

## ROMANS 3:21-26: A MINIATURE SOTERIOLOGY

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God our Saviour:

Is 43:11

Is 45:21-22

Titus 1:3; 2:13

1 Tim 1:1

A preliminary summary:

- *The whole initiative of salvation is with God.*
- *Jesus is the center of God's saving work; in no one else is there salvation.*
- *Salvation in the New Testament sense of spiritual deliverance means a total salvation. God saves fallen man—body and soul.*
- *Salvation is eschatological. Although [one] begins to enjoy his salvation here and now there is yet a time coming when he will realize it in all its fullness. (Horne, Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopaedia, 5:222, quoted in Zemek, 109-110)*

### Seven Characteristics of God's Salvation Plan (Rom 3:21-26)

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|---------------------|---|
| 1. Long-anticipated | 5. One-size-fits-all (both Jews and Gentiles) |
| 2. Not Law-based    | 6. Wrath-satisfying                           |
| 3. Faith-based      | 7. Substitutionary                            |
| 4. Christ-focused   |   |

See if you can identify from which portion of the text each point is drawn from.

<sup>NAU</sup> Romans 3:21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those 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> being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; <sup>25</sup> whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; <sup>26</sup> for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

#### 1. Long-anticipated: Romans 3:21

1 Pet 1:18-20 Gal 4:4 Heb 1:1 John 5:39 Lk 24:26-27 Rom 1:1-2

Gen 3:15	proto-evangelium
Lev 16-17	day of atonement (substitutionary ransom payment)
Exodus 12	Passover lamb
Dan 9:24-27	sin will be locked up, sealed up, and forgiven when Messiah cut off
Isaiah 53	video tape of the crucifixion
Isaiah 49:6	Gentile inclusion

The prophets' desire to know more: 1 Peter 1:1-11

## 2. Not Law-based: Rom 3:19-21a

If salvation is synergistic (a joint effort between God and man), then you carry the extraordinary (and impossible) responsibility of creating and maintaining an innocent standing before God. God says that such a feat is impossible (furthermore, it would deny His desire/requirement that His mercy be the only determining factor in salvation, Rom 9:15-16)

Examples: Matt 19 "What good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"  
Luke 18 the Pharisee

Such thinking countered:

2 Tim 1:9-10 Gal 4:9-11 Gal 5:4 Gal 6:14-15 Titus 3:5

The Westminster Confession's summary:

*Those whom God effectually calleth he also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous: not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone.*

Two failures of all Law-based systems of salvation:

- They falsely assume that man is able to justify himself before God. (Rom 3:20, 26-28)
- They falsely assume that God would diminish His glory by allowing a plan in which justification were not His sole responsibility. (Rom 9:16)

Two terms:

- monergism: one person working
- synergism: two or more people working together

The dividing line between Christianity and all other religions—and between Christianity and that which only *claims* to be Christianity—is the fact that only biblical Christianity is *monergistic* in its view of salvation. Only biblical Christianity credits all the work of justification to God.

*What is there left for us to pay? Nothing! Since he claimed that all was now 'finished', there is nothing for us to contribute. (Stott, The Cross of Christ, 99)*

All Law-based systems fail for these two reasons:

- They under estimate the holiness of God.
- They over estimate the holiness of man.

*All inadequate doctrines of the atonement are due to inadequate doctrines of God and man. (Stott, The Cross of Christ, 129)*

Explained by Calvin:

*Since we are all naturally prone to hypocrisy, any empty semblance of righteousness is quite enough to satisfy us instead of righteousness itself. And since nothing appears within us or around us that is not tainted with very great impurity, so long as we keep our mind within the confines of human pollution, anything which is in some small degree less defiled delights us as if it were most pure: just as an eye, to which nothing but black had been previously presented, deems an object of a whitish, or even of a brownish hue, to be perfectly white. (Institutes, 5, Beveridge trans.)*

J.I. Packer's summary of salvation:

*There is really only one point to be made in the field of soteriology: the point that **God saves sinners. God**—the Triune Jehovah, Father, Son and Spirit; three Persons working together in sovereign wisdom, power and love to achieve the salvation of a chosen people, the Father electing, the Son fulfilling the Father's will by redeeming, the Spirit executing the purpose of Father and Son by renewing.*

***Saves**—does everything from first to last, that is involved in bringing man from death in sin to life in glory; Plans achieves, and communicates redemption, calls and keeps, justifies, sanctifies, glorifies.*

***Sinners**—men as God finds them, guilty, vile, helpless, powerless, unable to lift a finger to do God's will or [to] better their spiritual lot.*

***God saves sinners**—and the force of this confession may not be weakened by disrupting the unity of the work of the Trinity, or by dividing the achievement of salvation between God and man and making the decisive part man's own, or by soft-peddalling the sinner's inability so as to allow him to share the praise of his salvation with his Saviour.*

*...Sinners do not save themselves in any sense at all, but that salvation, first and last, whole and entire, past, present and future, is of the Lord to whom be glory for ever; amen. (Packer quoted in The Five Points of Calvinism, Steele, Thomas, Quinn, 14-15)*

### **3. Faith-based:** Rom 3:21-22

Faith: trust, belief, a calm, certain confidence, to rely upon a specific person or object of hope. An assurance or strong conviction (Heb 11:1). Jer 17:5-8

*Faith contradicts all human boasting and undermines any attempt to base man's relationship with God on doing the law. (Michel, in NIDNTT, 1:601)*

*Faith is ... the negation of self-confidence .... It involves throwing oneself unreservedly on the mercy of God. (Guthrie, NTT, 576, in Zemek, 182)*

*Buswell: "an act of total commitment"*

*Guthrie: "the act of believing ... committing oneself to Christ"*

*Erickson: "As repentance is the negative aspect of conversion, turning from one's sin, so faith is the positive aspect, laying hold upon the promises and the work of Christ." (all quoted in Zemek, 182)*

Faith has **three components**:

**1) Knowledge** (Rom 10:1). Faith is always *in* something. Note: confidence in the wrong object will not save.

**2) Emotion**: a hearty conviction or heartfelt belief in God and Christ: Heb 11:6 (seeking or desiring God and His good gifts). Belief in Christ is different than the belief that there is a continent called Antarctica.

*Grudem: Saving faith is not just a belief in facts but personal trust in Jesus to save me. (ST, 710)*

*Berkhof: ...he ceases to consider the object of faith in a detached and disinterested way, and begins to feel a lively interest in it....When one embraces Christ by faith, he has a deep conviction of the truth and reality of the object of faith, feels that it meets an important need in his life, and is conscious of an absorbing interest in it (ST, 504-5)*

### **3. Will or volition.**

Biblical faith includes commitment—a decisive, life-changing decision: Jesus' command, "Follow Me." Berkhof: *In both Testaments faith is the same radical self-commitment to God... (ST, 498)*

Summary:

Faith includes a **knowledge** of facts: there is salvation through no other name under heaven but Jesus Christ. It includes the **emotions**: love, delight, sorrow, humility, and joy. It also includes the **will**—a commitment to trust in God and His promises.

Rom 3:22      John 3:18      John 8:24      Heb 4:2      Rom 1:16-17

Question: Is faith the one work *you* do to be saved? Is faith something you screw yourself up to, something that you do that forces God to relent from judgement and give you salvation? Biblically speaking, faith is viewed from two different but complementary perspectives: it is both the duty of man and the gift of God. Two passages especially emphasise that faith is a gift from God:

Phil 1:28-29 Eph 2:8-9

The Westminster Confession's summary:

*Those whom God effectually calleth he also freely justifieth ... not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience, to them as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith: which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God. (XI)*

J. Gresham Machen: *Such a wonderful change is not the work of man; faith itself is given us by the Spirit of God. Christians never make themselves Christians; but they are made Christians by God. (quoted in MacArthur, Faith Works, 37)*

#### **4. Christ-focused:** Romans 3:22

RC Sproul: *It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere ....This reduces justification by faith alone to justification by sincerity alone. (Faith Alone, 76)*

