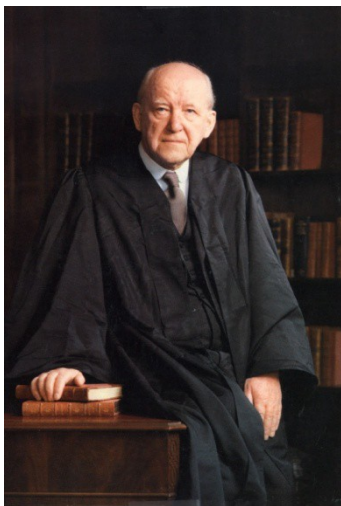


*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— 22 the **righteousness** of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are **justified** by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 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. 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.*



Martyn Lloyd Jones is one of the most famous preachers of the 20th century. He went to medical school and worked as a physician for a few years before he answered his call to vocational ministry. After being the assistant pastor to G. Campbell Morgan, he took over as senior minister at Westminster Chapel in London and preached there for nearly 30 years. From this famous preacher comes his most famous series on the book of Romans. He preached 366 messages on the book of Romans which today is a fourteen volume set. I just learned this week that even after 366 sermons, he never actually completed the book of Romans. He got to Romans 14:17 and quit. He “believed God had deliberately stopped him from finishing his Romans series because he did not know enough about “Joy in the Holy Spirit” to preach adequately on this.¹

I have only listened to one of these messages and this section of chapter three particularly stood out to me.

Now there are no more vital words in the whole of the Scriptures than just these two words: But now. What vital words these are. These are the kinds of words with which the Apostle always introduces the gospel. It's something that you'll find constantly in the New Testament Scriptures. He paints his dark and his black picture. And not only this apostle but the others also in the same way, but particularly is this true of the Apostle Paul and his particular style. He first of all paints his black and his dark and his hopeless picture. Then having painted it he says, "But now."

Martyn Lloyd Jones is in good company in recognizing this importance of these words. Martin Luther called this paragraph "the chief point...of the whole Bible."² What Jones described is exactly what we have seen since starting our study through Romans. Paul introduced his theme in 1:17—*the righteous shall live by faith*. But ever since that verse, it has been nothing but sin and wrath, sin and wrath. Paul's theology and his style is a bit like a symphony. The musical piece began on a high note with sweet melodies ringing out. At verse 18 of chapter one, Paul turned the score to a minor key. Especially if you read it as a whole unit, you can almost feel the somber mood of the music, the dissonant chords slower tempo.

But verse 21 is a change back to a major key. Just when you thought the music would drag on into hopeless series of melancholy notes, "but now" rings out in a crescendo of glory. I hope that you have been able to feel this progression. It will help you all the more to understand what follows.

Furthermore, as we are in this season of advent, verse 21 and following gives us yet another explanation of why God became man. What we have before us is the explanation of Christmas--the incarnation. This is why Jesus took on human flesh. This is why he was born as a helpless babe—to redeem us from our lost and hopeless state.

So let's get started with what Martyn Lloyd Jones calls, the most "vital words in the whole of the Scriptures." *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law*. What is the significance of these two words--"but now."? Paul is making a distinction between what is to come and the previous 2½ chapters. The immediate context would be verse 20. *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin*. The law cannot "justify" us in God's sight because it's only power is to give us knowledge of our sin. The law is a diagnosis but it is not a cure. If your diagnosis is cancer you can't cure yourself with more cancer.

Trying to turn the law into a cure is a bit like an alcoholic "curing" himself with more alcohol. The alcohol may help you feel better for a while but in applying this "cure," you are further entrapping yourself in its death grip. You and I need a cure from sin that is "apart from" the actual diagnosis.

Let's stop for a moment and talk about the righteousness of God. It is helpful to see Martin Luther's perspective because even as an unbeliever, he understood the righteousness of God.

For I hated that word "righteousness of God," which, according to the use and custom of all the teachers, I had been taught to understand philosophically regarding the formal or active righteousness, as they call it, with which God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, "As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!" Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience.³

As you can tell, Luther was absolutely miserable. And he was miserable for good reason. He knew that God was infinitely righteous. But he also knew that not only was he was not righteous, but God expected him to be so. The standard to which God calls us is himself—his perfect righteousness. This is one of Luther's key statements: "Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience." This was not just Luther giving himself high marks for good Christian living. All who knew Luther knew him to be above reproach. He went above and beyond all of the "rules" and did his best to be righteous. But deep down he had this nagging sense that his best would never be enough.



Maybe this is the way that a lot of unbelievers feel about God. Of course many revel in their sin. If they don't actually wear t-shirts like this one, it is certainly conveys the attitude of their heart. But then what if some of these people who love their sin do so because they have given up on trying to be good? If you have any sense that God is righteous and you can't measure up, then you only have two options. Either you work harder, as Luther did, or else you give up entirely like some people do.

But regardless, everyone must come to terms with the righteousness of God. He demands that we be righteous but as we know, he also supplies the solution: justification.

