only proof, but in this line of reasoning, it certainly is proof that He did not die for all. He died for the elect. And in dying for them, not only paid for their unbelief, but He also obtained for them their fate in His death, in His ransom payment. In buying His people, He bought everything that was necessary for salvation.

Now, if a person insists that Christ died in the place of the non-elect, if that is the case, then he or she must explain how the Father would elect some and the Son would die for those whom the Father did not elect. But nevertheless, if one argues that, and recognizes that He paid for all their sins, then he or she is left with the conclusion that God extracts double payment for those sins. He punishes them twice.

First of all, He punishes them in the substitute, in Christ. He punished all their sons in Christ, even the sin of unbelief, and then punishes those sins again in the unbeliever, in the unbelieving sinner. That is extracting double payment, and that is unjust, and that, because it is unjust, is impossible for God to do.

Now, why make the point? Why develop this as I have? The reason is because that is what Paul is teaching. This is what Paul is saying, and this is the gospel. Salvation, as Jonah said, is of the Lord. It's all His work, from beginning to end, every aspect of it is His work. It is all of Him; it is not of us. We must believe, of course. But even our faith is a gift. It's bought by Christ when He paid the ransom price for our salvation. As J.I. Packer put it, Christ is a redeemer who really redeems. Noticed in our bulletin, there's a memory verse that we have. First Timothy 1 verse 15. And as I was sitting on the platform and we were doing the announcements this morning in the early service, I noticed it. Of course, I'm familiar with this, but I thought, well, this says it all, does it not? This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to make sinners savable? No. Came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. He came to save.

Did He succeed in that? Yes He did. As Packer says, Christ is a redeemer who really does redeem. He's a Savior who really does save. So, if we are to be saved, then we must look to the Savior, nor to ourselves. That is a practical application of the point that I am making. The point is: you don't save yourself. You don't contribute anything to your salvation. Christ has not made you savable, and you put it into effect by your faith. It is all of God, and so you, or I, or anyone must realize: we cannot save ourselves. There's only one option, and that is to look to the Savior, who alone is the one who can save. This should shut us up to that, confine us to the Savior. And the promise is that all who do, all who look to Him, all who believe in Him will be saved because Christ redeemed them.

That's what these two great words, redemption and propitiation, teach. And in doing so, they give all the glory to the Lord and none to man. That itself is a proof of the truth of it. And I'll make this statement without qualification. I make it as an absolute statement. That is: any doctrine, any idea that exalts man at the expense of God is false. It cannot be true. The doctrine of limited atonement or definite atonement or particular redemption, whichever you choose to call it, does not do that. It does not exalt man in any way. Just the opposite. It humbles man and it grinds

human pride into powder. We realize that Christ has done it all, and we simply rest in His finished work, and Christ is exalted in our hearts. That itself is important. That itself is essential. It gives glory to God. Understanding the doctrine of definite atonement is sanctifying. It is very beneficial for the believer. It glorifies God and it produces thankful hearts. And in large part, that is the reason for the cross. It was not just to save sinners, but also to glorify God, to vindicate Him in a public demonstration of His righteousness in salvation. That's what Paul explains in the rest of the passage. God displayed Christ publically because, in His forbearance, Paul says, God passed over sins previously committed.

In the ages before the cross, God patiently held back His wrath. He did not deal with men in their ignorance as their sin deserved. In fact, He justified sinful people. You see that all through the Old Testament, like Abraham, whom He called out of paganism. Abraham was not a seeker who God found seeking Him. He was in paganism when God called him out of that. He was a sinful man throughout his life. A man who was willing to compromise his wife's virtue in order to save his own life. That's Abraham. God justified him. God forgave him. God saved him. He justified Moses who killed an Egyptian. Rahab, who was a harlot. David, who was an adulterer and a murderer. He forgave them and He saved them. It might seem that He passed over their sins lightly and unjustly. His mercy tended to obscure His justice and suggest that He's casual about sin and He forgives because, well, it's His business to forgive.

