

# RELIEF FROM THE PAST BAGGAGE OF FAILURE

Romans 3:25

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Almost two weeks ago, my wife came home and told me of the following encounter she had with a stranger in our local WinCo parking lot. In her words, here is what took place:

“The other day I was walking through the WinCo parking lot, filled with a thankful heart and singing under my breath a praise song I often sing. As I was opening my trunk to put away the groceries, I greeted a man at the car next to me doing the same thing. I felt led to ask him about something attached to his car and he responded by explaining what it was for. Then he said, ‘This is my Dad’s car; he died two days ago.’

Feeling compassion for him, I expressed my sympathies and then asked him, ‘Did he know Jesus?’ He said, ‘Oh yes! He was a wonderful father. He had nine children and adopted four more.’ Then he went on to explain how they were working on his memorial service, and how hard it was. So I asked him, ‘Are you walking with Christ, and are you plugged into a church somewhere?’ He said, ‘No, I’m not. I have issues in my life, not like drugs or alcohol or anything like that, but things that are bad; and I wouldn’t want my life to rub off on anyone I might meet at church.’ I said, ‘You know, none of us have arrived. That’s why Jesus came. A church is like a hospital for broken people. Jesus is in the business of fixing broken people.’ He said, ‘I used to go to church, but when I was 21 something happened, and I have never been back since. I’m 49 now.’

As we said good-bye I asked if I could pray with him, and he seemed surprised but agreed. I took his hand and prayed a short prayer of comfort. He thanked me, and I invited him to church.”

All around us, at the markets, in the gym, at the office, and at school, we have people who are hurting. They have issues. They are carrying baggage of regrets, baggage of past failures, and baggage of unresolved addictions and wounds. Some of these people are religious and some are not. Most have a strong sense that there are things morally right and wrong with them and their world. In addition, all of them carry a natural and strong sense of justice.

When Becky came home and shared this story with me, my heart ached. I wish and hope I can meet this man, so as to come alongside him. I want to know his story and help him understand how much Jesus understands and personally loves him and wants to remove the past baggage from his life.

I sensed that this man had been deeply hurt, as well as that he was filled with shame and a sense of hopelessness in that he is who he is and he cannot change. Because of his past, he feels not just worthless but a danger to others. He probably questions whether or not his life could ever make any positive difference in this world. I wouldn't be surprised that if we ever did meet and did have time to talk, he would tell me, like many have in the past who have undergone similar ordeals, that he is sure that God is angry with him and that he is beyond God's forgiveness.

I hope that none of you here today believe or feel that way about God and His approach to you. For if you do, you need to know that you have been deceived about Who God is and to what lengths He has gone and will continue to go to reach out and to embrace you. God wants to bring healing to your deeply felt wounds, whether self-inflicted or brought on by others. If you don't feel that God is angry at you, but know others who do, I hope that as we wrestle with one more aspect of Christ's work on the cross on our behalf, you will be able to come alongside others and offer healing to them in Jesus' name, by sharing with them this aspect of the Gospel that we are going to look at this morning.

As we continue in our study of the book of **Romans**, we will look more deeply into the works of God's righteousness toward all who have sinned, rejected God, or held Him at arm's length. In particular, we want to address the question, "Can God ever remove the consequences that I deserve for having turned my back on Him?"

I remember a conversation I had several times with my dad, after he came to Christ. The conversation usually began with his saying, "I know God has forgiven me, but He has to still be upset or angry with me. I can't imagine why He wouldn't be." My dad's thoughts were crying out this question that he so wanted to have answered, "Can God ever stop being disappointed and angry with me?"

I was glad I could point him to the Bible for the answer. Unfortunately, our lying and deceiving enemy Satan worked hard to keep my dad from grasping the truth of what we will be looking at this morning. But in the end, I believe he finally came to peace with this issue before he died.

