



Text: Romans 3:24-25¹

Series: Right Living: God's Righteous Transforming Our Lives

Title: Part 5 – Confidence in Three Words

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Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

I want to talk with you about confidence this morning. How can we have confidence before God? This morning I want to share three words with you that form the unshakeable foundation of our confidence.

I've been fortunate for most of my life to live without entanglement in our country's legal system. I've had a couple of speeding tickets and one or two parking tickets, but I've never been forced to defend myself in a court of law. I've never sat before a judge who was intent on finding my guilt or innocence of a charge that had been levied against me. And I'm thankful for that gap in my human experience.

But some time ago I got an unsettling email from a lawyer. His email stated that he represented a client, an author, whose work I had used in one of my sermons without having paid the royalty fee due. In the most careful and adversarial legalese, he notified me that unless I paid a significant amount of money in damages to his client, I could face civil prosecution.

At first I thought the email was a hoax, but it wasn't. He was serious. I had, in fact, used the piece written by his client. One of the people here in the congregation had given me the piece on a photocopied sheet. They had received it from someone else and so on and so on. The photocopy didn't list the author's name or any other information. The composition was appropriate to a point I was making in one of my sermons and so I used it. Then, as we do here at the church, I put my sermon on the internet. Some months later, this lawyer, acting to protect his client's copyright to the work, found my sermon on the internet – and the fun began!

I'm happy to report that all is settled. It never went to court. We actually carry insurance that deals with these sorts of eventualities. Our insurance company paid damages to the author, but after the intervention of our insurance company's claims adjustor, the final amount was significantly reduced from the original demand.

From the day I first received the lawyer's email until the day we signed off on the final resolution of the claim, I felt as if I had a cloud hanging over my head. I had

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broken the law! I was a law-breaker! I faced civil prosecution and if we had refused to pay the claim and gone to court, we could have possibly been penalized to an even greater degree. I felt terrible! I was sick to my stomach! I was vulnerable and insecure. I stood guilty before the law without a defence.

Was I guilty? Yes, I was. **Were damages owed?** Yes, the law was clear; damages were owed. **Is it really over?** Yes, all parties have signed off on the deal stating that they are satisfied. I feel as if I've been freed; it's in the past and I can move on. [I tell you though, I'm even more careful about using copyright material!]

I can only imagine what it must be like for people who face much more serious situations before the courts. The frustration with the formality of the process; the fear of the consequences; the uncertainty about the future; the longing to have their name cleared; the concern that life will never return to normal – I can only imagine how being charged before the law can weigh on the mind and heart of a person. You might have faced that situation or be facing it now; you have my sympathy.

Here's the reality that every one of us faces. Paul has written to us, serving us with notice that we face serious proceedings before law unless we deal with the matter in which we have offended his client. And who is his client? **God! And God has a case against us!**

Over the last couple of weeks, we have read in detail Paul's notification to us of the danger in which we find ourselves. The essence of what Paul says from chapter 1, verse 18 right through to chapter 3, verse 20 is that unless we deal with the charges standing against us, we...

“are storing up wrath for [ourselves] on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.” Romans 2:5

Paul has worked to establish that every one of us stands charged in God's courtroom with sin against God and against his Law. And there is coming a day, Paul warns ...

“when... God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.” Romans 2:16

When that day will occur is unknown, but the verdict that will be rendered on that day is not in question: the universal verdict will be **“guilty as charged”** ...

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” Romans 3:23

No one at any time has ever measured up to God's standard of righteousness. Are we guilty? Yes! Are damages owed? Yes! Knowing what the verdict will



be before it's given doesn't give us any peace – our guilt merits nothing but the wrath of God! What are we to do? God has us dead to rights!

In Romans chapter 3, verses 21 to 26, Paul brings us by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit into the courtroom of God at the end of history and, thanks be to God, we hear three words that bring an end to our anxiety and tear. What happens is nothing short of a miracle of divine justice and mercy. Kent Hughes, an American pastor and Bible teacher, calls these verses “the miracle of righteousness.” Donald Grey Barnhouse, an American preacher of the mid-twentieth century, said of these verses: “I am convinced today, after these many years of Bible study, that these verses are the most important in the Bible.”² Martin Luther, the reformer of the sixteenth century, said that these verses form the centre of the Epistle to the Romans and were in fact, in his estimation, they were the central verses of the whole Bible! (as quoted in Douglas Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans*, p. 125)

Let's read them together...

