

Romans 3:21-26

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Date: 07 September 2025

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[0 : 00] Romans 3, 21, 26. It's one long sentence. I love the movie, Jared's Fire. It's on the iPad. Harold Abrahams is the other brother to Eric Hiddle. And he famously said in the movie, I don't! know whether he said it in real life, but he says in the movie this, now in one hour's time I'll be out there again. I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor four foot wide with ten lonely seconds to justify my whole existence. But will I? You see what he's saying? And he's saying this to me, I want my life to count. I want my life to count that would make him feel validated. That would make him feel that his life has been worth living. What about you? Where do you look for your validation? Where do you find your sense of worth? Someone's telling me this week that they posted a story on Instagram and no one liked it. And they felt devastated. And I said, how would you have felt if lots of people liked it? And they said, well, I felt that it felt good. We like that, can't we? If a review won't work, it's good review, you get positive feedback, you're absolutely on top of the world. If you're validated, you get negative feedback, you're absolutely devastated. We know what that's like, don't we? Every one of us feels a need to do something that justifies our existence. And we all want to feel worth that way. And we all want to feel affirmed by others to feel that our achievements really matter. We all want to be validated. The Bible's word is justified. In the end, I want to know that I did okay. That I justified my existence. In the end, I want to know what others will say to me, yes, but more importantly, what will God say to me? What will God say to me? I did okay. How can I be sure of that? Well, this one sentence from Genesis 3, verses 21 to 26, tells us how.

[2 : 48] Leon Morris, who's an Aussie Bible scribe, said this is probably the most important sentence ever written. This is just one long sentence, verse 21 to 26. And if you're not sure yet what it really means to be a Christian, these are probably the most important words that you'll have here.

Let me just read them for you again. Verse 21. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested, apart from the Law. I want the Law and the prophets by a witness to it, but righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all in me.

There's no distinction for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness. He was in his divine coherence, he passed over former saints. It was to show his righteousness on present time, so that he might be just, and justified over one who has faith in Jesus.

If you've been trying to keep the Law, and if you've been trying to put yourself right with God, you can't do it. But there is a way in this first party to be right with God.

[4 : 02] Apart from the Law, that's what Paul has said here. Apart from the Law, apart from trying your best, doing your hardest, the righteousness of God has been made known.

To which the Law and the prophets, they testify. It's not some new idea that's suddenly cropped up. It's been there right from the beginning of the Bible, right the way through to the end. There is a way to be right with God, which is not by giving the Law.

It's a righteousness that's given by faith, through faith in Jesus Christ for all to believe. And it's wonderful news. I'm going to unpack in three parts. First of all, and first of all, we are justified freely by grace.

What does that mean? It's kind of Christian jargon. We are justified freely by grace. Picture the scene. It's a court of the Law. And we are there in the first three chapters of Romans.

And God is the judge, the universal judge, the judge of the whole earth. And human beings, you and I, you stand on the dock. And our condemnation is entirely different.

[5 : 11] And that's what Paul has been arguing in the first three chapters of Romans. He says our pleas of ignorance are inexcusable, chapter one. Our comparisons with others are inexcusable, chapter two.

Our religious credentials are inexcusable, chapter three. And the inclusion is unavoidable all the time. Every single one of us are full short of glory and glory.

That means there's no way that God would possibly maledate us. No way that God would possibly justify us. No way that God can say, we're okay.

We're not okay. Not without compromising himself. The gavel comes down. And a verdict is announced.

Not guilty. I'm justified. It's just as if I've never sinned.

[6 : 14] But it's much, much more than that. Because to be justified means much more than just not guilty. It means to be positively righteous in God's sight. In fact, the word justified and righteous.

Righteous and justified is the same word in the Greek. They're all two different words. We translate them differently, but they're the same word. And so what Paul is saying is that it's amazing.

We are righteous-ified. If that's a word, which it isn't. We are righteous. We are justified.

Righteous-ified.

Freely. By grace. I know of someone who is awaiting trial for causing death by dangerous driving. Someone was killed. And someone else was severely injured in the crash. It's a horrible, horrible situation. Imagine for a moment that is you. What do you want?

[7 : 13] If you want justice, you'll definitely lose your license. You're pretty certain to end up in prison.

