THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD:
GROUNDS OF JUSTIFICATION

AN EXEGESIS OF A PERICOPE FROM PAUL’S EPISTLE
TO THE ROMANS SUBMITTED TO
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### ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>A.D.</td>
<td>In the year of the Lord</td>
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<td>cf.</td>
<td>confer, “compare”</td>
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<td>e.g.</td>
<td><em>exempli gratia</em>, “for example”</td>
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<tr>
<td>et al.</td>
<td><em>et alii</em>, “and others”</td>
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<td>LXX</td>
<td>Septuagint – Greek translation of the Old Testament</td>
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<td>NT</td>
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<td>OT</td>
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INTRODUCTION

Previous to his conversion, Paul was devoted strictly to the Law. Being educated under Gamaliel, and placing confidence in the flesh, he sought the ways of his ancestors so much that according to “the righteousness of the Law, he was found blameless” (Ac. 22.3; Phil. 3.4-6). However, the encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus profoundly transformed the life of Paul (Ac. 9.15, 26.16-18). The scales had fallen from his eyes and consequently what was once “gain,” now he “counted as loss for the sake of Christ” (Phil. 3.7). Evidently Paul now perceived that the Law was not capable of justifying him before the God of Israel (Ac. 13.38); for indeed, it was the very thing which led him to persecute the Messiah. Through the realization of this “bankruptcy of the Law,”¹ the apostle’s sights became set on preaching the message of faith in Jesus the Nazarene, apart from the works of the law found in Judaism. Through observations made in a background study, an exegesis, and a structural diagram, one will see that Paul understands the death of Christ as the central act which demonstrates the righteousness of God as the grounds for the enabling of sinners to be justified through faith in Jesus.

BACKGROUND

The background of this pericope, considered here as its historical and literary context, will help to illuminate Paul’s Roman audience, and the pointed message of the Cross which he longs for his readers to grasp. Through a brief historical analysis, the circumstances in Rome

will help to clarify the purpose of the epistle. In addition, Paul’s placement of Romans 3.21-26 within his letter will help the reader to understand his emphasis of God’s righteousness and our justification—the former being that which enables the latter. Together, the historical and literary context will enable the reader to better understand how God credits righteousness to the one who has faith in Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile.

**Historical Context**

*The Date of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*

Paul’s epistle to the Romans was probably written within the winter months of A.D. 56, depending on how one approximates the length of his missionary travels. This date assumes that the majority of the eighteen months Paul spent at Corinth in Acts 18.11 had passed when he was brought before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia (Ac. 18.12) whose office was held from July of 51 to July of 52. “Many days” after this encounter—approximately during the fall of 51—Paul left to sail to Syria (Ac. 18.18), briefly stopping in Ephesus, Caesarea, and arriving finally in Antioch (Ac. 18.19-22). After “some time” there, Paul began his third missionary journey, traveling through Galatia, Phrygia (Ac. 18.23), and then on to Ephesus, where he would remain for two years and three months (Ac. 19.8, 10). At some point near the end of this stay, Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians, and in it told them of his desire to receive the “collection” soon (2 Cor. 8; 9.2-4). This is in accord with his being “purposed in the spirit” to travel through Macedonia, Achaia, and then to Jerusalem, in hopes of coming to Rome thereafter (Ac. 19.21, cf. 20.16). Indeed, this comes to pass (Ac. 20.1-3), and Paul receives the collection

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(cf. Rom. 15.25-27) upon coming to Greece (i.e. Achaia, probably Corinth) for a three month stay (Ac. 20.3). It is probably accurate to say that Paul wrote Romans during these months at Corinth, because he entrusts Phoebe of Cenchrea to carry the letter (Rom. 16.1-2) prior to his departure for Jerusalem (cf. Rom. 15.25). By now, it is approximately the winter months of A.D. 56. Other scholars have varied in opinion; however, not by a great deal, usually falling within the range of A.D. 56 to 58.

**Paul’s Audience**

Previous to these days, the church at Rome experienced quite a shift in ethnic majority, i.e. from being predominately Jewish to becoming predominantly Gentile. This change is associated with Claudius’ (A.D. 41-54) command for all ethnic Jews to leave Rome (Ac. 18.2), because of some trouble stirred over a man named “Chrestus [possibly Christ]” in A.D. 49 (Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4). Knowing that Aquila and Pricilla came to Corinth for this reason, also suggests that the Jewish Christians would have been expelled from Rome as well (Ac. 18.1-2). It would be safe to say, therefore, that since the church in Rome suffered such a significant loss of Jewish Christians in A.D. 49, Gentile Christians began to flourish. However, after Claudius died, the Jewish Christians began returning during the quieter days of Nero (A.D. 54-

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3 Gaius, mentioned as Paul’s host in Romans 16.23, was a convert of the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 1.14). This also points to Paul’s three month stay being in Corinth.

4 Paul’s departure from Philippi “after the days of Unleavened Bread” in Acts 20.6 suggests that the letter was written in the previous winter months. The Jewish month which corresponds to the days of Unleavened Bread is Nisan, and is from mid-March to mid-April.


6 It is accurate to say that Aquila and Pricilla were already believers when Paul met them at Corinth (Ac. 18.2), observing that he spoke so highly of them in his letter, which he wrote while in Corinth (Rom. 16.3-4).