If you have your Bibles with you this morning, I'd like you to open them to **Romans 3:21-26**, where we will see the answers to these questions. When the answers are understood, all Christians can be relieved of much of the baggage we unnecessarily carry with us every day concerning the worry of God's anger with them. Follow along as I read God's Word for us today.

**<sup>21</sup>But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—<sup>22</sup>the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup>who God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. <sup>26</sup>It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**

We have been working on this passage for the past two Sundays, and will not finish with it today, but we are getting closer. It is such a wonderful passage filled with truth about what Jesus Christ's death on the cross accomplished for all who put their trust in Him as their Savior.

I have mentioned before that there are four expressions here that build one upon the other. They are “**the righteousness of God,**” “**justified,**” “**redemption,**” and “**propitiation.**” Thus far, we have looked at the first three. Today, we will touch upon the meaning and significance of the fourth, “**propitiation.**”

If you are visiting with us, let me bring you up to speed. From **Romans 1:1-3:20**, the apostle Paul painted a pretty miserable picture of the condition of the human race. Basically, we learned that every human being is guilty of suppressing the truth about God. We have done so either by ignoring the truth we know about God, by exchanging the truth about God for a lie, by simply disobeying the truth about God, or all of the above. As a result, God has pronounced His wrath against the entire human race. The result of God’s wrath is that we are all doomed to spend eternity separated from the One who created us, with no ability on our own to appease His anger against us or to earn his forgiveness or acceptance.

Up to this point in the book of **Romans**, the news has been nothing but bad. But beginning with the **3:21**, Paul introduces the Good News: God has initiated a rescue effort for all who want to be forgiven, accepted, and welcomed back into a warm relationship with Him. This is the only solution to the problems and havoc that our sin has brought upon our lives.

The first important expression in this paragraph that gives us hope is “**the righteousness of God,**” which is used several times in this paragraph and throughout **Romans**. This expression has two aspects to it. First, it speaks of God’s character. “**Righteousness**” points to God as being the only one who has it all together. There is nothing missing in God’s character. He is without evil; He is good. He is the very source and origin from which righteousness originates.

Out of His righteous character flows the second aspect of the expression “**the righteousness of God.**” Out of God’s character, He initiates His righteous action toward the human race. Out of his righteous character he deals faithfully with us. He sets up a righteous plan to rescue those who wish to escape the wrath of God and to enjoy His loving friendship.

What are the righteous actions of God toward us, by which He plans to save and transform our lives? How does God plan to rescue and reconcile us to

Himself? The answer to those questions is found in the next important term used in this paragraph, “**justification.**” To justify someone means to declare them righteous and acquitted of all wrong doing. Because Jesus died on the cross, having paid the penalty for our sin and rebellion against God, God declares those who put their confidence in Christ’s work alone to be righteous and, like himself, totally forgiven, fully accepted, and forever and completely approved in Christ.

Well, how does that work? What enables us to be declared righteous and acceptable to God? The answer to those questions leads us to the third important term, “**redemption.**” In New Testament times, the term “**redemption**” was used in slave markets to describe slaves being purchased who had been in chains, and who were not free to act as they wanted to. These people were forced to obey their masters’ demands. Then, someone came along, purchased them for a price, loosed them from their bondage of chains, set them free from their previous master, and delivered them to a new life.

In this case, we were the slaves, being held captive or in bondage to our sinful behavior. Our sin has been the master who controlled our lives. Jesus paid the price for our freedom from the master controller of sin. Hence, for all who put their complete trust in God’s righteous plan to rescue us, through Jesus redeeming us, we can declare the following truth about ourselves. We Christians are:

1. Redeemed FROM something, namely from the slavery of sin and the power of sin to control our lives.
2. Redeemed BY something, namely by the payment price of the blood of Christ.
3. Redeemed TO something, namely to a state of freedom, under God.

And that freedom under God is not freedom to do whatever we want, but freedom to be who God originally created us to be and to do--to be servants of God and to enjoy Him fully as we serve and relate with him.

