

# The God who Justifies

## Part 2

Romans 3:21-26

LTS: Rom 4:1-9

BI: The God of the gospel is not only holy, he is also faithful, righteous, glorious, Gracious, Forbearing, and just.

This morning we are back in Paul's letter to the Romans. After 19 messages – the majority of which were focused on God's judgement upon sinners, – we have come to a major transition. In verse 21 of chapter 3, Paul switches from condemnation to Justification.

The first three chapters, by design, focused on God's condemnation of all sinners so that Paul's readers would feel compelled from the heart to find and embrace God's offer of justification.

Condemnation means that sinners are declared guilty in the court of God by an act of sovereign justice.

Justification means that sinners are declared righteous as an act of sovereign grace.

The big question, however, is, if sinners are truly guilty before the court of God, how can God declare them righteous without committing an injustice in the process? Any rogue judge can arbitrarily declare a murderer innocent. But to do so would be wrong! It would be unjust! But God is no unrighteous Judge. So how does God do it? Upon what legal grounds can God be Just and the justifier of sinners?

That's a critical question if we want to understand the gospel. And Paul answers this question in the text we will consider for the next several weeks.

However, you may remember from last time that I suggested we would be helped and prepared for the answer to this question if we would take the time to cultivate a clear understanding of who God is before we dive into the details of Paul's answer.

The passage before us helps us understand who God is. It mentions certain attributes of God that undergird the actions of God. In this passage I believe we can see 7 attributes of God that help us understand the Gospel of God. Specifically, we see that the God who justifies the ungodly is...

1. A Holy God
2. A Faithful God
3. A Righteous God
4. A Glorious God

5. A Gracious God
6. A Forbearing God
7. A Just God

But before we dive back into this study of the attributes of God, let's take a moment to read the text.

Read Rom 3:21-26

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—<sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup> 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.

He who has ears to hear, let Him hear.

What kind of God justifies sinners?

Last time we saw that the God who justifies is...

- I. A Holy God.
  - a. That God is "Holy" speaks first NOT of his moral purity but of the reality that he is absolutely distinct for everyone and every thing in the Cosmos.
  - b. One author writes, "There is a special kind of fear from which we all suffer. It's called xenophobia. Xenophobia is a fear (and sometimes a hatred) of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign. God is the ultimate object of our xenophobia. He is the ultimate stranger. He is the ultimate foreigner. He is Holy and we are not."<sup>1</sup>
  - c. Because God is Holy, he is absolutely unaffected by the schemes of men. Of course his holiness is characterized by moral purity, and it is the infinite holiness of God that makes all of his other attributes holy. That means,
    - all his judgments are holy judgments.
    - All of his actions are holy actions.
    - It cannot be otherwise because God is Holy. ,So the God who justifies is a Holy God. Second, the God who justifies is

## II. A Faithful God

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<sup>1</sup> R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, (Wheaton, Ill. Tyndale House Publishers,1985), 65

- a. We see this attribute in v. 21 where Paul tells us that the righteousness of God through the testimony of the law and the prophets. In other words, the roots of Paul's gospel are the very promises of God found in Old Testament even as early as the book of Genesis.
- b. I think Paul wants his readers to understand that the gospel is not new. God's promises of salvation start as far back as Genesis where he promised our sinful parents that a son of Eve will come to crush the serpent's head.
- c. Later on in Genesis, He teaches us through the narrative of Abraham that those who are justified receive their justification by faith alone.
- d. Now, we don't have time this morning to rehearse God's dealings with Abraham, but Paul will offer a full treatment of this topic in Rom. 4.
- e. What I want you to hear, however, is that the Gospel promise of justification by faith alone comes to us from the heart of a faithful God.
- f. So, the God who justifies is a Holy God, and He is a..  
Faithful God.

Third; the God who justifies is...

### III. A Righteous God

1. This is where we pick up from last time. When we speak of God's attribute of righteousness, we mean that God always acts in accordance with what is right.<sup>2</sup> Righteousness is not arbitrary.<sup>3</sup> There is an objective standard to measure what is right and what is right wrong. When God declares something to be right and another thing wrong, he is NOT measuring them against something outside of Himself. Rather, true righteousness is measured against God's own Person and nature.
2. Anything that is contrary to God's nature is wrong, and everything that is consistent with His nature is right. This is probably the paradigm that Paul was thinking of when he said to Timothy (2 Tim. 2:13), "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself."
3. You see beloved, the world determines what is right and wrong – just and unjust by the court of public opinion. And it seems to me that whenever the people of greatest influence successfully sway societal norms, it's always in a direction away from God. The few exceptions are when God, in His mercy, sends revival through the proclamation of the Gospel. Witness the Great Awakening that swept through Britain and the American colonies in the early 1700's.