Paul’s audience in Rome, therefore, can be described as predominantly Gentile Christians with a significant number of returning Jewish Christians (cf. Gentile=Rom. 1.5, 13-15; 1.18-2.16; 11.13; Jew=2.17-3.8; 15.7-9; 16.3, 7, 11).

The Situation at Rome

The return of these Jewish believers to a Gentile setting helps focus the situation which Paul is writing towards with his Roman brothers and sisters. The failure of the gospel among the Jews and the success of the gospel among the Gentiles has caused theological problems which are rooted in historical facts. God’s covenant people, the Jews, always pictured the Messiah to be the one who would fulfill the promises given to Israel (e.g. Gen. 18.18; Is. 9.6, 11.10, 59.20-21); however, the majority of Jewish Christians at Rome, though they know Christ, are confused as to why some of their fellow countrymen are not also being saved. What has made matters worse (i.e. in their eyes), is that Gentiles are coming to believe without holding to the Law. This causes the Jewish brethren to weaken in faith (3.3; 4.16-19; 9.6; 11.1; cf. 14.1), because they are not seeing the promises of God being fulfilled in their Messiah. In other words, they are losing eschatological hope because the blessings promised to Israel have not come to consummation. This weakening in faith has caused Jewish Christians to question the success of the Gentile mission, and Gentile Christians to become arrogant in their salvation, both of which, in the end, compromise the entire gospel.

Paul, however, for the sake of the gospel, writes to reaffirm two things: the Gentile mission, and the promises of God to Israel. The former is magnified in at least three ways. First,

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8 Ferguson notes that Nero’s reign “began with the quinquennium (the five good years) when affairs were under the control of Seneca” (Backgrounds of Early Christianity, 32); cf. Rom. 13.1.
Paul celebrates growing faith⁹ (1.17) amongst the Gentiles, and defends the mission in light of his own calling (1.5, 13; 16.25-27). Second, he draws link after link to the OT promises given to Israel about salvation coming to the Gentiles (4.17, 18; 9.17, 25, 26; 10.13, 19, 20; cf. 14.11). Lastly, he reveals to them how Gentile salvation is part of Israel’s own eschatological salvation, and that both are interdependent upon one another (9.17-32; 15.5, 7-13). Paul’s reaffirmation of the promises given to Israel can also be observed in at least three ways. First, he explains Abraham’s enduring faith in the promise of God (4.16-21). Second, he reveals his own longing to see Israel come to salvation in Christ by faith (9.3; 10.1). Lastly, he explains Israel’s unbelief and the purpose of God to bring in the Gentiles through faith (9-11; 15.8). By clarifying the misinterpretation of historical facts amongst the members of the Roman church, Paul theologically defends the whole gospel in his letter, confirming Gentile inclusion and Israel’s salvation, both of which are unified in the redemptive plan of almighty God.

**Righteousness of God in the Old Testament**

God’s faithfulness to this redemptive plan is what many scholars have deemed as God’s righteousness—a pervasive theme within the epistle to the Romans (e.g. 1.17, 3.5, 21, 22, 25, 26, 10.3), and more appropriate to address within this historical background. They define God’s righteousness as God’s faithfulness to His covenant, i.e. “His steadfast love toward Israel.”¹⁰ However, it is crucial to see that God’s faithfulness to His covenant people is not an

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⁹ Over the years, scholars have debated on what ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν (from/out of faith for faith) means. Talbert notes the options as: “from the faith of the OT to the faith of the NT; from the faithfulness of God (or Jesus) to the faithfulness of humans; from one degree of faith to another, i.e. growth in faith” (Charles H. Talbert, *Romans* [Macon, GA.: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2002], 41). I believe it has something to do with the whole of Paul’s purpose in Romans, i.e. of the growing faith among the Gentiles (cf. Rom. 1.5, 13-15; 15.5, 7-13; 16.25-27).

end, but a means to an end—that end being the glory of God’s own name. If one is to understand
Paul, he must understand that Paul’s doctrine of righteousness is best understood in this light of
the OT. Indeed, God’s righteousness is associated with God’s faithfulness to His covenant, but
this faithfulness is not limited to God’s saving acts alone (e.g. Ps. 31.1-3; 143.1, 2, 11; Dan. 9.7,
13-19). It is also associated with God’s punishment upon His covenant people (e.g. 2 Chr. 12.6;
Neh. 9.33; Ps. 141.5; Is. 5.13, 15-17; 10.22; Lam. 1.18; Dan. 9.14). Thus, Paul’s understanding
of God’s righteousness must be rooted in a superior motive of God which includes both God’s
saving and punishing acts within the covenant. This superior motive is the glory of God’s own
name, and is the foundation for understanding OT righteousness (e.g. Ex. 14.4; 1 Sam. 12.22; 2
Sam. 7.23; Ps. 25.11, 143.11; Is. 43.6, 7, 25; 48.9-11; 49.3; Jer. 13.11, 14.7, 9, 20), and why the
wrath of God is justly revealed against sinners in Paul’s opening argument (Rom. 1.21, 25, 28,
2.24, 3.18)—because they have not given God the glory due His name. Thus, the righteousness
of God, against the OT background, is better defined as God’s faithfulness to uphold and exalt
His name, through the manifestation of His glory—whether redemptive or punitive—in His
covenant people. This is what Paul knows God’s righteousness to be, and thus is what he intends
to expose in Christ through the preaching of the gospel (1.17).

These historical realities will help to sharpen the literary context of Paul’s argument in
Romans 3.21-26, for salvation has come for Jew and Gentile, apart from the law through faith in
Jesus Christ.

