

The God of the Gospel

Romans 3:19-26

Visitor's Sunday

Introduction: Please take your Bible and join me in Romans 3. Romans is the 6th book of the New Testament, so if you find Matthew, just keep going past Mark, Luke, John, Acts, and then you will come to Romans. We'll be in Romans chapter 3.

We live in an age that has come to be termed by some journalists as an age of outrage. We have constant access to news outlets from around the world and they feed us information of ongoing tragedies and violence and injustices. On top of that we have the polarization of the political world in which there are very few left in the middle and more and more on opposite sides who are often caught up in fierce battles over what they believe to be best. And then we have social media which gives us 24-hour a day access to publicly vent our outrage over whatever the latest flashpoint happens to be. In fact, a survey done in conjunction with NBC News reported that half of all Americans are angrier today than they were a year ago. And 68% of the people in that survey said that they hear or read something in the news at least once a day which makes them angry. No wonder this has been called an age of outrage. Lots of people are upset about lots of things.

But there is a problem in our world that gets zero press coverage and almost no social media outcry. It is the problem which sits at the core of all the other problems. This problem is heart which pumps lifeblood to all the other problems in our world. And yet there is no outrage about this problem. There are no demands for a solution to this problem. We would rather deal with the offspring of the problem than face the mother problem head on. But thankfully, the time tested and always right Word of God never shies away from speaking the truth – even if we don't think we want to hear it. Our passage this morning is one of the clearest in all of Scripture about mankind's greatest problem and God's great solution. In a word, mankind's greatest problem is sin. And in a word, God's great solution is the Gospel. Romans 3:19 presents the truth this way, we'll read down through verse 26.

At the center of the Gospel is the God whose Good news this is. The gospel is not first or even preeminently about us. The Gospel is from God and brought to us by God and accomplished by God and makes much of this gracious God. And in our text this morning I want to point you to two truths about this God who has given us this great gospel which is able to save us from our sin. The first is that God is Just, and the second is that God is the Justifier.

I. God is Just – vs. 19-20, 23

- a. We learn about God being just in verses 19-20 primarily. Those verses are a conclusion statement about our guilt before God as a human race. And that argument began back in chapter 1 where we are told that we have suppressed the truth about God by our unrighteousness. Romans 1:19 says:

- i. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Rom. 1:19-25 ESV)
- b. The truth about God has been plain for all to see and know in every generation, and yet we have all turned aside and gone our own way. Rather than submit to God as our Creator and Lord, we rebelled against Him and exchanged the truth about God for a lie. And so he gave us up to our sinful passions and our deluded minds and has let us abound in our sinfulness against Him. At the end of chapter 1 there is a long list of how this sin expresses itself in humanity, and if you read it you will find a very accurate and telling picture about our current state as a society. All of our problems are simply the flowers which spring from this root of our greatest problem – our rebellion against God.
- c. But the case against us doesn't end there. In chapter 2 we learn that we often try to justify ourselves from the guilt of sin by looking at the sin of others. This is especially true of the religious who tend to think that they are better off in their keeping of God's law than others, therefore they presume that they will not be judged by God. But in 2:6 it says that God will render to each one according to his works. So, God's judgment of my guilt will not be established on comparison with others. We wish that were true don't we? We wish that God's judgment scale allowed us to put ourselves on one side of the scale and the worst sinner we know on the other side of the scale. We can always find someone who is more obviously sinful than we are. But that is not how this works. God is too just, too righteous, too holy, to judge you and I based on the works of someone else. We will be judged by our own works.
- d. The argument proceeds from there into chapter 3 where the point in verses 9-20 is that we are all under sin by nature and by choice. So, the verdict in verse 10 is that none is righteous, no not one. And in verse 11 that no one understands; no one seeks for God. And verse 12 that we have all turned aside. And in verse 18 that we have no fear of God. And this culminates in the statement of verse 19 that we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