John Piper: *The issue is: Does Islam—or any other faith besides Christianity—cherish the crucifixion of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, as the only ground of our acceptance with God? The answer is no. Only Christians 'follow the Lamb' who was 'slain' as the one and only Redeemer .... In other words, the center of Christianity ... is the dishonourable, foolish, gruesome and utterly glorious reality of the tortured God-man, Jesus Christ. More and more, He must become the issue. (Brothers, We Are Not Professionals, x-xi)*

Biblical faith is always *faith in*: John 3:16, 36; Acts 16:31; Gal 2:16; Rom 10:11

#### **The Roman Catholic error: faith in relics.**

Fredrick the Elector ruled the area of Germany where Luther lived, and Fredrick had given his life to assembling one of Europe's greatest collections of holy relics. *Those who viewed these relics on the designated day and made the stipulated contributions might receive from the pope indulgences for the reduction of purgatory ... to the extent of 1,902,202 years and 270 days. (Bainton, Here I Stand, 53)*

#### **A second error:**

All gods are the same god in the end; therefore, you can be saved by faith in someone or something other than Christ.

#### **A third error:**

All true-hearted seekers will get a chance to believe in Christ after death. This was C. S. Lewis's error. Billy Graham also held this view:

1978 McCall's magazine article: *I used to believe that pagans in far countries were lost if they did not have the gospel of Christ preached to them. I no longer believe that.* (quoted in Iain Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided*, 73)

1997 television interview with Robert Schuller: *I think that everybody that loves or knows Christ, whether they are conscious of it or not, they are members of the body of Christ .... They come from the Muslim world, or the Buddhist world or the non-believing world .... They may not know the name of Jesus but they know in their hearts that they need something they do not have, and they turn to the only light they have, and I think that they are saved and they are going to be with us in heaven.* (ibid. 73-74)

This is a denial of the NT's *faith in Jesus Christ* gospel.

#### 5. One size fits all (both Jews and Gentiles): Rom 3:22; Acts 15:11

Three reasons salvation is the same for all who are saved (Rom 3:22-24):

1. *One human condition* (v. 23)
2. *One divine action* (v. 24). A once-for-all divine action in which God declares the ungodly sinner right with Him by imputing or crediting the sinner's guilt to Christ and Christ's flawless righteousness to the sinner (see separate section on justification).
3. *One payment price* (v. 24). Redemption: used of purchasing back an officer or nobleman captured in battle or of purchasing a slave's freedom. Christ is the one purchase price for all sinners, Jew or Gentile. Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 1:17-19

#### 6. Wrath-satisfying: Rom 3:25

1 John 2:2     1 John 4:10     Heb 2:17

David Wells: *[Evangelicalism] was built around two core theological beliefs: the full authority of the inspired Scripture and the necessity and centrality of Christ's penal substitution.* (*The Courage to Be Protestant*, 5)

**Propitiation:** *Hilastarion* referred to a sacrifice you made to your god in order to turn away his anger. Some offerings were thank offerings—given to thank the gods for a good harvest, for example. Others offerings were made for ritual, ceremonial cleansing. A *propitiatory* offering was given to turn away the gods' anger and to regain their favour. In Africa, many people still make sacrifices to deflect or turn away the anger of the ancestors. That's a propitiatory sacrifice.

Leon Morris: *In plain language he bribed his god to be favourable toward him. (Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, 211)*

Paul's use of the term propitiation is both *like* and *unlike* the pagan idea.

Unlike: While God is angry at your sin, there is nothing you can offer Him that will dissuade Him from His wrath. God can't be bribed with a juicy steak (Ps 50:12-13).