**Literary Context**

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The boundaries of the pericope (3.21-26) were selected according to three outstanding characteristics. The first is the resounding νυν ὀν (but now) at the beginning of verse 21. It shows a contrast from Paul’s previous line of thought in 1.18-3.20 (addressed below), and creates anticipation for what is now true for salvation. The second is spotted by the inferential conjunction οὖν (therefore) in verse 27. This means that Paul is basing verses 27-31 on what he had established previously in 21-26. The third characteristic is observed by the content concerning the righteousness of God—referred to five times in six verses (δικαίοσύνη θεοῦ, 21a, 22a; δικαίοσύνης αὐτοῦ, 25a, 26b; εἶναι αὐτῶν δίκαιον, 26c). The emphasis highlights the purpose of the pericope, and gives great understanding of the cross of Jesus Christ in the whole of Paul’s letter to the Romans.

The pericope is encompassed by two larger arguments. It immediately follows a section which exposes the obstacle of humanity’s sin (1.18-3.20), and begins a section which brings the good news of justification (3.21-4.25)—all of which is Paul’s exposition of the gospel (1.16-17). From 1.18-3.20, Paul is revealing the reality of sin, and the wrath of God which justly condemns the sinful acts of all mankind, both Jew and Gentile alike (3.9-3.18). The Gentiles have trampled the glory of God under foot (1.18-2.16), and the Jews have blasphemed His name among the Gentiles (2.17-3.8). Paul concludes that everyone is shut up under sin (3.19), because no one can be justified by the works of the Law, “for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (3.20, NASB). Humanity is therefore doomed; however, verse 21 begins a different proclamation, i.e. gospel proclamation.

Paul knew that the Law was unable to accomplish a righteous standing before God (3.19, 20). Thus, the legal declaration, “not guilty,” must be rooted in something apart from the Law and outside human ability (3.21, 27), i.e. in the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus
(3.22-26). This justification by faith is offered to the Jew and Gentile (3.27-31), and is demonstrated in the OT example of Abraham (4.1-25). Therefore, through an explanation of God’s righteousness and the faith of Abraham, Paul reveals that God is able to credit righteousness to the one who has faith in Jesus and thus justifying him by the blood spilt at Calvary.

In light of the whole epistle, Romans 3.21-26 demonstrates the righteousness of God as the foundation for justification through faith in Christ. The pericope enables Jewish and Gentile believers to have a better understanding of God’s faithfulness and Christ’s atoning death. Thus, both Jew and Gentile are to rejoice together for the righteousness of God in Christ.

**EXEGESIS**

Paul’s desire in Romans 3.21-26 is to reveal the saving righteousness of God in the glorious death of His Son Jesus Christ. As mentioned above, Paul just finished explaining the condemnation which all men deserve, and emphasized the bankruptcy of the Law in justifying either Jew or Gentile before God (1.18-3.20). “But now,” however, “the righteousness of God has been manifested” at the cross, and through the atoning blood of Jesus, God justifies all who will believe. What the holiness of God demanded towards the sin of mankind (i.e. wrath and eternal punishment), the love of God provided in the offering of His Son as a ἡλαστήριον (means of propitiation). Through a word study of Paul’s use of ἡλαστήριον, one will see that Paul is bringing special attention to the atoning death of Christ, in order that God can rightly justify sinners. Together with the exegesis, one will see that man’s justification is squarely rooted in the righteousness of God demonstrated at the cross of Christ.

**THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD: MANIFESTED (v. 21)**
Paul begins his argument in verses 21-26 with a significant shift from verse 20. This shift, marked by ἃνω δὲ (But now), is calling attention to something far different than what the reader was previously left with, i.e. the just condemnation of all mankind. Without any grounds for future justification (represented by δικαιοθήσεται, “will be justified”) before God, the reader, whose sin binds him in eternal chains of darkness, knows not where to look. He has trampled the glory of God’s name under foot (1.18-3.20), and the transgression must receive due punishment. It seems hopeless. Paul’s gospel, however, resounds, ἃνω δὲ! But now there is hope for justification. The solution to the problem of one’s coming judgment need not remain untold. It is now in the present (as one will see), and according to Paul’s gospel (1.17) provided by the righteousness of God through faith in Christ (3.22).

This righteousness is not ἐξ ἔργων νόμου (by works of the Law), as some evidently thought before (2.21-24, 3.20), but ἄνωτέρω νόμου (apart from the Law). This better defines the kind of shift that Paul is explaining in verses 20 and 21, i.e. from the old covenant to the new. The Law given at Mount Sinai represented the covenant between God and His people Israel (Ex. 24.3-8). However, in their depravity and disobedience, Israel failed to keep the covenant and as a result suffered God’s judgment in Babylon. After this period, the majority of the Jews reconsidered the Law so as to try and separate themselves once again as a nation, making it a superior mark of distinction to the exclusion of the Gentiles.13 The effects of this movement are evident in the Jewish Christians at Rome (cf. 2.17, 23, 4.2). What was meant to reveal the depth

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of their own sinfulness was now being used to parade their own human righteousness.\textsuperscript{14} On the contrary, Paul has explained that the Law proves nothing for anyone except the knowledge of their own sin. The only hope, therefore, is in God’s faithfulness to maintain His new covenant promises of Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36. Thus, what was impossible by the Law is now made possible apart from the Law, i.e. in the manifestation of God’s righteousness.