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<sup>2</sup> Wayne Grudem; *Systematic Theology: An Intro to Biblical Doctrine*, (Zondervan, 1994), 204

<sup>3</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Michigan, Grand Rapids, 1985), 287.

4. But God's view of righteousness never changes, because God's nature is fixed. It is immovable. Theologians say God is immutable; that is, God never changes. He doesn't modify his moral law based on the whims of human preferences and feelings.

5. In our day people speak of the "New Morality." But there is no such thing! Psalm 2 says, "The kings of the earth take their stand... saying, 'Let us burst their bonds and cast away their cords from us. He who sits in heaven laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in His wrath and terrify them in His fury.'"

7. Again, the prophet Isaiah declares, (Isa. 5:20) *"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness!"*

8.. Friends, when Isaiah uses the word "woe" in this passage, He is NOT telling his horse to slow down. Rather, the word woe is found in the vocabular of divine judgement and the very curse of God.

9. In light of all we have seen over the past year and over the past 10 years, and the last 10 days... Does anyone still believe that The United States of America is NOT experiencing God's righteous judgment?

10. Beloved, our country has a really big problem. But our problem is not

- a social justice problem,
- a financial equality problem,
- political warfare problem
- or an environmental problem.
- No! We have a righteousness problem.

11. You see, one day sinful man and Holy God will stand face to face before the throne, and it will be eternally determined who is in the right.

12. O' My friends, there is a fatal error that I hear again and again as I share the gospel with people. Ask them why they think God will let them into heaven and they will tell you, "Well, I'm not a BAD person. I've never killed anyone. I've never cheated on my wife or sold drugs to children." Its as if people think that when they die, God is going to pull out the scales and measure their righteousness against a murderer, an adulterer, a terrorist, or adrug-dealer. But that's not how it works. On the day of Judgement, if God pulls out the scales and puts you on one side, you will watch to your everlasting horror as God Himself sits on the other side. He, Himself is the measure of righteousness. And everything that exists in heaven is righteous as He is righteous. That's why Jesus said in the sermon on the Mount, "Therefore, you must be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt 5:48).

13. Beloved, this is why Paul repeatedly talks about “Righteousness.” Only righteous people will inherit the kingdom of heaven! But how do we who are unrighteous acquire the righteousness that satisfies God? That’s what the first part of Romans is all about. And its why, in fact, Paul uses the term righteous or righteousness more than 40 times in this relatively short epistle.

14 My friend, if you are sitting here this morning hoping that in the end you will catch God on a good day and in a good mood and he will let you skate through the pearly gates, you are in for a terrifying shock. Because the God of our salvation is a righteous God. And when you come face to face with God Your life will be measured not against you neighbor’s immorality, or Hitler’s atrocities, or the drug dealers criminality. No, you will be judged against the righteousness of God.

15. On that day you will not Meet with Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild. Rather, you will meet the Jesus that the apostle John tells us about in Revelation 1:12-17 where we read, Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, <sup>13</sup> and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. <sup>14</sup> The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup> his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. <sup>16</sup> In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. <sup>17</sup> When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

16. This is NOT the Jesus you have always imagined. This is Jesus the righteous Judge of all things. He will judge you against His infinitely righteous character and you will be found wanting and without defense.

17. Far from being invited to skip merrily into the kingdom of heaven, you will be cast out of His presence where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Why? Because God is a Righteous God.

18. Who is the God who justifies? He is...

- A Holy God,
  - A Faithful God,
  - A Righteous God.
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- 4<sup>th</sup>, The God who justifies the ungodly is...

#### IV.A Glorious God:

1. Notice in verse 23, Paul says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. What is the glory of God? Well, “the glory of God is literally the great light that shines forth when God makes his presence visible.”<sup>4</sup>

- A. Back in Exodus we saw it in the bush that burned but was not consumed as Moses listened with fear to the voice of God coming out of it.
- B. We see it again when God led his people out of Egypt and guided them by a pillar of fire. They called it the Shakina glory of God.
- C. We see it glimmering from the bodies of those who were permitted to come into close contact with God. Witness the angels who appeared at the birth of Jesus and the glory of God shone round about them
- D. Or think of Moses who’s face shone with the glory of God after meeting with and speaking with him face to face
- E. We see it also on the Mt. of Transfiguration where Matt. Tells us (Mat. 17:2) that Jesus was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. This is the glory of God.
- F. Nevertheless, I think Paul has something else in mind when he says everyone... falls short of the glory of God.