Well, so far, so good! God’s plan is the best news we have learned of yet. However, there is this question: What happened to the “**wrath of God,**” this

destructive anger of God aimed at the whole human race that Paul declared in **Romans 1:18**? Isn't God still angry with us, even those who have trusted in Christ as our Savior? If He is, most of us wouldn't be surprised. Many Christians are not sure how God feels about them when they have blown it. Innately, many people know that God is angry at sin, and somehow His anger needs to be appeased.

But if He isn't angry with us Christians for having rebelled and turned our backs on Him, then why isn't He angry? When we sin, ignore God, or disobey Him, God is always injured by our unjust treatment of Him. So why isn't he angry with us? That's where this fourth important term comes in, found in **verse 25**, "**propitiation.**" Paul writes, "**Jesus Christ whom God displayed publicly as propitiation in His blood through faith.**"

If we are going to understand this verse, it's obvious that we must understand what propitiation means and what difference it makes to our everyday lives. So, let me see if I can demonstrate what propitiation means and why it is so significant for our emotional health.

Before defining propitiation, I will demonstrate it through a fabricated story. Then, after you live the story with me, you will better understand the definition I will give you.

The scene of our fabricated story is a fast food restaurant, one of several owned by one businessman. One day while at work, one of the employees was charged with the duty of mopping the tile floor. However when finished, he failed to set up the big bright yellow and red sign reading, "Caution: Floor is wet!" Moments later, while the floor was still wet and slippery, a second employee came around the corner, was unaware of the wet floor, slipped, fell down, hitting his head hard on the corner of the stainless-steel food preparation table, and was knocked out. When he awoke several days later, he had suffered some memory loss and vision impairment to his right eye.

As is typical with cases like this, the employee sued the restaurant for negligence and won a settlement for \$1.2 million dollars. The restaurant's insurance company paid the penalty, and as far as the courts were concerned, justice had been served, and the case was closed.

But as far as the injured employee was concerned, as well as the owner of the restaurant, the case was far from closed. It took two years from the date of the accident for the case to be settled and another six months before the employee received his portion of the settlement. That's a long period of time to live with emotional turmoil. It would be a long time for things to settle down within the hearts of the employer and employee.

On the owner's side of things, he really cared about his employees; and even though this was purely an accident, he knew that this employee's life had been changed forever and wished the horrible event had never happened. The employee's vision would never return to normal. That's why his former employer was so disturbed to learn, via some of the other employees, that the former injured employee was bitter, angry, and depressed with the gloomy outlook for his future. Previous to this accident, that employee had had great hopes of going to college and owning his own business. But now, that looked more like fantasy than reality.

Sure, the employee had been awarded a lot of money, but because of the accident and trial, he didn't graduate on time, which left him challenged to finish high school and begin his studies at a local junior college. Even when he began college, with his head injury and loss of sight in one eye, he could barely pass his business classes. No amount of money would heal his inner wounds of broken dreams and a sense of being useless.

Upon learning about his former employee's state of mind, the owner of the restaurant decided to pay him a visit. When he arrived at the home, he found his employee surprised to see him. His anger toward his former boss lay just below the surface of his somewhat cordial greeting.

But moments after his employer was invited into the house, the employee could see deep pain in his boss's countenance. He had not considered how the accident might have been traumatic for his boss. He was cautious as to what was going to happen next and listened as he shared his personal sorrow for the life changing event that the accident had become to this young man's life. He went on to say that he hoped nothing like this would ever happen again to one of his employees.

Then, noting that this must have set back the young man's dreams of owning his own business, he said some completely surprising words. It was a

proposal. He asked the employee if he would consider coming back to work to take on a new job he had just created. The title was “Supervisor of Safety” for all of his restaurants. He would pay him full health benefits and contribute to his tuition for ongoing studies in business. In addition, his employer would do what he could to help his new Supervisor of Safety begin his own business helping other business owners avoid such unnecessary accidents in their restaurants. Most importantly, he wanted this young man to know that his life could still be productive.