Paul’s phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ πεφανέρωται (the righteousness of God has been manifested) establishes the fundamental ground of all redemptive delight, which is displayed in the verses following. As noted above, God’s righteousness is defined as His faithfulness to uphold and exalt His name through the manifestation of His glory in His covenant people. Thus, Paul’s genitive θεοῦ is best recognized as subjective\textsuperscript{15} here, drawing particular attention to this righteous nature of God. The only hope for man to be saved from wickedness is squarely rooted in the righteous God to graciously provide a way out—i.e. by the offering of His Son Jesus. This former act of grace is implied by Paul’s use of the extensive perfect πεφανέρωται, which stresses a completed past action, from which the present state, i.e. God’s righteousness, became known. In other words, Paul’s emphasis is that the righteousness of God was made known, or disclosed, by a previous historical event (the cross). This builds quite anticipation for what is to be revealed about this historical event in relation to God’s righteousness and human justification.

\textsuperscript{14} Ladd, Righteousness, 15.

\textsuperscript{15} Cranfield’s genitive of origin is persuasive, however Daniel B. Wallace notes that if there is similarity between it and the subjective use, “the subjective should be given priority” (Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996], 109). Since I am undecided, I therefore give priority to the subjective genitive.

\textsuperscript{16} Wallace notes that the extensive perfect is “a.k.a. consummative perfect” (Beyond the Basics, 577).
He then proceeds with the clause \( \text{μαρτυρουμένη ύπο τοῦ νόμου και τῶν προφητῶν} \) (being attested by the law and the prophets), which buttresses his previous statement regarding the righteousness of God. Indeed, its manifestation has not only occurred in a recent historical event, but has been attested to, or confirmed, in the centuries past through the Law and the prophets—i.e. the whole OT (cf. Mt. 5.17, 7.12; Lk. 16.16; Ac. 13.15, 24.14). The implication is that the message of God’s righteousness is nothing new, but something deeply woven into the fabric of God’s holy word. What the old covenant attested as God’s righteousness, the new covenant reveals in His Son whom the Law and the prophets pointed towards. Thus, Paul is not merely asserting that God’s righteousness has been confirmed by the OT, but that the gospel has been confirmed by the OT.  

Paul is therefore doing two great things with this assertion; confirming the righteousness of God, and drawing out the relationship it has with Whom the OT pointed towards.

**The Righteousness of God: Appropriated (vv. 22-24)**

This leads him to his next clause, \( \text{δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας} \) (that is, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ, for all those who believe). It is set apart especially by the explanatory conjunction \( \text{δὲ} \) (that is), which Paul uses as a way of indicating the impending information of what is being described. In other words, Paul is preparing his reader for further exposition of what was conveyed in verse 21, namely, the manifestation of \( \text{δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ} \) (the righteousness of God).

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18 BDAG, 213.
From his following exposition, one can gather two essential means for justification apart from the Law: (1) the way God’s righteousness has come to sinners, and (2) the way sinners are united to God’s righteousness. The first is understood by the person Paul refers to within his clause, Jesus Christ, and the advantage use of the preposition εἰς (for). Since there seems to be a common knowledge of Jesus’ crucifixion among the people, Paul is more so stressing what Jesus makes possible, the righteousness of God for all who believe—which will gain more attention in verses 25 and 26. The second is understood in and by the preposition διὰ (through). The righteousness of God comes to a person διὰ πίστεως (through faith), in the sense that faith unites the believer to God’s righteousness. Thus, faith can be defined as the enabling dependence provided19 for man to be justified (or declared righteous) in God’s presence. Together with verses 20 and 21, Paul is pointing out that righteousness is not earned by the works of the Law, but granted apart from the Law through πίστεως ησου χριστου (faith in Jesus Christ).

There has been some debate as to what Paul means by πίστεως ησου χριστου. If he intended the genitive (ησου) to be subjective,20 it would convey the idea of Jesus’ faith, and

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19 Paul reveals salvation as what God accomplishes to reconcile man to Himself (Eph. 2.1-10). Faith is instrumental for this salvation. Faith is something which depends upon another, i.e. Christ, without any inclination that it, in itself, has become a virtuous act of the person in need. Thus, faith is something which must be granted to a person, enabling them to respond to the gospel. (e.g. “but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out Abba! Father!” Rom. 8.15; “and love and faith, from God the Father,” Eph. 6.23; “For you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him…,” Phil. 1.29).

translate, “faithfulness of Jesus.” If he intended the genitive to be objective, the phrase would then portray Jesus as the object of one’s faith, and translate, “faith in Jesus.”

Witherington raises the objection of redundancy with the objective use, arguing that Paul would then seem to be referring to “Christian faith twice” in the same sentence. This is not a problem, for Paul uses a similar redundancy elsewhere in his letter. For instance, in 1.16 he states, δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστιν εἰς σωτηρίαν πάντι τῷ πιστεύοντι, ιουδαίῳ τε πρώτων καὶ Ἑλληνι (for it [the gospel] is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Judean first and also to the Greek). Surely Paul has the Judean and the Greek in mind when he used πάντι (everyone), but by including the latter statement better defines the πάντι for specific understanding in Rome (cf. 2.9, 10, 4.16). The same use is to be observed here in v. 22a in regards to πάντας (all). Paul is simply using the redundancy to accentuate who (πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας, all those who believe) receives righteousness through faith in Jesus, which is what Barrett calls “the underlining of a vital truth.” This vital truth is the fulfillment of God’s promise of Genesis 12.3, “and in you [Abraham] all the families of the earth will be blessed”

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22 Witherington, Romans, 101.