But the cross demonstrates the opposite. It vindicated God's righteousness because there, God's wrath towards sin was displayed and His justice was established, established not in Himself but established before men, established in history. To remove His wrath and receive forgiveness, there must be propitiation. There must be a sacrifice sufficient to pay for sin and satisfy God's righteous justice.

So for all who think that God takes sin lightly and forgives it lightly, the cross disproves that. Calvary disproves that. It is the public display of God's response to sin and how He deals with it. He is just. And it is through the cross that God was able to be just in justifying sinners. By justly punishing sin in His own Son as our substitute, God could justly justify all who believe in Jesus.

So, the cross is the solution of the divine dilemma which was really no dilemma or problem for God at all because He's all-wise, He's all-knowing, and He

planned the cross from all eternity. But in our minds, as we look at the situation, it seemed to be a dilemma, but one that is solved in the cross because that is where God satisfied Himself toward the sinner. In the cross, the justice of God and the mercy of God meet. Apart from it, justification would be impossible. Apart from the cross, no man would be just before God.

That is the reason it is so important to understand the words of this passage, of Romans chapter 3 verses 21 through 26. Three words: righteousness, which refers to the gift of righteousness in justification. God declaring the sinner righteous. Redemption, and then propitiation. Redemption is what Christ has done for people. He has bought us out of spiritual slavery and given us spiritual freedom. Propitiation is what Christ has done to God. He has satisfied His justice toward sinners by paying the debt we owe, by suffering the penalty of sin in our place. And justification, which is what God the Father does for the sinner based on Christ's work of salvation. He pronounces us innocent. He forgives our sins. He declares us to be righteous in His sight.

Well, what do we do in all of this? Believe. Receive the work of Christ on our behalf by faith and faith alone. Trust in the redeemer and thank Him for His redemption. Salvation is all of the Lord. That's the gospel. But it is easy to forget these great truths.

Back in 1915, Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield worried about that and he wrote an article exposing the danger. It dealt principally with the word "redemption" which he defined more precisely as ransom. He did that because the word was losing its meaning in that day. But what he said about that word is true for each of these three words. They are valuable words, but as he said, worthy words do die like any other worthy thing, if we do not take care of them.

Well, that's sad, as Warfield said, but he went on to write that: sadder than the death of a worthy word is the dying out of the hearts of men of the things for which the words stand. That really brings us to the question that we must ask ourselves: redemption, propitiation, justification. Do we understand them? Important words to understand. But if we understand them, are they true for us? Are they true for us personally? Is Christ your redeemer? Did He ransom you from sin and death? Has God been propitiated toward you? Is His wrath turned aside and are you justified, are you righteous in His sight? Has He declared you to be that? If you trusted in Jesus

Christ as your Savior, then the answer to that is yes. So rejoice in the blessing that He has given you. It is all of God. Rejoice in it, grow in it, develop a greater understanding of it, and become increasingly thankful. We can't come to the end of this subject, really. Over time, as it is, we can go on for eternity rejoicing in these things, and we should do that. If you're a believer in Jesus Christ, rejoice in it and be thankful. But if you're here without faith, if you've not believed in Jesus Christ, then the wrath of God abides on you. It's what our Lord said in John 3:36.

So turn to Him. Believe in Him. He receives all who do. Why? Because He died in the place of sinners so that all who believe in Him would receive eternal forgiveness and eternal life. May God help you to do that. Look to Christ, trust in Him, and become His child. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your grace. We come to a text which is somewhat technical, but a text that is so important for us to understand. It explains the work of Christ on the cross. It explains the nature of salvation. It explains how it happens. And as we understand these things, we understand that salvation is of the Lord. It is all Your work. You did for us what we could not do for ourselves. You did what had to be done, and You did it at great cost to Yourself. Death of Your only begotten Son. We thank You for that. Make us increasingly appreciative of this great

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