As the former employee sat and listened to this offer, he felt his heart lift for the first time since the accident. His depression was replaced by joy. Upon seeing the sincerity of his boss’s reaching out to him, any anger he had held toward him or the restaurant completely disappeared. He gladly accepted the offer, shaking the man’s hand.

In a similar way to this story, Paul is saying that human sin injured and rightfully angered our holy God. Just as the employee was injured by the company’s negligence, our sin has hurt and injured God and made Him rightfully angry. We wronged our creator.

With Christ’s sacrifice, Jesus took our punishment upon himself. He paid the penalty for our sin. But different than the financial award the employee received that did not settle the anger of the injured employee, Christ’s work on the cross did satisfy the anger of God. In fact, God’s anger was so appeased toward us sinners who put our trust in Christ’s work on the cross, that now God, wrath-free, warmly reaches out his arms of love to forever embrace all of those who put their trust in Christ. For all who put their trust in Christ, God will never be angry with us again. The Bible teaches that God will never show forth His wrath to one who puts his or her trust in Christ. That’s what Christ’s propitiation accomplished once and for all. It accomplished something we could never hope to accomplish.

So, let’s try to put this in the form of a definition: “Propitiation means to so satisfy the anger of one (God) who has been unjustly wronged, so that the anger of the One who was wronged is so fully appeased that He is free to fully love and embrace the one who wronged Him.” God’s hostility has been soothed once and for all. His need for vengeance has been forever satisfied. All He wants to do with His saints (forgiven sinners) is to pour out His love on them.

During the last two messages, I have said something that bears repeating again. Our human tendency is to believe that God responds to us solely on the basis of how we perform. If we perform well, then we think God approves of us. If we perform poorly, God disapproves of us and is angry at us. Because of Jesus' justifying and propitiating work on the cross for all who put their trust in Him as their Savior, this is not true. God no longer deals with us based upon our performance. He approves and loves us based on Christ's performance on our behalf. God may disapprove of our actions, but not of us. There is a big difference between hating actions and hating the person. God's love for us will never change one way or the other on the basis of our performance. He may hate my sin, but He will forever embrace and love me. If I do wrong, God may lovingly discipline me so that I learn and grow, but he never punishes out of hatred so as to hurt or harm me. Because of Christ's propitiating work on our behalf, we will never experience God's wrath. With his wrath being once and for all appeased, God is free to love and do what is best for us in the long run.

Look at **1 John 4:9-10**. In this passage, we see the concept of justice and love tied together with propitiation. It reads, **"By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."**

Now, let's see if we can go one step further in practically applying this truth to our everyday lives. I want to address a common problem for all of us. For some of us it is more of a problem than for others. For me, a naturally highly competitive, performance-driven person, this was a huge lesson I had to learn. It was a major lesson that changed how I respond to personal failure. I could use several examples from my own life of how I have had to repeatedly apply this truth to my life, but I prefer to use that first moment, that "Ah ha!" moment, when the truth of God's propitiation first took root in my life.

Becky had set out a grocery list on the kitchen counter and asked if I would mind going to the market for us. I was happy to do so. For me, shopping is like going on a hunting trip or a search and destroy mission. Get in, hit the objective and get out as quickly as you can. I'd take a shopping list and look at it like it was my kill list. Get to the market and the hunt begins. Bag'em,

pay for 'em, and come home the victor without messing up one order! I grabbed the list and flew out the door to the Safeway downtown.

I raced around the store, checking my list three times to make sure my basket was full of the exact items I was supposed to bring home. There had been several trips before to the store when I had come home, had "killed" the wrong species, and my winnings were rejected. Worst of all, I failed to be the victor. But this time, I had done it! All the requested trophies were in my cart. All I had to do was get 'em home, and I was the winner. I moved to the checkout line, waiting my turn, chest all puffed up: I had killed the list! And Mama was going to be pleased with me! Are you success driven folks catching the emotion in this?!