23 Dunn, Once More, 740-41.

24 Barrett, Romans, 70.
(NASB, italics mine). Therefore, there is no need in “relieving” this redundancy, for it is Paul’s celebration of the justifying faith which has come to all the families of the earth.

Others have argued for the subjective use because it brings out the parallel with Abraham’s faithfulness in 4.1-25. Indeed, Paul is using a parallel structure, however, it is obvious that Paul is not using Abraham’s faithfulness to parallel Christ’s faithfulness, but the object of Abraham’s faith (God; e.g. 4.3, 5, 17, 20, 24) to parallel the object of the believer’s faith (Christ; e.g. 3.22, 26). His emphasis in chapter 4 is that Abraham believed in the One who justifies the ungodly. And as Abraham believed in God’s promise, so the Christian believes in Christ. Verses 4.16-22, which are often understood to show Abraham’s faithfulness, are more accurately referring to the type of faith Abraham had, that is, a faith which endures. This enduring faith of Abraham is clearly paralleled with Paul’s gnomic use of the present participle \( \piστεύονται \) (believe), both of which show a continual and ongoing belief. Therefore, the issue in this passage is not that Christ had faith in God, though it would be true to say he did (cf. Heb. 4.14-15, 5.8, 10.23), but that Christ, as the object of faith, is what unites all believers to God’s righteousness.

Paul continues \( οὐ \: γάρ \: ἐστιν \: διαστολή \) (for there is no distinction). His use of the explanatory conjunction, \( γάρ \) (for), sheds even more light on \( πάντα \) in verse 22a, and illuminates the inclusive gospel for both Jew and Gentile. Under the old covenant, Israel was

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25 Witherington states as his first objection, “It relieves us of the redundancy of Paul referring to Christian faith twice in this sentence” (Witherington, Romans, 101).

26 Wenham, Paul, 356.

27 The faith of believers, rather than their faithfulness, is also supported by the surrounding context (1.5, 8, 12; 3.27, 28, 30, 31; 4.5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20).

28 Wallace notes that the gnomic present means to have a continual belief, and is most often used in “soteriological contexts” in the NT, (Wallace, Beyond the Basics, 523, 620).
given the Law so that they would be a distinct people set apart from the rest of the nations (Ex. 19.4-6). However, the new covenant people are no longer defined by the Law, but apart from the Law (v. 21a), through faith. Paul’s message is that the righteousness of God has not only brought justification for the Jew, but also for the Gentile, and thus settles any dispute of superior distinction among ethnic sects.

Thus far, Paul has made it clear that, in regards to future justification before God, both Jew and Gentile are children of wrath (1.18-3.20, cf. Eph. 2.3), πάντες γὰρ ἠμαρτον (for all have sinned). His use of the aorist verb ἠμαρτον (have sinned) stresses the one single fact, all humanity has sinned. In relation to the previous context of the pericope, it is right to say that sin is not merely the damage of man, but what is more, the dishonoring of God and His name.

Paul then adds καὶ ὑπερούνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ, (and lack the glory of God). The word ὑπερούνται (lack) means “to experience a deficiency,” and is exactly what Paul is trying to convey here. The problem with people is not only that they have sinned against God (past), but also that they are currently experiencing a deficiency of God’s glory (present). This, of course, is due to what David Wenham calls “the enslaving transgression of Adam (5.12-21).” Furthermore, Paul’s gnomic use of the verb makes the statement “a general timeless fact.” In other words, all people, at all times, lack the glory of God. Therefore, man, whose sin is against an infinitely Holy God, is only worthy of an infinitely just punishment.

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29 Barrett, Romans, 70.
30 BDAG, 1044.
31 Wenham, Paul, 65.
32 Wallace, Beyond the Basics, 523; cf. Schriener, Romans, 187.
Graciously, Paul does not stop here, but continues with \( \text{δικαιούμενοι δωρεάν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν χριστῷ ἤσου} \) (being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; v. 24). His anarthrous use of the noun \( \text{δωρεάν} \) (gift) helps to reveal an adverbial use of the accusative. Semantically, therefore, \( \text{δωρεάν} \) is functioning like an adverb, and thus is modifying the action of the verb \( \text{δικαιούμενοι} \) (being justified). In other words, it is showing that the action of God in justifying sinners is done so freely, i.e. as a gift, and is not based upon or owing to anything previous that the person has done. Justification, righteousness, is strictly given \( \text{τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι} \) (by His grace).

This outpouring of grace is most remarkably given \( \text{διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν χριστῷ ἤσου} \) (through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus). Paul uses the preposition, \( \text{διὰ} \) (through), to point out the means by which God carries out justification (\( \text{δικαιούμενοι} \))—that is, through \( \text{ἀπολυτρώσεως} \) (redemption). The original meaning of \( \text{ἀπολυτρώσις} \) deals with slaves or captives, and draws out the implication of “‘making free’ by payment of a ransom.”