So you say, well actually I'll plead for mercy. Because there were extenuating circumstances. Maybe in this instance the children distracted her.

Maybe the sun was in her eyes. Maybe she was unwell. Perhaps she'd fallen asleep momentarily. There are extenuating circumstances. So I'll plead for mercy. Well, you might get a suspended sentence, mightn't you?

Perhaps. You'll certainly have a huge fine to pay. You may have to do some community service. Justice is getting what I deserve.

Mercy is not getting what I deserve. And grace, what is grace? Grace is getting what I don't deserve.

[8 : 14] So just imagine for a moment that you are declared driver of the year. And you're given a brand new BMW.

A full tank of petrol. Free insurance for the next 12 months. You'd say, well that is scandalous. That's shocking, isn't it?

It's worse than shocking. It would be offensive if that were to happen. It would make the news for certain. It's offensive, isn't it? It is.

And if you are not offended by God's grace. If you are not shocked by God's grace. If you sing amazing grace, but you've not been amazed.

Then you've not understood it. Because that is exactly what grace is. Justice demands that I get punished. Mercy lets me off.

[9 : 12] I'm still alive. I've got time and room to repent. The sun rises on the just and the unjust. God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

I'm in his world. I'm not getting what I deserve. He's being merciful to me. He's being kind to you tonight. He's giving you space to repent. Justice demands that I be punished.

Mercy lets me off. But grace, what does grace do? Grace brings me in. Brings me to his table. Gives me bread and wine to eat. Brings me into his family.

I deserve hell, but I get heaven. I deserve nothing, but I'm given everything. And how is that possible? How can God do that? How can God be right and call wrong people right?

Wouldn't he have to be wrong to do that? He could call wrong people wrong and be right. And if he could find any, he could call right people right and be right.

[10 : 21] But how can he call wrong people right and still be right? That's wrong, right? It's wrong to call wrong people right.

How can it be right to call wrong people right? That's the question. How can God do that without compromising his character? How can God say that I'm right when I know that I'm wrong?

How can the judge of all the earth pronounce me innocent when I know I'm as guilty as sin?

Look at these words again. We are justified by his grace. We are justified, verse 24, freely by his grace as a gift.

Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. That's the second thing we need to grasp. Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

[11 : 35] This does not come cheap. There is a cost involved. The best illustration is now, which is the illustration lots and lots of preachers have used over the years.

Christianity explored claim it's their own, but it's not. It was Spurgeon, I think, used it first. But the skyline of London. It's beautiful, isn't it? The skyline of London.

The skyline of London. It's just you wouldn't want to live anywhere else when you go to Waterloo Bridge and you look across the skyline. You see Whitehall and the Parliament and St Paul's Cathedral, Tower Bridge, all the lights of London. It's wonderful.

But you can't see it now because of the skyscrapers, but you've got to go into a kind of, well you've got to go into one of those skyscrapers. But you could see in the old days, you looked at the skyline of London and you could see the old bailey and on top of the old bailey, on the top of the old bailey is a magnificent golden statue of the Roman goddess of justice.

And she's blindfolded so she couldn't show partiality. And she holds a sword in one hand and scales in the other. You've seen it.

[12 : 44] And the message is clear. If you're found guilty in that court of law in the old bailey, then the sword of her wrath, the sword of justice will fall on you. But just across the skyline, in the city, on the top of St Paul's Cathedral is another golden symbol.

It's a cross. It's a powerful reminder to us, isn't it, that the sword of God's wrath, the sword of God's anger against sin, the sword of God's justice has fallen on Jesus at the cross.

Do you remember Genesis 3? Genesis 3, Adam and Eve fall into sin. And they're not allowed to eat, they're not allowed access to the tree of life and they're banished from the garden.

Do you remember how they can't get back into the garden? They go east of Eden and they're banished from the garden and God places at the east of Eden a cherubim with a flaming sword that turns in every direction.

And the message is really clear for the smallest child to understand there's no way back into paradise. You won't get back into paradise by trying your best, by keeping the law.

[14 : 00] You won't get back into paradise by being good. There's no way in the sword turns in every direction, whichever path you go in, to get back into God's favour. There's no way you can get back, it's blocked.

The flaming sword is saying that God is angry with sinners every day and there's no way back into paradise. Into a relationship with this holy God. The only way back is for that sword to fall.