Like: A wrath-averting sacrifice is made, but it is God Himself who provides (in fact, *becomes*) the sacrifice that satisfies or exhausts His wrath. 1 John 2:2

The liberal denial of the doctrine of God's wrath:

- *The wrath of God described in the Bible is simply an [externally imposed] motif reflecting the wrath of the Jewish people. In other words, people get angry at sin, but God never does, and the OT is really just written by angry men who are busy misrepresenting God.*
- *Anger in every shape and form is foreign to God, Whose mercy is infinite. (Quoted in Leon Morris, 208)*
- *A hell-oriented gospel is not the way forward ... (Brian McLaren, A Generous Orthodoxy, 109, fn 48)*

Expiation and Propitiation:

*Propitiation:* to satisfy God's wrath.

*Expiation:* a sacrifice that wipes away sin.

You hear that and you think, "But that sounds okay. To wipe away sin is biblical." And you're right it is biblical. But is that *all* the Bible says? That's the key. What the liberal theologian is saying is, God wiped away sin in Christ, but God wasn't actually angry at that sin in any way. God forgives, but it wasn't because He had a dangerous, holy hatred for that sin.

Question: If God wasn't angry at your sin, then why did your sin have to be wiped away at all? The question the liberal never seems to answer is: If God *didn't* wipe away or forgive your sin, what would happen? Once you remove the reality of God's wrath, there's nothing to be saved *from*.

The objection:

Is God a violent-tempered ogre who storms in the house of humanity like a drunken father and vents His rage, bullying, threatening, and roaring in fury?

J.I. Packer's response: *To some ... 'wrath' suggests a loss of self-control, an outburst of 'seeing red' which is partly, if not wholly, irrational. To others, it suggests the rage of conscious impotence, or wounded pride, or plain bad temper. Surely, it is said, it would be wrong to ascribe to God such attitudes as these. The reply is: indeed it*

would, but the Bible does not ask us to do this .... God's wrath in the Bible is never the capricious, self-indulgent, irritable, morally ignoble thing that human anger so often is. It is, instead, a right and necessary reaction to objective moral evil. God is only angry where anger is called for." (*Knowing God*, 136)

## 7. Substitutionary: Rom 3:25-26

David Wells: *It is impossible to understand Paul's doctrine of penal substitution without placing it in the center of the matrix of God's character. God is simultaneously the God of love and of wrath—the one side cannot be surrendered to the other—and in his wrath he judges justly and in his love he himself bears the penalty of his judgement. (The Courage to be Protestant, 200)*

Substitution:                   ...in His blood ... (v. 25)

### Five Different ways of viewing the death of Christ:

**1) A ransom paid to Satan.** Some in the early church (Origen, for example) believed that Christ died to pay Satan a ransom, so that Christ could rescue those who were slaves to Satan. This view has been resurrected and given new life by the Word-faith teachers.

Evaluation: While this seems logical, it has no biblical support. God's word never breathes a hint of the idea that Christ died to pay Satan a ransom price (cp. Eph 5:2).

**2) The moral influence view** (Peter Abelard, 12<sup>th</sup> century). Abelard said that God wasn't angry at sinners—Christ's death wasn't a wrath-satisfaction. He said that becoming incarnate in Christ and dying on the cross was simply God's way of identifying with human suffering. "See, I suffer too. Now won't you love Me?"

Evaluation: Many Bible passages that say Christ died for our sin. None of them say Christ died merely so that we would know that God feels our pain. *'Sin-bearing' has dissolved into sympathy ... (Stott, The Cross of Christ, 167)*

**3) The governmental view** (Hugo Grotius, 1600s). Grotius said that Christ died merely to show that God gets upset when His laws are broken, but Christ's death didn't actually have anything to do with God being upset at your sin specifically. Grotius believed that God has a vague, general wrath, but isn't actually specifically angry at anyone.

Evaluation: This also fails to reflect accurately the biblical data.

**4) The example view** (Socinus, late 1500s). Socinus rejected the Reformers' doctrine that Christ died to satisfy the Father's just wrath. Socinus said that God isn't really angry at sin. Therefore, Jesus died merely to leave you an example of how you should trust and obey God in difficult circumstances. Jesus trusted God in painful and even deadly circumstances; so should we. (This is the view of the atonement popular in the Emergent Church).

Evaluation: This is true *as far as it goes*: 1 Peter 2:21-24.