Some, however, like Büchsel, have argued against this interpretation, and render it “deliverance” or “liberation.” Indeed, Paul does use this definition in Romans and other letters (e.g. Rom. 8.23, 1 Cor. 1.30, Eph. 1.14, 4.30, Col. 1.14); however, the idea of a ransom is not foreign to him (Eph. 1.7; 1 Tim. 2.6; cf. Ac. 20.28; 1 Cor. 6.20, 7.23) or the Son of Man (Mt. 20.28; Mk. 10.45). Thus, according to these scriptures, the notion of “ransom” must not be forsaken, as Büchsel has done, yet neither should the idea of “deliverance.” Both are true. God, at the cost of His only

\[33\] BDAG, 117.

Son, purchased men (cf. 1 Pet. 1.18-19; Rev. 5.9-10), so that they would be or will be liberated from “sin, death, and Law.” Redemption which is ἐν χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (in Christ Jesus), therefore, can be defined as the means by which God purchases men, and as a result of the liberating work of Christ, justifies them by uniting them to His righteousness through faith.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD: DEMONSTRATED (vv. 25-26)

Until now Paul has explained that the righteousness of God as manifested apart from the Law and thus is the foundation for justification (v. 21). He also clarified that the righteousness of God was made accessible through Christ, and so by grace will lead to justification for those who believe (vv. 22-24). The question which still remains is how a righteous God made possible the justification of the ungodly. Verses 25 and 26 demonstrate this in the death, or God’s putting forth, of Jesus Christ.

Continuing from verse 24, Paul sets up a relative clause—represented by the relative pronoun, ὃν (whom)—which will stretch through verse 26, and clarify God’s righteousness and men’s justification. Since ὃν is followed by a verb in the indicative mood, προέθετο (set forth publicly), the clause is definite and is thus referring back to its antecedent, χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (Christ Jesus). In other words, everything that is included in the clause following ὃν is explaining something about Christ Jesus.

35 Wenham, Paul, 150n27.
Paul begins, ὃν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον διὰ [τῆς] πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι (whom God set forth publicly as a means of propitiation through faith in His blood). The middle voice of the verb, προέθετο (set forth publicly), shows that God himself put Jesus forward. That is, God sent Jesus from glory, clothed Him with flesh, and purposely set Him forth at the cross. Godless men did not steal Jesus away from God and kill Him as a ransom for many; God gave him as a ransom for many (cf. Mt. 10.28; Mk. 10.45; 1 Tim. 2.6)—for “the Lord was pleased to crush Him” (Is. 53.10, NASB). The emphasis therefore is that justification, salvation, belongs wholly to God. His holiness demanded wrath and judgment towards the sinfulness of mankind, yet the love of God provided the offering of His Son as a ἱλαστήριον (means of propitiation).

Many scholars have debated the meaning of ἱλαστήριον, and its intended lexical meaning within this context. They have suggested that Paul either means, “mercy seat,” “expiation,” or “propitiation”—each of which will be respectively addressed.

The idea of “mercy seat” is rooted in the Hebrew verb, kippur, which is more of a “technical word meaning, cover over sin.”37 In the OT, the word was used to give reference to the solid gold cover of the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25.17-22, 37.6-9; Lev. 16.2, 13-15).38 Once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies, and sprinkle the blood of the sin-offering upon it (Lev. 16, 23.26-32; Num. 29.7-11). The result

36 Metzger notes in regards to the article τῆς, “The article may have been added by copyists who wished to point back to διὰ πίστεως ἱησοῦ χριστοῦ in v. 22… a majority of the Committee preferred to include τῆς in the text, but to enclose it with brackets to indicate doubt that it belongs there” (Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament [London: United Bible Societies, 1975], 508).

37 BDB, 498.

38 Wenham, Paul, 152.
of this act was atonement for sin (Ex. 30.16; Lev. 4.20, 26, 31, 35), i.e. an appeasing of the wrath of God for reconciliation. With this historical observation in mind, some have suggested that Christ is the eschatological antitype of the OT mercy seat. Indeed, Christ is a “place” where sinners deposit their sins, yet it seems odd that Paul would be referring to Christ Himself being the mercy seat, since it was His own blood spilt. Since the mercy seat was more so a place of atonement, then it would be better paralleled to the blood spattered cross rather than directly to the person of Jesus. The epistle to the Hebrews also points out that it was the entrance of the high priest under the old covenant, which foreshadowed Jesus’ entrance “once for all” into heaven (Heb. 9.1-12), making Him a mediator of the new covenant.\(^ {39} \) Thus, although the implications of the mercy seat portray sound teaching which points to the sacrifice of Christ and the atonement for sin, mercy seat is not the actual meaning which Paul is trying to convey by ἱλαστήριον.

This leaves two other options, “expiation” or “propitiation.” Expiation is defined by Gundry-Volf as, “the obliteration of sin through Christ’s atoning death.”\(^ {40} \) Propitiation deals more so with the appeasing of God’s own wrath through Christ’s death.\(^ {41} \) It is not necessary to choose either term in this situation since both are so accurate in defining what happened at the cross. Rather, it would be better to see how the two words related to one another in defining

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\(^{39}\) Schriener argues, however, “That Jesus functions as the priest, victim, and the place where the blood is sprinkled should not trouble us. Paul is attempting to communicate that Jesus fulfills the sacrificial cultus…” (Schriener, Romans, 194).


what happened at the cross. Others, however, such as Büchsel\textsuperscript{42} and Gundry-Volf,\textsuperscript{43} have argued that \textit{ἱλαστήριον} can \textit{only} mean “expiation,” to the exclusion of propitiation. This is not necessarily so.