Do you remember what the prophet Zechariah says in that famous verse? He says, awake, O sword, against my shepherd. It's an amazing prophecy, that's what's happened.

Isn't that what the cross is about? The shepherd has become the sheep. And the sword of God's wrath falls upon him. And that is what redemption means. We saw it last week, isn't it? It's the payment of a price to set us free.

In the ancient world, as a last resort, people sold themselves into slavery to pay their debts.

Bankruptcy wasn't an option. And if that happened to Jewish members of the family, the family were obliged to raise enough money to go and buy back that relative from slavery.

[15 : 13] To buy him back as soon as possible. We've had people here in this church. There are people in our community, aren't there?

And they are working two or three jobs in order to earn enough money to send home to get their family out of terrible situations. You've spoken with those people, they're here in London.

And they're working two or three jobs to raise enough money to send home so that some of their relatives can get out of refugee camps.

Some of the people that live around us, that work in the shops that we shop in, have got husbands, wives, kids in refugee camps, work camps. And they've been there for years with no hope of getting out.

And so their relative here is raising enough money to try and send back so that their relatives can be released. It's what Jesus has done for us, isn't it? None of us can pay what we owe to God.

[16 : 16] None of us have lived the life that God has a right to expect of us, but Jesus has. And he has offered that perfect life to God on our behalf to set us free. He's lived the life we ought to have

lived.

He's died the death we've deserved to die. Look at verse 25. The concept there behind those words is the concept of satisfying the anger of a holy God.

He takes the wrap, he puts himself under, that sword falls on him. Verse 25, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith. Spring Bridge Road car park in Ealing.

You know it? You come back and somebody has scratched your car, dented your car. You're furious.

Does it make you angry when someone does that? It makes me very angry. You feel justifiably angry. Someone's got to pay. Either you've got to pay, or by some miracle the security cameras are working in that car park, and you might be able to find the person who did it.

[17:26] Or, if you're stupid enough, the insurance company will pay for it. But someone's got to pay. And if you're the one who caused the damage, or you're the owner of the car, or the insurance company, someone's got to pay.

And ordinarily what happens, well, we think I don't want to go to the insurance company, I don't know who did it. So I absorb the payment myself.

What has God done? God has absorbed the payment for our sin in himself, if I can put it like that. He is the injured party.

Our sin is against the Lord Jesus. Against God. And in Jesus, the Bible says, God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. In Christ, he has come into this world in order to absorb the cost. Himself. In order to pay the price himself. The price of our sin and rebellion. This group of tourists being shown around a slum area of Rio de Janeiro.

[18:46] And they see a little girl sitting in this slum in Rio de Janeiro, and she's covered in dirt. Stinking dirty. Just sitting on the ground.

And one of the tourists says to the tour director, Why doesn't her mother do something about her? She is filthy. And the tour director says, well, her mother loves her.

And that little girl's mother loves her little daughter. But she doesn't hate the dirt. She's used to dirt. But coming where you come from, you hate the dirt.

But you've only just seen this little girl. You don't love this little girl. Do you? And until love for that child and hatred for dirt are in the same person, things will stay as they are.

It's not the message of the gospel until love for sinners and hatred of sin are in the same person. Things will just stay as they are. But at the cross of the Lord Jesus, justice and mercy kiss each other.

[20:01] At the cross, God's anger is satisfied on Christ. He is the propitiation for our sin. Justice is satisfied. And at the same time, God shows his love for sinners and he invites us into his family and to his table.

None of us can pay the debt we owe to God. None of us have lived the life that God has a right to expect of us. But Jesus has. There's one more thing we need to grasp.

How does all this come to us? We are justified freely by grace, not by the law. Not by doing our best, but freely by grace. How is that possible? Well, through the redemption that is in the blood of Jesus.

But all of this comes to us. Here's the third thing. By faith. It is not earned. It is a gift from God. And it's received by faith.

Look at verse 22. This righteousness. This right standing with God is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

[21:11] We're going to verse 25. Whom God put forward as propitiation by his blood to be received by faith. By faith. Verse 26. It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Do you know yellow boxes on the road?

Yellow boxes? Have you seen them? When you're learning to drive, some of you are trying to learn to drive. What's the rule of a yellow box? You do not enter a yellow box unless your exit is clear. Alright? You do not enter a yellow box in your car unless the exit is clear. That is justification by faith.