- e. Being under the law is not speaking about just those who directly received the Law of Moses in the Old Testament, but about the whole world who knows that God exists, but has still gone their own way.
- f. Verse 23 drives that point home where it says that there is no distinction in all of mankind. This is true of everyone everywhere – all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. To sin is to completely miss the mark or the standard that has been set. To fall short is to be completely deprived of something or to be in total lack of something. And that something here is the glory of God. This is to say that God made us to be his image bearers in this world – to live life as He commanded and therefore to display the glory of His wisdom and goodness through our lives. But we have all, every last one of us, completely missed that mark.
- g. And so, verse 19 says that this case is being presented to us from Scripture so that every mouth may be stopped. The idea here is that every reason to speak is removed in this court room scene before the just and holy God. We have no defense. There is nothing left to say. The case against us is too overwhelmingly convicting. We are guilty and we all know it.
- h. Not only that but it says that the whole world will be held accountable to God. This is a legal and technical term to describe one who has lost all possibility of disproving a charge against him. The case is lost. The judgment is settled. We are guilty before God.
- i. Science tells us that the human brain is far more advanced than any super computer in the world. Scientist report that your brain records every word you say, every place you've been, every thing you've looked at, and everything you've done. Though you may have long since forgotten, it is all recorded on the hard drive of your brain. What if on Judgment Day as you stand before the God who made you, he simply hit play on the hard drive of your mind and all of this was revealed? Do you think that you would be acquitted of guilt based on the evidence of your own mind? The obvious answer is – no way! We will all be found guilty beyond any doubt.
- j. But why did God give us His law then? Wasn't that to give us a way to justify ourselves before Him? If we keep His Law then we can be declared righteous right? Well, verse 20 tells us that no human being can be justified by the keeping of the law in the sight of God. And that is based on the truths we already rehearsed from chapters 1-3. We have turned from God, and even our human attempts to keep His law are filled with sinful intents and evil purposes. The Law was given so that we might know just how sinful we are. It was not given to justify us, but to convince us of our guilt before God.
- k. So, if we are all guilty under the high and holy standard of God's truth and we have all turned aside to our own way and we are all condemned as guilty before the Just and Holy God – then what hope do we have? How can man be made right with God and be innocent before God? This is the greatest problem of mankind which should get the most traction in our world, but is largely ignored. Is there any hope? Well, praise be to God, there is! Not only is God Just, but He is also the Justifier.

II. God is the Justifier – vs. 21-26

a. Some of the most precious words in all of Scripture are the words which start verse 21 – “But now.” Though we stand guilty and rightly condemned, God is unwilling to leave us there. Our greatest problem is the Justice of God. His great solution is to justify us in Christ Jesus by faith. To be justified is to be righteous. To be righteous is to be completely in the right, holy and perfect before this just judge of the universe. But how can this be when we are completely unjust and unrighteous? This can be true of us only through the finished work of Jesus Christ. We have no righteousness of our own, we need a foreign righteousness that can be given to us so that we can be justified before God and be made right with Him. These verses are one of the clearest in all of Scripture which explain this truth to us. Verse 21 tells us that this righteousness of God has been made known to us now in Christ, but it is in keeping with the words of the prophets of old. God is faithful and always the same – yesterday, today, and forever. This plan was not different in the Old Testament than it is in the New Testament. God’s plan to save mankind from sin has always been to send His Son and through Him to make justification possible for us. And this justification is given to us through redemption and propitiation by the blood of Christ, and we receive this justification by faith. So, let’s look at each of those truths.

b. *By Free & Sovereign Grace – vs. 24*

- i. God justifies the sinner by free & sovereign grace. In verse 22 we learn that this righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. And then we learn that this is universally true of all people. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified by God’s grace as a gift. This does not mean that all people of all places are justified by God just like all are condemned by God. It rather means that all people of all places, if they are to be justified, will be justified in this way – through faith in Jesus Christ.
- ii. Verse 24 says that this justification is by the grace of God and is given as a gift from God. The combination of grace and free gift make known to us that this is completely unmerited and unearned by us. This is the central point of this truth about justification. It is not based in any way at all on something we have earned or deserve. We have not positioned ourselves by our good works or our religious affiliation or our baptism or our Bible reading or our church attendance or our AWANA attendance or any other good work to be given this justified position before God. We do not predispose God to this judgment by something we do or are.
- iii. This is an important distinction to make because this is the issue over which the reformers of the 16th century split from the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has been teaching since the Middle Ages that justification means we are made righteous, not that we are declared to be righteous by God. They teach that you must have Christ and grace and faith, but these are additions to the works you perform like baptism into the church and penance and partaking of communion. These works

predispose you to God giving grace to you and making you righteous and purging you of all of your sin so that you can enter Heaven. This is why purgatory is necessary in the Catholic system of faith because not too many of us will die having reached sinless perfection so we need some years of suffering in purgatory to further purify us before we can enter Heaven – according to their system of belief.