Gundry-Volf bases his argument for “expiation,” \textit{alone}, off of three main contextual reasons. The first is that expiation “clearly fits” what Paul is getting across about “God’s own gracious initiative in love towards the ungodly.”\textsuperscript{44} The same is true for propitiation. That God would send Christ (on His own initiative) to appease His own wrath against sinners \textit{is} the gracious act of unconditional love (cf. Eph. 2.3-5; Col. 2.13-15). It is the essence of His mercy, and the outpouring of His love. His second argument is that “the idea of appeasing God’s wrath is in tension with Paul’s understanding of Christ’s death.”\textsuperscript{45} Evidently Gundry-Volf has not taken into consideration the whole of Paul’s teaching. Paul often speaks of the wrath of God which is revealed against sinners and Christ’s death bringing peace between men and God (cf. Rom. 1.18, 2.5, 2.8, 3.5, 5.9, 9.22; Eph. 2.1-3; 1 Thess. 5.9). In fact, the essence of justification, rooted in God’s righteousness (Rom. 1.17, 3.21), is to remove wrath (i.e. the divine hate for sin) from sinners who believe \textit{in} Christ.\textsuperscript{46} Therefore, the appeasing of wrath is not in tension with Paul’s understanding of the cross. His third argument is that “the context of 3.25 does not require propitiation.”\textsuperscript{47} The opposite is true. Propitiation is absolutely necessary to the context.


\textsuperscript{43} Gundry-Volf, “Expiation,” 282.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{47} Gundry-Volf, “Expiation,” 282.
of Romans 3.25. The passage is clearly showing that God, in the demonstration of His own righteousness, is satisfying His own holy and just anger against those who deserved hell, by crucifying His own Son. It is in His divine patience and love that He chose to provide a sacrifice that man could not. Thus, “propitiation” is clearly not excluded from this context. Instead, it is the more superior of the two ideas. Propitiation does not eliminate expiation, rather, it enables expiation to happen, and is therefore the better term to use here. Therefore, Paul is not only displaying Christ as the atonement of God’s wrath, but also as the gift of God’s grace and both are crucial to justification.

Before leaving ἡλαστήριον (means of propitiation), it is also important to note that it is part of a double accusative of object-compliment construction. The relative pronoun, ὃν (whom), is the “direct object in the object-compliment construction,” and ἡλαστήριον is the object compliment. This construction, used with the verb, προέθετο (set forth publicly), shows that ἡλαστήριον is what ὃν (i.e. Jesus) became. In other words, Jesus Christ became the “means of propitiation” when God set Him forth publicly at Calvary. He did this, Paul continues, διὰ πίστεως ἐν τῷ ἀντwoord aἵματι (through faith in His blood). Paul’s dative of manner, aἵματι (blood), answers how Jesus became a means of propitiation, i.e. He did so in the blood He shed at the cross. Thus, according to His divine purpose, God set Jesus forth, so that He [Jesus] would be a propitiatory sacrifice, in the spilling of His blood.

This was accomplished εἰς ἐνδειξίν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ (for a demonstration of His [God’s] righteousness). The putting forth, the cross, and the blood, was all according to the will of God, and He did so to demonstrate His righteousness. Still, Paul is using a subjective

48 Wallace, Beyond the Basics, 184.
genitive, \(\alpha\upiota\nu\) (His), to refer to righteousness that is an attribute or quality of God. The reason for this is due to what he is trying to get at in verse 26, i.e. God, in Himself, is just, even while justifying the ungodly.

Following this with a causal use of \(\deltai\alpha\) (because of), Paul then points to what he means by the previous statement. He states, \(\deltai\alpha\ \tau\iota\nu\ \pi\acute{a}\rho\epsilon\sigma\iota\nu\ \tau\omega\nu\ \pi\rho\omega\gamma\epsilon\rho\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\nu\tau\omicron\nu\) (because of the passing over of sins previously committed in the forbearance of God). In other words, the cross was planned for the sake of God’s righteousness. God knew that in His kindness He would tolerate the very sins which had defiled His name (cf. Rom. 2.4). If He were to merely wink at them, as if the sins did not matter, His righteousness would be in jeopardy. Not only would He be saying that “sin did not matter,” but that “He does not matter.” However, because He is faithful to uphold and exalt His name, He sent His own Son to bear the sins He would pass over in the justification of the ungodly.

Again Paul asserts \(\pi\rho\omega\ \tau\iota\nu\ \acute{e}\nu\delta\epsilon\iota\zin\ \tau\iota\zeta\ \delta\iota\kappa\iota\omega\sigma\omicron\acute{\iota}\nu\zeta\nu\ \alpha\upiota\nu\ \\epsilon\nu\ \tau\omicron\nu\ \nu\omicron\ \kai\rho\omicron\nu\) (for the demonstration of His righteousness in the present time). The preposition, \(\pi\rho\omega\) (for), is used here to convey purpose. Paul is therefore stressing that Christ’s death was for the purpose of demonstrating God’s righteousness. The “present time” is probably referring to the time which the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel (1.17), and therefore would be from the cross to the Second Advent.

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49 For some scholars (especially influenced by Kümmel), \(\pi\acute{a}\rho\epsilon\sigma\iota\nu\) should be translated, “remission” or “forgiveness.” The NT word \(\acute{a}\phi\epsilon\sigma\iota\nu\) means forgiveness, not \(\pi\acute{a}\rho\epsilon\sigma\iota\nu\) (BDAG, 776). For others who affirm “passing over,” see, e.g. Barrett, Romans, 75; Piper, Justification, 137-149; Witherington, Romans, 109n45; Cranfield, Romans, 73.