We are to imitate the way Christ handled the injustices of His trials and crucifixion. When men judge treacherously, Christ entrusted Himself to the One who judges righteously, and so should we. But is that *all* the Bible says about Christ's death?

**5) Penal Substitution** (Romans 3:25). The full, biblical view of the atonement is **penal substitution**. Christ died both as an example and to bear the penalty of God's specific wrath at your sin and my sin.

R. W. Dale: *The mysterious unity of the Father and the Son rendered it possible for God at once to endure and to inflict penal suffering.* (quoted in Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 187)

P.T. Forsyth: *The one thing God could not do in the face of human rebellion was nothing. 'He must either inflict punishment or assume it ...'* (*ibid.* 180)

Another name for penal substitution: vicarious atonement. *Vicarious* means *in the place of or as a substitute*.

The fact that Christ's payment is a blood payment makes the atonement inescapably **penal** and **substitutionary**.

1. Death is the penalty of sin: Gen 2:17; Ezk 18:20; Rom 6:23
2. The background of Christ's sacrifice is the OT sacrificial system, and its key sacrifices were undeniably substitutionary in nature.

The *blood of Christ*—the terminology explained as *sacrificial*:

To talk about Christ's *blood* is to talk about His death on the cross—there was no mystical value to the actual drops of blood of Jesus of Nazareth. *Blood* in these contexts refers to *lifeblood*. Romans 5:8-9; Lev 17:10-11

The lifeblood of the animal stood in for the lifeblood of the sinner.

Walter Kaiser: *Basic to the whole theory of sacrifice in the OT is the concept of substitution. The life of the victim is substituted for the individual human life in such a way that the offender averts the necessity of forfeiting his or her own life, which God could have demanded because of the offense committed.* (*Leviticus* in *The New Interpreters Bible*, 1119)

Other examples: Gen 22:13; Ex 12:23; 13:14-15

Understanding the OT sacrificial system, is there any other way to interpret Isaiah 53 except as substitutionary sacrifice? Is 53:4-6, 11

**Key NT texts for substitutionary atonement:**

The Gospels: Mark 10:45     Matt 20:28

Christ gave His life as a substitute *in the place of many* to ransom them from sin, death, and wrath.

The use of *anti* in Mark 10:45: *Anti* is used "as the equivalent of .... substitution ('instead of', 'in the place of' .... It is improbable that *anti* ever has the diluted sense of 'for the benefit of', 'on behalf of' .... In its prevailing sense in LXX ... including the papyri ... *anti* clearly denotes a substitutionary exchange .... (Gen 22:13)." (NIDNTT, 3:1179)

Davies: *...the meaning of anti is basically that of substitution or exchange. No instances have been found where the "broader" meaning appears.* (quoted in Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 366). (cp. Matt 5:38; Lk 11:11)

Conclusion: Mark 10:45 and Matthew 20:28 clearly teach that Jesus' death was more than just an example. It was also a substitutionary ransom payment.

J.I. Packer: *Jesus Christ our Lord, moved by a love that was determined to do everything necessary to save us, endured and exhausted the destructive divine judgment for which we were otherwise inescapably destined, and so won us forgiveness, adoption and glory. To affirm penal substitution is to say that believers are in debt to Christ specifically for this, and that this is the mainspring of all their joy, peace and praise both now and for eternity.* (quoted in Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 168)

Key verses in the Pauline Epistles: 2 Cor 5:21     Gal 3:13

Stott: *How can he save us and satisfy himself simultaneously? We reply at this point only that, in order to satisfy himself, he sacrificed—indeed substituted—himself for us.* (Stott, 155)

Summary: Jesus' death was not for us in some vague, general sense. It was not merely to identify with our sufferings. It was not merely to provide an example of how to trust God in the midst of injustice. Jesus died bearing God's wrath so you wouldn't have to. The price God's justice required, He determined to pay Himself. That's the doctrine of penal substitution.

Conclusion: Romans 3:21-26 teaches us that God's saving plan is:

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|---------------------|---|
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