

Watch Your *Doctrine*

Session 6: Propitiation and Redemption with Pastor Colin Smith

We've been learning some important Bible words like regeneration—the miracle by which God brings us to repentance and faith in Jesus. The last time we looked at justification—the marvelous free gift by which God declares us righteous, drops all charges against us and reconciles us to Himself in Jesus Christ.

Today, I want us to learn two other words that take us to the heart of what Jesus has accomplished on the cross. These words are 'propitiation' and 'redemption.' You find them alongside justification in Romans 3 which is our focus for this session.

Scholar Leon Morris describes these verses as “possibly the most important paragraph ever written.”

*All have sinned and fall 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. (Romans 3:23–25)*

Now these are long words, but they are Bible words! The first time I visited America, I was taken by a friend to see a game of baseball. My friend started to talking about sliders, splitters, curveballs, and change ups. I didn't have the faintest idea of what he was talking about. If you were to come with me to a game of cricket, I could talk to you about the bouncer, the yorker, the inswinger, and the googly!

Sports have their own distinctive vocabulary. People who love baseball learn the baseball words. People who love cricket learn the cricket words. And people who love Jesus learn the Bible words, and find great joy in what they convey.

Why do we need to be justified? Paul answers that question in the opening chapters of the book of Romans. In Romans 1:18 we read,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

The gospel is not about how you can have a fulfilled and happy life. The gospel is about how we can be saved from the wrath of God. Now who needs to be saved from this wrath of God? The answer to that question is 'everyone!' Paul states this repeatedly: “*we have already charged that **all**, both Jews and Greeks are under sin*” (Romans 3:9) and “***all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23). The word 'all' includes everyone. It crosses cultures and it crosses generations.

Someone might say 'so we are all sinners,' but why does that matter? After all, nobody is perfect, and everybody makes mistakes. Surely it is natural for us to fail and natural for God to forgive. To err is human; to forgive is divine. What is there to worry about? Isn't it obvious God will forgive our sins? The answer is that it is not obvious at all. The natural consequence of

crime is not forgiveness but punishment, and the natural consequence of sin is not that God should forgive us but that He should condemn us. God is holy. He abhors sin and has a settled disposition of unrelenting hostility toward sin wherever it is found. It is God's unflinching purpose to eradicate sin from His universe. He will destroy it forever. So the fact that we are "under sin" matters big time!

We saw in our first session of this module that God is holy and we are not. Isaiah was the finest preacher and moral leader of his day, but when he saw the holiness of God, he said, "I am ruined!" (Isaiah 6:5 NIV). The apostle John had reclined next to Him at the Last Supper, but when he saw the glory of the risen Lord, he said, "*I fell at his feet as though dead*" (Revelation 1:17).

If Isaiah and John reacted that way, what would it be like for you and me? Sinners cannot live in the white heat of God's holiness. When we stand in the presence of God, we will be silent. The excuses that seem reasonable to us now will dry up in our mouths. Nobody will have anything to say.

This is the issue that God addresses in the Bible. We are under sin, and we are accountable to God. The universal sinfulness of man and the absolute holiness of God mean that condemnation would be our natural destiny. That is why God took a breathtaking initiative of sending His Son.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law. (Romans 3:21)

God has done something to make our wrong position right, and this "righteousness" or "way of being right" is "apart from law." So it is not a matter of God saying, "mend your ways, get your act together, and start keeping My laws." That would be an unbearable burden, because even at our best, none of us fulfills all that God has called and commanded us to do.

So what has God done? Paul says, "*for all have sinned and fall 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*" (Romans 3:23–25).

We looked at this word 'justified' last time, but what I want us to see in this session is the ground on which this wonderful gift of justification is offered to us. We are justified freely, but how does this happen? Paul says that our justification came, "*through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood.*"

1. Propitiation: The Wrath Is Spent

... Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation... (Romans 3:24–25)

A propitiation is a gift or payment offered to placate the anger of an offended person. The best way to explain is through an illustration, so let me introduce you to Neil and Sally. Neil was in his early twenties when he began dating Sally, a girl he met at the office. He had a reputation for being "a bit on the wild side," and there were times when Sally was uncomfortable with him. One night, Neil took Sally to a party where things got a little out of hand.

Neil began drinking, and by the time they drove home in the early hours of the morning, he was scarcely able to control the car. Then the unthinkable happened. The car hit a bank, careened out of control, and rolled over several times. When the vehicle came to rest, both Neil and Sally were unconscious.

Several hours later, Neil came around in the hospital. His head was thumping and his body ached as he tried to remember what happened. “How is Sally?” he asked. “It’s bad news,” said the doctor. “She’s paralyzed. She won’t ever walk again.” “Can I see her?” asked Neil. “No, she won’t talk to you.”

Sometime later Neil receives a letter from Sally’s lawyer. In the light of her permanent disability, Sally is bringing legal action. Neil wonders how he could have been such a fool. It was just one night, but it changed everything. Neil doesn’t know how to live with himself, and he has no idea what to do about Sally.

There are three factors in this situation: *First*, there is an offense. Neil acted recklessly and irresponsibly when he decided to drive home after drinking. *Second*, there is an offended person. Sally is angry, and rightly so. *Third*, there is an offender. Neil knows he is to blame. He is deeply sorry for what he has done. But that won’t change the fact that Sally is paralyzed and that her lawyers are preparing a legal action against him.

Neil hires a lawyer and his lawyer talks to Sally’s lawyer about what it would take to settle the case. Their discussion centers on one issue. What will it take to satisfy Sally? What Neil thinks really doesn’t matter. It’s all about Sally, because she is the offended party.