50 Piper, Justification, 148.
To finish the relative clause Paul then adds, \( είς τὸ εἶναι αὐτῶν δίκαιον καὶ \) 
\( \deltaίκαιοντα τὸν ἐκ πίστεως ἱσθοῦ \) (in order that He would be just even while justifying the one who has faith in Jesus). This purpose construction (\( είς τὸ \) plus the infinitive \( εἶναι \))\(^{51}\) is stating the goal of \( εἶναι \) (to be), and is thus showing that God set Christ forth, in order that He would be just. In other words, Christ died so that God’s own righteousness would be vindicated. The \( καὶ \) should more appropriately be rendered “even” due to the adverbial participle (\( δίκαιοντα, \) justifying) following it. This also helps in making a better distinction between God being \( δίκαιον \) (just) and God \( δίκαιοντα \) (justifying), or as Blackman puts it, “God in Himself, and God in action.”\(^{52}\) God’s righteousness can therefore be seen as the grounds of one’s justification. Not only is He just, but He is so, even while actively justifying \( τὸν ἐκ πίστεως ἱσθοῦ \) (the one who has faith in Jesus). His being righteous enables the one who has faith in Jesus to be counted righteous. In sum, the assertions of 25b through 26c show that Christ died to vindicate God’s righteousness in the passing over of previous sins under the old covenant, and so that the gospel of justification by faith would be preached under the new.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, Romans 3.21-26 reveals several things about the righteousness of God and the believer’s justification. First, God’s righteousness has been manifested apart from the Law and revealed itself to sinners, both Jew and Gentile alike through the gospel which has been

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\(^{51}\) Wallace, *Beyond the Basics*, 591.

long testified about in the OT. Second, God has graciously purchased men at the cost of His own Son so that they would be set free from sin and death. This redemption is directly rooted in His righteousness which He has given to all of those who make Christ the object of their faith.

Third, God put forth Jesus so that He would be a means of propitiation. This sovereign act was to demonstrate His righteousness in order that He would both be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. From these things, one can see that Paul understands the death of Christ to be the central act that demonstrates the righteousness of God as the grounds for the enabling of sinners to be justified through faith in Jesus.
APPENDIX A

SENTENCE FLOW OUTLINE IN GREEK

Romans 3.21-26

[21] Ia νυνὶ δὲ χαρὶς νόμου
dikaiosuai theou pefanerwtaei,
   Ib μορτυρουμενη ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν,

[22] IIa δικαιουσην δὲ θεου διὰ πίστεως ἰησοῦ χριστου, εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας:
   IIb οὐ γὰρ ἐστιν διαστολή:
[23] IIIa πάντες γὰρ ἡμαρτον
   IIIb καὶ υπερφέρουνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ,
[24] IVa δικαιούμενοι διαφεσάν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν
   χριστῷ ἰησοῦ:

   Vb εἰς ἐνδείξειν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ
   Vc διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἄμαρτημάτων
[26] VIa ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ θεοῦ,
   VIb πρὸς τὴν ἐνδείξειν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ,
   VIc εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον καὶ δικαιούντα τὸν ἐκ πίστεως ἰησοῦ.
APPENDIX B
EXEGETICAL OUTLINE IN ENGLISH

Paul’s overall intention is for his reader to understand that the death of Christ is *the* central act which demonstrates the righteousness of God, the grounds for the enabling of sinners to be justified through faith in Jesus.

I. The Righteousness of God: Manifested (v. 21)
   a. The righteousness of God is the foundation for justification
      i. The righteousness of God is currently apart from the Law
      ii. The righteousness of God was attested by the OT

II. The Righteousness of God: Appropriated (vv. 22-24)
   a. The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe
      i. There is no distinction
         1. For all are shut up under sin
         2. For all lack the glory of God
      ii. Those who believe are justified through the redemption in Christ Jesus

III. The Righteousness of God: Demonstrated (vv. 25-26)
   a. God put forth Christ as a means of propitiation in His blood
      i. He did this to demonstrate His own righteousness
         1. Because He passed over sins previously committed
         2. In His patience
      ii. He did this to demonstrate His righteousness for the present time
         1. In order that He would be just
         2. Even in justifying those who believe in Jesus
APPENDIX C
SERMON BRIEF

I. The Righteousness of God: Manifested (v. 21)
Expl. Paul asserts that righteousness has been revealed apart from the Law and has been attested by the OT.
Illus. Display how the OT preached the gospel beforehand.
App. Show them how the word of God is of one piece.

II. The Righteousness of God: Appropriated (vv. 22-24)
Expl. Paul asserts that all men lack the glory of God and can only be justified through faith in Jesus Christ. Redemption therefore comes to all those who are bought by the blood of the Lamb.
Illus. Sin is not merely the damaging of man, but the dishonoring of God. It is to take the glory of God and put it into the dirt.
App. All those who make Jesus the object of their faith will be redeemed.

III. The Righteousness of God: Demonstrated (vv. 25-26)
Expl. Paul asserts that God put Christ forth for the demonstration, or proof, of His own righteousness.
Illus. Use a court situation that shows how unrighteous it would be for a judge to acquit a rapist and murderer without any due punishment.
App. God did the most unjust thing in all the universe, in killing His Son, so that you might have life in glorifying His name.
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