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 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.” Romans 3:21-26

In just six verses of this chapter, Paul introduces us to the three most important words in the entire dictionary of Christian liberty and freedom:

**“justification,”
“redemption” and
“propitiation.”**

These three words are designed to bring us into a place of confidence, assurance and peace. They are intended to end our uncertainty, answer our anxiety and remove our fears. Their purpose is to replace our sense of doom under the impending judgement of God with confidence in His mercy and love for us.

²Donald Grey Barnhouse, *God's Remedy, God's River*, Volume 2 (Fincastle, VA: Scripture Truth Book Co., n.d.), p. 6 as quoted in Hughes, R. K. (1991). *Romans : Righteousness from heaven*. Preaching the Word (82). Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books.



The question that every defendant has at the top of his or her mind is a simple one: what is the verdict going to be?

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, Paul speaks on behalf of the Judge of the Universe, and declares that we have been acquitted. It's as if the Final Judgment has been brought forward in time and we are allowed to hear what God will say to all those who put their faith in Christ...

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift” Romans 3:23-24

Justification!

God has declared us to be acquitted of all charges & right in His sight

To be “justified” means at least two things. **First** of all, it means that **God has pardoned us of our crime.**

We “all have sinned” Paul wrote in his letter. (v.23) In these first three chapters of his letter about the Gospel, we've seen how Paul has made an ironclad case for our guilt. We are without any excuse and we stand in court awaiting the seemingly inevitable judgment of “guilty as charged.”

But a miracle occurs! Instead of “guilty,” we hear the Judge say, “justified,” “pardoned for the crime.”

What has made this possible is the fact that someone has taken our punishment for us. God does not overlook or excuse our crime -- someone has died in our place and God's punishment was exhausted on Him. Because Jesus died and took our punishment we can be pardoned.

Secondly, to be “justified” means more than just to be acquitted for past crimes. It also means **that God has declared us “righteous” in His sight.**

Let me ask you a question. **On what basis does God declare us righteous: by faith or by perfect obedience?**

I'll warn you, it's a bit of a trick question. Most people will say, “by faith.” But that's not quite right. God declares us righteous by perfect obedience – but not by our obedience, but by the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ. His perfect obedience to God's Law is credited to our “spiritual account” when we put our faith in Him. As one writer put it, faith is simply “the hand of the heart” that receives the gift of the perfect righteousness of Christ.

When God justifies us, on the one hand He pardons and wipes our record clean and on the other hand He adds to our record the accomplishments of Jesus Christ. Christ's righteousness -- His sinless life, His perfect obedience to the Law



of God, His complete surrender to the will of His Father, His selfless death on the cross for us – all this becomes ours by faith in Him.

And don't bother looking for any good reasons that prompt God to be so generous to us -- there aren't any! We are acquitted and declared righteous "by his grace as a gift."

The word translated, "gift," occurs in John 15:25 where Jesus says of his accusers that they "hated me without a cause." You can add that rendering to this passage and it makes perfect sense: we are "justified 'without a cause' by his grace."

Paul uses this same word in his letter to the Corinthian believers when he told them that his preaching of the Gospel to them had been "free of charge." (2 Corinthians 11:7) We are "justified 'free of charge'" to us. It doesn't cost us anything; but it cost Jesus Christ everything!

The only reason for this declaration is found in the word, "grace." Because of His mercy and kindness, God has chosen to be gracious to us and to give us what we need.

Mercy is when God *doesn't* give us what we deserve -- He forgives our sin.

Grace is when God gives us what we *don't* deserve -- He credits to us the goodness of Jesus and treats us as beloved children rather than as guilty sinners.

Let me tell you a story about mercy and grace. Say you're travelling along the highway, way beyond the speed limit. You pass a radar officer and he clocks you over the limit. He puts on his flashers, pursues you down the highway, but just as you begin to slow to pull over, you get a flat tire.