Suppose that the lawyers identify a sum of money that would be acceptable to Sally. The payment of that money would be a “propitiation.” A propitiation is a payment offered to placate the anger of an offended person, to satisfy the need for justice and settle the case.

Since our sin is an offense against God, it follows that God is the one who determines what the propitiation should be. The question is, “What will satisfy God?” And the Bible gives us the answer: “*Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation*” (Romans 3:24–25). God presented His Son, Jesus, as the propitiation. God in His mercy willed to forgive sinners, and in His righteousness, He willed to do this justly. He directed the full weight of what sinners deserve against Himself, in the person of His Son.

The Bible speaks about the wrath of God being poured out and spent. “*I will soon **pour out** my wrath upon you, and **spend** my anger against you*” (Ezekiel 7:8). The wrath of God towards sin can be poured out, and when it is poured out it will be spent. This takes us to the heart of what happened at the cross. The divine wrath toward sin was poured out on Jesus. He became the ‘*propitiation*’ for our sins (Romans 3:25). All that was due to sinners was poured out on Jesus at Calvary.

Notice that God the Father “*put forward*” the Son as the propitiation. The Father and the Son were in this together. Don’t ever get the idea that God loves you because Jesus died for you. No! Jesus died for you because God loves you! He loved you even when you were the object of His wrath!

God the Father put His Son Jesus forward as a *propitiation*. And here we come again to the mystery of the Trinity, for in giving Jesus Christ, God was giving Himself! **God bore the wrath of God!** “*In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself*” (2 Corinthians 5:19). The divine wrath towards your sin and mine was poured out on Jesus. Because it was spent on Jesus, there is nothing left to be poured out on you.

2. Redemption: The Price Is Paid

*... the **redemption** that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.* (Romans 3:24–25)

To redeem is to purchase by the payment of a price. I learned this Bible word as a child through a simple story that has stayed with me. It’s the story of a boy who liked to make things. One day the boy’s father said to him “Why don’t you make a boat?” The boy loved that idea, so he worked with his father to make a beautiful sailing boat. He painted it blue and red, and it had a tall white sail. When it was finished, the boy put a special mark on the boat so that he would always know that it was his.

The boy loved his boat, and he had great joy when he took it out to sail on the lake. But one day the boat was caught in a great wind that took it away. The boy was brokenhearted. Sometime later, the boy was walking past a toy shop in the town when he saw in the window, a beautiful boat. It was blue and red and it had a tall white sail. And when the boy looked closer, he could see the special mark he had put on it, so he would always know it was his.

The boy went home, gathered all the money he had saved, and went back to the shop and bought the boat. On the way home, he hugged the boat and he said, “You are twice mine! You are mine because I made you, and mine because I bought you!”

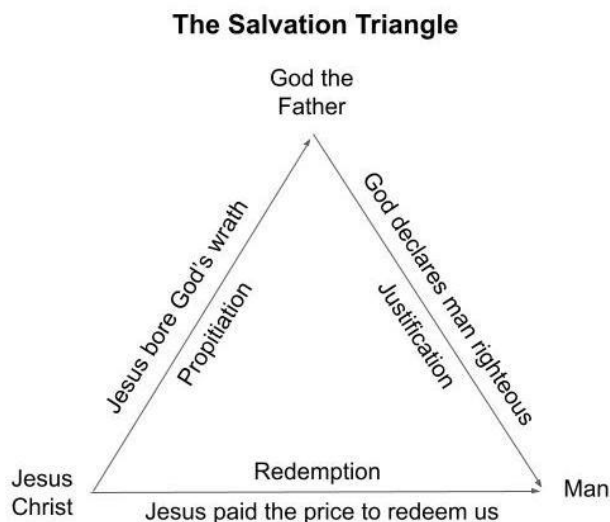
Peter says to Christian believers, “You were redeemed! Ransomed! Bought back! Not with perishable things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ” (paraphrasing 1 Peter 1:18–19). The Lord who made you bought you by the shedding of His own blood and He did this in love to make you His own!

Put these two words together and you see what Jesus accomplished on cross. In His death, Christ propitiates, and He redeems. And there’s more...

James Montgomery Boice spoke of the ‘salvation triangle.’ What Jesus accomplished on the cross relates to the Father and to us. In relation to the Father, the Son **propitiates**. Jesus bore the wrath. It was spent, exhausted on Him. His death is a propitiation. In relation to us, the Son **redeems**. Jesus paid the price. He bought us and made us His own. His death is the redemption.

And on this basis, that the Father **justifies** all who, by faith, belong to Jesus. Because the Son has propitiated the Father, and because the Son has redeemed us, the Father justifies all who have faith in His Son.

And as we saw last time, we are justified by faith because faith joins us to Jesus. Jesus is our propitiation. The wrath was spent on Him. Jesus purchased our redemption. He bore the wrath for us. He paid the price of our sin. And when we become His, what He has accomplished becomes ours. And that happens through faith.



Paul makes this clear, *“for all have sinned and fall 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**”* (Romans 3:23–25). When you trusted in Jesus Christ, God applied all that Jesus accomplished on the cross, the propitiation and the redemption, to you.

And here’s what that means. In Christ you are saved from the wrath of God! All that was ever due to you on account of your sins has been poured out on Jesus. It is spent, exhausted. There is nothing left for you. There is therefore now no condemnation because you are in Christ Jesus! In Christ you are **redeemed**! The price has been paid. You belong to Christ. You are twice His. His because He made you, and His because He bought you. In Christ you are **justified**! God has dropped all charges against you. The verdict has been announced. You have peace with God, and instead of fear and dread, you can come before Him with love and thanksgiving.

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