When my turn came, I unloaded the basket. There must have been five feet of items on the counter. As the checker was busily entering the items, I stood there calmly on the outside, but on the inside I was quite pleased with myself. I looked to my left and noticed that because I had had so many groceries, there were about eight customers behind me waiting their turn.

Then I heard it, "That will be \$213.78!" I smiled, reached in my back pocket for my checkbook, and it wasn't there! This was back in the mid-80s, and markets were not yet set up to take a credit card. I was stunned! I had blown it. I had forgotten to bring the checkbook with me. I looked at that whole line of people, who in turn were staring back at me. I looked at the cashier and said, "Uh, Ma'am, I forgot my checkbook, and I don't carry that much cash. Can you please put those groceries aside, and I'll race home and come right back?" She said, "Sure." I thanked her, looked back at the crowd in line, tried to smile at them, said "sorry," and took off running for the car.

I felt so stupid, was so embarrassed and so angry with myself that I called myself everything I could think of on the way home. "You idiot! How could you be so dumb as to forget the checkbook? That's like going duck hunting and leaving your shotgun at home!" When I got home, I left the car running, flew into the house, looked at the counter where the shopping list had been, and right there next to where the list had been sitting was the checkbook. I grabbed it, got back to the car, all the while coming up with new pejorative names to call myself, when suddenly the Lord spoke to me. "Bob, why are you so angry with yourself? Why are you calling My saint, names I would never call you? Don't you remember that I love you just as you are, including

when you make a mistake, forget something, or have an accident? I, the judge, am not angry with you. It's okay that you had to make an extra trip! Relax! I love you!"

"Yeah, but Lord, it was such a waste of time."

"Whose time did you waste? Doesn't all time belong to Me? If I'm not angry that you wasted time, then why are you angry?"

And suddenly, it hit me. "It's okay to forget things, to make mistakes, to lose things, and to have accidents. It's all a part of being human. I live in a fallen world. I am not perfect, but the most powerful Almighty being in the cosmos loves me. And if He says I'm okay, then I am okay. I can laugh at myself and move on with life." And I actually started laughing at myself, feeling God's love surround me at that moment.

By the time I got back to the store, I was a different person. I know that because the cashier commented on it. She said, "What happened to you?"

And I asked her, "What do you mean?"

She said, "When you left here, you were pretty disturbed. But you aren't now. How come?"

So, I told her. "Jesus and I had a talk on the way back here. He reminded me it's okay to make mistakes and to forget things. But most of all, He reminded me that He wasn't angry with me. He loves me. And therefore, I shouldn't be angry with me."

The cashier's response was, "Wow! That's really amazing!"

To which I responded, "Indeed, His grace is amazing."

The point is that when I remember that God's anger for me has once and for all been appeased, and He loves me and accepts me, then there is no need for me to get angry and upset at my failures. I don't have to worry about God or anyone else getting angry at me for my failures. I can learn from them, but I don't have to berate myself. When I remember Christ's propitiating work that satisfies God's anger at me, so that he can fully embrace me with all of my

failures and mistakes, then I can more easily and quickly apply God's forgiveness and acceptance to myself. I don't need to beat up one whom Jesus Christ loves and died for.

In turn, this leads to a second important application of this truth to life. The more you understand and remember that God holds no anger for you but loves you, the more ever increasing your love and devotion will be for Christ. Your love and appreciation for Christ's propitiating work on your behalf will become more meaningful, and so will your commitment grow to serving Him with your whole heart.

Finally, as I grasp the reality of Christ's propitiating work on my behalf and all that it entails, I find **Ephesians 4:32-33** becomes more of a reality in my life. The Apostle Paul writes, "**Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**" In short, taking in the full understanding that God's anger toward me is once and forever satisfied because of what Jesus did for me, I find that it has produced more patience, longsuffering, kindness toward others, as well as my increased ability to forgive others. If you are someone who finds it hard to let go of a grudge toward someone else, then just ask yourself where you would be if Jesus had not satisfied God's anger and eternal grudge against you.