- iv. But that is not what Romans 3 teaches is it? Romans 3 is clear – you are guilty before God. You have not predisposed God to declare you right in His sight. Rather, the complete opposite is true. You have predetermined your judgment of guilty before God because of your own sinful rebellion against Him. So, the only way you can be cleared of this guilt and given this righteous standing is by the free and sovereign grace of God. He gives it freely and it is all powerful to overcome our sinful standing before Him.

c. *Through Redemption in Christ Jesus – vs. 24*

- i. But it is not powerful without basis. This free and sovereign grace is able to save us through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. We hear this idea of redemption quite a bit don't we? Maybe an athlete had an opportunity to be great, but then got terribly hurt. But a few years later they make this great comeback and sportscasters might say that there is redemption in how they are now playing. Or maybe you like to go garage-saling, and you find a beat up old piece of furniture or jewelry and you buy it and spruce it up and redeem it back to its original beauty. Or maybe you've heard of someone whose life takes a few hard knocks and they lose everything. But through hard work and good breaks they are redeemed and exceed their previous station in life.
- ii. But when the Bible speaks of redemption it is speaking of a price that is paid to free from bondage or slavery. The cultural context of the 1st Century would have the redemption of prisoners of war who are in bondage, but a price is paid for their release. Or also of a slave who has sold himself into slavery because of a debt he owed. His debt is paid by someone else and he is freed from slavery. That is the Biblical idea of redemption – a price paid to secure someone's freedom.
- iii. That is what is needed in our case. Remember that we are under sin – it is our master. We are so under its rule that we are not capable of righteousness in any way. We do not understand God's truth and we do not seek after God. We are under sin as its slaves. We need to be set free. And that is what God does by his free and sovereign grace. He provides this redemption through the substitutionary life and death of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Our debt is eternally great, and the only one who could pay the price of that debt and secure our freedom from sin and death and hell is the Son of God himself. And he provides for our redemption specifically through the propitiation by his blood as it says in verse 25.

d. *By Propitiation by His blood – vs. 25*

- i. This free and sovereign grace of God justifies the sinner, but this free grace is costly to God. The payment price for this redemption from sin is the shedding of the blood of His own Son. If you are not very familiar with your Bible you aren't really sure what it means to say "by His blood." It is referring to Christ's willingly laying down His perfect and sinless life to die a bloody and gruesome death under the condemnation of sin. He was put to death on a Roman execution stake known as a cross and he died under the pretense of being guilty of blasphemy and trying to raise an insurrection against the Roman Empire. But in reality, he was completely innocent and no one took his life from Him. He told his disciples before he ever went to Jerusalem that last time that no man would take his life from him, but He would lay it down as a sacrifice for His people – to purchase them out of their bondage. The Old Testament sacrificial system pointed ahead to this great Lamb of God who would lay down His life on the Cross and pay the ultimate price under the condemnation of sin.
 - ii. You also might not know what the word "propitiation" means – and that is okay. It means a satisfaction of wrath or appeasement of anger. So, a husband might buy his wife flowers as a propitiation for forgetting to pick up the kids from school. He appeases her anger with his gift. But what's at stake here in Romans 3 is much more severe than just making someone angry by forgetting something simple and normal. What's at stake here is the holy and righteous God whose standard we have completely disregarded. He is justly and righteously angry with sinners whom He created, but who rebelled against Him and did what was right in their own eyes. This wrath must be satisfied. The Just Judge must righteously judge us based upon our guilt or innocence. He will not simply overlook it all and let our case pass. He is too holy to put up with such injustice.
 - iii. So, verse 25 says that he put forward His own Son to be the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. It was God's idea and God's doing to provide a Savior. And if Jesus was to save us from the righteous wrath of judgment then he must shed His blood for us and pay the ransom price.
 - iv. Do you remember how I showed you that the text moved from our being under the bondage of sin to our being without excuse before the judgment seat of God? We are in bondage to our sin and we are condemned by our sin. Well, redemption and propitiation take care of those two things. Redemption buys us our freedom from slavery to sin and propitiation frees us from God's wrath through the shed blood of Jesus. He suffered that condemnation so that we do not have to. So, God put forward His own Son to solve our greatest problem and give us a way to be right before Him. And He did this because He loves us. I John 4:10 says "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Truly there has been no greater love ever shown than what God has shown to us through His Son.
- e. *Received by faith – vs. 25-26*