I think it is important to note that the words justify and righteousness are the same word.

dikaioyne = righteousness

dikaion = justified

dikaion = just

'Righteousness' is used 4 times and 'just' or 'justify' is used 3 times. So as we work our way through the text. To be justified is to be made righteous. It's a bit like how Google has become a verb. You Google something on Google. You are made righteous by being righteous-ified. Terrible word, but you get the picture.

But what exactly happened in verse 21? *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law.* What is the “now” and how is it different than before? The key word is manifested. Manifested simply means to be made known. To be revealed or shown. Salvation was always by faith and never by the law. This is why Paul added the phrase, *although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it.* So the righteousness of God is manifested in a new way, but all throughout the Old Testament salvation was also shown to be by faith. In chapter 4 and 9-11, Paul will demonstrate quite clearly all of the examples which “bear witness” to this new manifestation of God’s righteousness. He will use the examples of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel and Malachi. In other words, this is the same message that the Bible has always taught, “but now” it has been manifested in a new way.

Matthew 1	Romans 3	This new manifestation of the righteousness of God is the Christmas story. The angel of the Lord revealed this to Joseph in a dream. <i>She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.</i> ” 22 <i>All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and</i>
<i>She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.</i>	<i>But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law</i>	
<i>All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet</i>	<i>although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it</i>	

bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us). This section of Matthew 1 is helpful because we see the coming of Christ—which is the new manifestation of God’s righteousness. But we also see the word of the prophet who predicted this event. The words spoken to Joseph are very similar to Paul’s words. *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it.* Not only that, but Joseph was given the name of the Savior of the world—Jesus.

This is where Paul picks up in verse 22: *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.* Like righteousness and justify are the same words, so are faith and believe. So this verse could read:

*the righteousness of God through **faith** in Jesus Christ for all who have **faith**.*
or
*the righteousness of God through **belief** in Jesus Christ for all who **believe**.*

So why the repetition? Is it just for emphasis? I like how one commentator explained the repetition. “God’s righteousness is available *only* through faith in Christ—but it is available to *anyone* who has faith in Christ.”⁴ This presents the fact that the gospel is both exclusive and unlimited. It is exclusive in that a person must express faith in Christ and Christ alone. Make sure you catch the object of faith. Twice in this short passage it is made clear—faith in Jesus Christ. This is not faith in religion or faith in your good works or even faith in your ability to

have faith. It is faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ as the eternal God in human flesh. Faith in Christ as the one who lived a perfect life

The gospel is exclusive for those who faith in Christ but it is also unlimited in that it is available to anyone who believes. The gospel invitation is always open to all. Jesus says, *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28). Isaiah said,

*Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Isaiah 55:1, 6-7)*

And of course the New Testament ends with an echo of Isaiah's words. *The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price* (Revelation 22:17)

This perfectly matches what comes next. *For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his **grace as a gift**, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* Grace is a gift. It comes without price to us but the price for God is terrible. *whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*

OK, now we have three big words we have to tackle here—justification, redemption and propitiation. If you are very familiar with these words—great. If you are not, then some preaching gurus would tell me to leave these word alone. Don't take the time to explain them because they are too “theological.” They are just 'Christianese' that will confuse the average person in the pew. You know what I say to that line of thinking? Two things. First, these are Biblical words, not some high falootin' words out of an old, dusty theology book. If they are in the Bible, then we should know what they mean. Second, I don't think you are average pew sitters. I am never going to assume you can't understand. I assume that you can and should understand these vital terms. By the time we are done, you will no longer merely say, Hey did you hear that Bill got saved?” Instead you will say “Hey did you hear that Bill was redeemed by the propitiation of Christ's blood and by faith he was justified by Christ.” ;-)

And to show you how much faith I have in you, we are going to start with the hardest word—propitiation. The Greek word is *hilasterion*, which is a form of the word from which we get the word hilarious. Hilasterion was used with the Greek gods. In Greek mythology, the pagan gods were malicious and almost always angry. The job of the worshipper was to make the gods turn from wrath to favor. To change their mood from anger to hilarity, or cheerfulness. Propitiation then is a means to satisfy the wrath of God. Through sacrifices and offerings, the angry gods would become temporarily cheerful and so choose not to destroy the one offering the sacrifice.

Lets you think that propitiation is just borrowed from pagan religions, let me show you how it is radically different.

1. Biblical propitiation is based on the perfect holiness of God, not on the capricious and selfish nature of pagan gods. As we have seen from our study through the book of Romans so far, the wrath of God is very real and very deserved. If you do not believe this then I encourage you to go back and read the first ten message sin this series. Here is a quick sampling of the pertinent verses.
 - **1.18**—For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
 - **2.5**—But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.
 - **2:8**—but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.
 - **3:5**—But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us.