In a little way. Let me show you. The moment that you enter the Christian life. The moment that you trust in the Lord Jesus. You can do that tonight. The moment that you enter the Christian life and you turn to Jesus and cry out to him to save you.

[22 : 20] That very moment you enter. That very moment you know that your exit is clear. You do not have to go through the rest of your life wondering how is this going to turn out on the day of judgment.

What's going to happen when I die? You do not have to go through life thinking does he love me? He loves me. He loves me not. He loves me.

He loves me not. The moment that you trust in Jesus and turn to him and cry to him to save you.

That moment you enter. That very moment you know that the exit is clear.

That very moment the verdict of the last day is announced. The verdict of the last day on your life is pronounced in the present. Not guilty.

Not guilty. For those of you who trust in Christ we could go around this room. I could ask you to stand, please give your name. Not guilty. You might be listening and you think well that's too good to be true isn't it?

[23 : 33] But it is true. That I'm exonerated the moment I trust in Jesus. I'm acquitted, I'm absolved, I'm approved, I'm vindicated, I'm accepted. And I need to say this to you, this is something that happens in the courts of heaven.

It's not something that takes place in your heart. It's not something I experience. I'm not against experience at all.

I'm not against people experiencing things. I think the Christian life is one of experiencing the living God. But justification is not an experience. It's not something that registers on your central nervous system so you get tingles up your spine.

No justification registers in the courts of heaven. And so the moment that you trust in the Lord Jesus your status is altered. Not guilty. No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Claire and I got married at 23. I had under 500 pounds in the bank. But no student loan. Claire had a Nissan Micra. And getting married I said on 24th of August 2003, all that I have I share with you.

[25 : 03] What do you have? Well, I had no overdraft facility. I had nothing. Claire had a tiny bit more but so little. But so little. And when I'm married to Christ by faith, when I put my trust in him as my Lord and Saviour, all that I have is mine.

And all that he has is mine. What do I have? Well, I've got an overdraft. All I've got is a sin that I need to be saved from.

He takes it all. Past, present, future. Sins you haven't even thought of yet.

Sins you haven't committed yet. He takes it all upon himself. And all that he has, that perfect, beautiful, winsome holiness of his is wrapped around you like a cloak.

And when God sees you tonight, he doesn't see your sin. He sees you in his son, in Christ. He accepts you in the beloved.

[26 : 12] And that's justification. And when you came in this evening, you sat down on a chair. You sat down on a chair.

The chair's pretty solid. You've probably done it hundreds of times. Look around you this evening, and these people are sitting pretty comfortably in their chairs. Some too comfortably.

Nobody has fallen off the chair this evening. It's happened once when I was preaching. But nobody has tonight. You have faith that the chair that you're sitting on will actually carry your weight.

Can you not trust Jesus tonight? Can you not trust Jesus of all people to bear the weight of your sin and your guilt?

Can you not do that? Can you not put your trust in him? To put you right with a holy God? Can you not do that?

[27 : 21] Horatius Bonner wrote this hymn that's plagued me this week in a wonderful way. Upon a life I have not lived. Upon a death I did not die.

Another life. Another death. I staked my whole eternity. Let me read it to you again. Upon a life I have not lived. Upon a death I did not die.

Another's life. Another's death. I staked my whole eternity. And if you've never done that. If you've never put your trust in the Lord Jesus.

Can I invite you to do that tonight. Now without delay. To trust him not just to get you through this week of school.

To trust him not just to get you through your exams. To trust him not just to get you a parking space. You know what it's like isn't it? Lord please help me find a parking space. Oh it's alright Lord I found one.

[28 : 25] You can trust him for those things if you want to. It's wonderful to trust him for that. To trust him to help you in your relationship problems. And the family strife. To trust him perhaps with work and all the stresses in life.

You can trust him for all those things. But if you haven't trusted him for your salvation. Well what profit is there in that? To trust him to put you right with God.

Have you ever done that? Maybe tonight you've been coming to church for years. But maybe tonight you've realised that you're a sinner who deserves nothing but God's angry punishment. Against you because of your sin.

But God hasn't spared his own son. He has given him up for you. That in him you might have eternal life. Can you not trust him?

What's stopping you trusting? Let's pray together. Let's pray together.