- i. So, does that mean then that everyone everywhere is forgiven and freed? No, the text says that this justification before God must be received by faith. If you place complete and total faith in Jesus Christ alone to save you from your sins then you will be justified, or declared righteous, by God. Faith is the personal response to this provision of salvation made for you by Christ. And this is the instrumental cause of salvation being applied to you. Faith is not a work which makes you savable by God, but faith is the hands of your inner man which receives the gift of God's gracious salvation.
- ii. Faith in the Scriptures is a matter of the mind and the affections and the will. All three of these core parts of your person need to be engaged to truly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. You must believe the facts about the Gospel – that God is a holy God who made you and who deserves your obedience and worship. You are a rebellious sinner who has turned from God and gone your own way. You rightly deserve the just judgment of this holy God against your sin and you stand condemned before Him as guilty. But God sent His Son to live a life of perfect obedience and sinlessness so that he could give that life as a perfect sacrifice upon the Cross of Calvary. He died under the condemnation of sin and in the place of sinners. But death could not hold Him. His payment to redeem us was sufficient and his propitiation of God's wrath was good and right. We know this because He raised from the grave and ascended to the right hand of the Father. His work was sufficient and enough. And you must mentally believe that there is no other way for you to be saved.
- iii. But this mental agreement is not enough. What you know in your mind must then affect your conscience and convict you of your personal need to turn from all other ways of salvation and trust in Christ alone. And this conviction of heart must direct your will to go all in on your trust in Christ. This saving faith in Jesus must involve your whole person and it must be wholly set on Jesus. You must burn all other bridges to all other ways of salvation. You must put all the weight of your trust in Christ alone.
- iv. Saving faith is only as good as its object isn't it? So, you need to choose your object carefully. Imagine yourself out hiking with your family in CO when suddenly you slip on the path and before you know it you have slid 100 feet down the side of the mountain. When you finally stop sliding you find yourself clinging to the side of the mountain and your feet have landed on a small section of solid rock that jut out from the mountain side. As you hold on tight your family calls for help and within an hour there is a helicopter circling above you to rescue you. They let down a trained rescuer by rope and he extends his hand to you. You must leave all of your trust in that little ledge that is holding you and you must give yourself completely to that rescuer. As long as you give him one hand and

the other hand remains clinging to the rock face of the mountain, you will not be rescued. And the question racing through your mind is – can this rescuer handle me? Can he bear my weight and keep his grip on me? Is he capable of saving me?

- v. Friend, Jesus Christ is the only rescuer who is capable of saving you. But He cannot save you if you put one hand on him and one hand on your good works or your religious deeds or your family heritage or your nice personality or your ongoing pursuit of a life of sin. It is all Christ or no Christ. You will not be justified before God any other way.

Conclusion: So, how about you? Have you put this kind of trust in the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Do you see the truth about your greatest problem and do you understand the provision of God through Christ Jesus to rescue you? Is He your only hope? Have you put this kind of saving faith in Him? If you haven't, may today be the day for you to put your trust in Christ.

I don't know the state of your heart and of your standing before God, only you and God do. Do you know this God? Are you justified before Him through the work of His Son? Do you know the peace with God that justification brings? I assume that there are some here this morning who are not at peace with God. You have been convicted by the Holy Spirit that you have a great problem and you need a great Savior. Friend, don't delay or deny this conviction. Turn to Christ in complete and total faith today. Romans 10:9-10 says – "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." I am sure that you have questions you need answered about this gospel. Talk to the person who invited you or grab me at lunch and ask if we can talk. The greatest privilege of my life is to talk to others about the Jesus who has saved me from my sins. If you don't know Christ, may today be the day of your salvation. Would you pray with me? Let's pray.