2. Biblical propitiation is initiated by God, not by man. Propitiation is the reason Christ was born. Long before baby Jesus could say the word propitiation, it was his sole purpose for taking on human flesh. In other words, propitiation is the reason for the season. Do you think that phrase will ever catch on? :-)

3. Not only was Biblical propitiation *initiated* by God but is it also *satisfied* by God, not by man. We know that God's wrath must be satisfied but we also know that God chose to satisfy it himself, through the unblemished sacrifice of Christ. Hebrews 10:4 tells us that “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” You could have an endless river of the blood of bulls and goats and it would never take away our sins.

But why would God pour out his holy wrath on the Son whom he adored? Because of 2 Corinthians 5:21. *God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* Jesus took on human flesh and then he took on human sin. He didn't merely carry our sin, he became sin. He absorbed it. It turned him from the spotless lamb into one worthy of holy wrath. It's not as if Jesus actually sinned but our sin was credited to his account. Legally speaking, he was guilty. Someone has put it this way. “The *innocent* was punished voluntarily *as if guilty*, that the *guilty* might be gratuitously rewarded *as if innocent*.”⁵

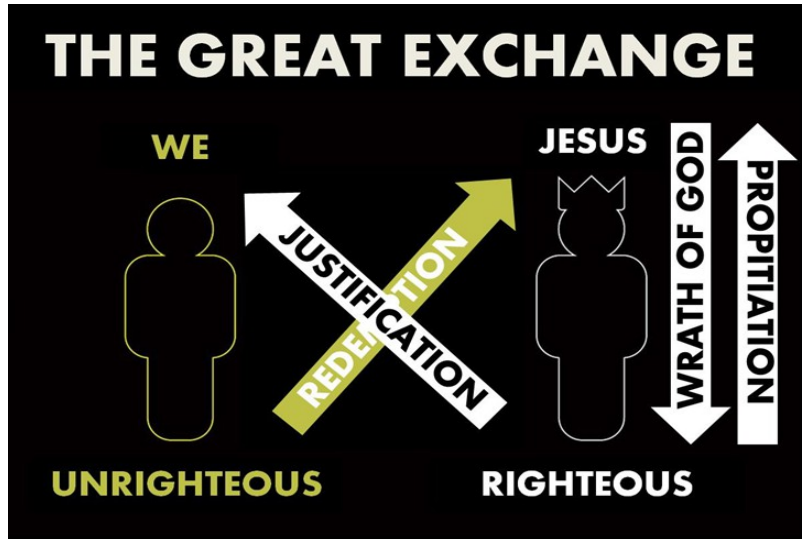
This goes hand in hand with our next word, redemption and justification. Redemption is being set free through the payment of a price.⁶ The price was the transfer of our sins to Jesus. Justification, as we saw earlier, is being made righteous. Just as Jesus never actually sinned but was declared guilty on our behalf, so we don't actually perform acts of righteousness but are instead declared righteous.

All of this combined can be called The Great Exchange. If you recall from chapter one, the Dark Exchange was when we “exchanged the truth of God for a lie and

PROPITIATION—Satisfying the wrath of God.

REDEMPTION—Being set free through the payment of a price.

JUSTIFICATION—Being declared righteous.



worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). This is called the Great Exchange because God reversed the process that we created. Through propitiation, redemption and justification, God exchanged our sin for his righteousness. He became sin and we became righteous. A great exchange.

What does all of this mean? You see, in the evangelical

church we are pretty good at insisting that we are not saved by work but by faith. But if God has done all of this for us, why do we still feel so rejected at times? Why do we feel like we must earn God's love and acceptance?

In one of Neil Anderson’s books, *Breaking the Bondage of Legalism*, he found that 58% of Christians said they do not measure up to God’s standards. These saints are caught in a performance trap. Theologically, they would dent that are saved by works, but practically, they feel they still need to work for God's full acceptance.



This week Karen helped me with a project and when it was finished, she sent me an email saying that she thought it turned out very nice. I took about 2 minutes and created this graphic and emailed it, saying, thanks for the Karen Maurer seal of approval. She wrote back and said, “and that’s not easy to achieve!” True enough.

We do this in all of our relationships. We seek approval at some level .We want the seal of approval from other people and we especially want it from God. But don’t you see that we already have it? If you have expressed faith alone in Christ alone, then you have been part of the Great Exchange. So when you sin as a believer, what happens to you? Do you lose God's seal of approval? Do you think God will ever reverse the great exchange? Will he remove his righteousness and return your sin to you? This will never happen. When you sin, you remove yourself from full fellowship with God but your position does not change with him. When you repent ,you are restoring that broken fellowship. We need to rest in our relationship as a child of God and quit our striving for his approval.

Rich Maurer
December 15, 2013

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1 <http://theresurgence.com/2011/01/17/martyn-lloyd-jones-20-lessons-from-his-life>

2 Moo, p. 242.

3 <http://www.temcat.com/L-2-Prophecy-Library/History/MartinLutherConversion.pdf>

4 Moo, p. 226.

5 *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's Commentary*, in PC Study Bible software, BibleSoft.

6 Moo, p. 225.