2. The kind of glory that Paul is referring to is a kind of glory that is the opposite of sin. We know that because Paul says, “All have Sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.

3. Now, I think It would help us interpret this statement in Rom. 3:23 if we could find a passage written by the same author (i.e. Paul) where he speaks of the glory of God in the context of human experience. After all, in Rom. 3:23 Paul is telling us that “falling short of the glory of God” is the universal experience of all people.

4. Thankfully, we do have such a passage written by Paul. In fact, he wrote it in one of his letters to the church of Corinth. So turn with me to 2 Cor. 3:18. Here Paul writes:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,  
are being transformed into the same image from one degree of  
glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

5. What Paul is talking about here is the sanctification of believers. When God justifies a sinner by faith, the H.S. takes up residence in his/her heart and begins a powerful process of transformation. We call this “Sanctification.” Justification is about God declaring us righteous. Sanctification is about God making us righteous.

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<sup>4</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* Phillipsburg, N.J., P& R Publishing, 2008), 302

6. In other words, when the Spirit of God starts transforming the child of God, the goal is the restoration of the image of God in us. That is, we become more and more like Jesus.

7. Therefore, when Paul says (Rom. 3:23) that all fall short of the glory of God, he probably means that no sinner is able to measure up to the righteous Person character of Christ, which Paul refers to as Christ's glory. Only the Spirit of God can bring about such transformation to a sinner. In other words, one must be justified by faith before he/she can "image forth" the glory of God, which is the very purpose for which God created us (Gen. 1:26).

8. Think of it this way: Jesus shows the world what the Father is like, and we were created to show the world what Christ is like. To show the world what Christ is like is to live in a manner that is perfectly righteous as Jesus is righteous. If we were able to attain the glory of God...

- We would never sin against our spouse
- We would never sin with our mouth
- We would always love sacrificially
- We would always tell the truth
- We would love the Lord our God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.
- And we would love our neighbor as ourselves.
- And our hearts would always be inclined to do the father's will.
- This is the nature of Jesus Christ. It is His glory.

9. Amazingly, those who have by faith received God's grace of justification will one day be fully transformed to a restored glory. Paradise lost will be paradise regained. And everything about us will perfectly reflect the glory of God.

10. So let it be known that the God who justifies is

- A Holy God
- A Faithful God
- A Righteous God
- A Glorious God, and next...

## V. A Gracious God:

Notice with me what Paul says in vv. 23-24.

... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..."

1. The problem mankind faces is the reality that we all fall short of the glory of God.

- None of us are holy as God is holy
- None of us are faithful as God is faithful
- None of us are Righteous as He is righteous.
- None of us fulfill our purpose to perfectly reflect the glory of God. We all fall short. And if the apostle Paul had stopped there, our situation would be hopeless. We would be without hope and without God forever.

2. But listen closely, my fellow sinner. God is not merely

- a Holy God,
- a faithful God,
- a righteous God
- and an infinitely glorious God,
- he is also a Gracious God.

3. The Good News of the gospel (v. 24) is that sinners like you and me can be Justified (i.e. declared righteous in the courtroom of heaven) by God's Grace as a gift through the redemption that was paid for when Jesus shed his blood and died on a cross on your behalf.

4. Listen to how Paul says it in Eph. 1:7

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.

5. In Eph. 2:8 Paul says it like this:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast.

6. When Paul wrote his short epistle to Titus, he said it like this: (Titus 3:4–7).

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that being justified by his Grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

7. O my friend! Behold the kindness of the Lord! He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth. And this is the truth: that though our sin merits for us only condemnation, the Grace of God freely justifies all who believe. Another way to say it is, For those who believe the Gospel, the grace of God shields us from the wrath of God.<sup>5</sup>

8. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote:

The Christian life starts with grace, it must continue with grace, it ends with grace. Grace, wondrous grace. "By the grace of God I am what I am" (Paul says). "Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."<sup>6</sup>

9. There is a single word that encompasses all the riches we find in Christ: GRACE.<sup>7</sup>

10. O my friend, listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to your heart right now. God is making his appeal his appeal right now. I implore you to be reconciled to God. For God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might be become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor. 5:20-21).

11. Now, we don't have enough time today to talk about the final two attributes of God, but you can study them out on your own. But may the Lord fill your soul with the glory of Christ so that you may respond in a kind of worship that glorifies God and fills you with abundant joy.

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<sup>5</sup> Dan Kirk

<sup>6</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, (1964), p. 132

<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur, *Our Sufficiency in Christ*, p. 243