The officer comes to your window and asks for your keys. He goes to your trunk and takes out your spare tire. He changes your flat and comes back and hands you your keys. He says to you, "I won't fine you this time, but please watch your speed. You're free to go."

Mercy is the officer NOT giving you the fine you deserve. Grace is the officer changing your tire – something you didn't deserve. We don't deserve God's mercy and forgiveness. We're sinners. We're guilty and it's when we acknowledge that simple reality that God's grace opens to us.

In his book, Healing Grace, Christian author and counsellor David Seamands includes this story:



When Emperor Franz-Josef I of Austria died in 1916, his was the last of the extravagant imperial funerals. A great procession of dignitaries decked out in their imperial regalia followed the coffin, draped in black and bearing the gold imperial colours. The funeral cortege descended the stairs of the Capuchin Monastery in Vienna and at the bottom of the stairs was a great iron door leading to the Hapsburg family crypt. Behind the door was the Cardinal-Archbishop of Vienna.

The officer in charge of the funeral cortege began the ancient, established burial ritual by crying out: "Open!" From behind the door, the Cardinal responded: "Who goes there?"

The officer responded: "We bear the remains of his Imperial and Apostolic Majesty, Franz-Josef I, by the grace of God Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary, Defender of the Faith, Prince of Bohemia-Moravia, Grand Duke of Lombardy..."

The officer continued on with the Emperor's thirty-seven titles to which the Cardinal from behind the door responded: "We know him not. Who goes there?"

The officer spoke again, this time using a more abbreviated series of titles reserved for times of emergency.

"We know him not," the Cardinal responded again. "Who goes there?"

The third time, the officer responded, stripping the Emperor of all his grand titles: "We bear the body of Franz-Josef, our brother, a sinner like us all!" At that, the doors swung open, and Franz-Josef's body was admitted. (© 2008 PreachingToday.com Alan J. White, Chicago, Illinois. Leadership, Vol. 15, no. 4.)

There are no human reasons why God should accept us and give us entrance into His presence. But because of His grace, we can be confident that when we stand before God one day, seeking entrance into heaven, we will be admitted if, by faith, we have received God's pardon and been made righteous in Christ. And the beginning of that act is our declaration that we are sinners who are in need of God's mercy and forgiveness.

Are you confident in God's verdict on your life? Fellow sinner, if you have put your faith in Christ, you have nothing to fear from the Day of Judgment! There is no wondering or worrying what the Judge will say -- the verdict is already in -- you and I are acquitted through faith in Jesus Christ!

One of the questions that weighed heavily upon my mind as my little legal entanglement proceeded was: Will I have to pay a penalty? If so, how much? Can we pay it? I knew I was guilty but I appealed to the other party to let me off with just an apology. For a week or two I waited for their answer. Finally, it came: "No," they responded, "a payment has to be made."



Paul tells us that we are ...

“justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” Romans 3:24

First of all, Paul tells us about the great doctrine of “justification.” Now we’re introduced to the second great word of liberty and freedom...

Redemption!
God has paid our penalty for us

The word that Paul chose here was drawn from the language of the slave market. It meant to **“deliver by the payment of a price.”** A generous benefactor, or even the slave herself, could pay a ransom or penalty and gain her freedom.

Before we come to Christ we are enslaved by sin. Paul has already told us that we are all **“under sin.” (Romans 3:9)** As we saw last week, that means that we are **prisoners of sin**. We have a life, but it’s not freedom. Our master is sin and sin does not seek our best interests. God, in his grace, has mercy upon us and pays our ransom, giving us our liberty. But he doesn’t just pay a fine or do community service; he pays with his life!

The Apostle Peter tells us that...

“you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” 1 Peter 1:18-19

Fanny Crosby put this wonderful truth into the words of her hymn...

“Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it;
Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb;
Redeemed through His infinite mercy,
His child, and forever, I am.”

One winter’s night during the Depression years, the mayor of New York City, Fiorello LaGuardia, showed up at night court in the poorest part of the city. He dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench. That night, an old woman, charged with stealing a loaf of bread, was brought before him. She defended herself by saying, “My daughter’s husband has deserted her. She is sick, and her children are starving.”

The shopkeeper refused to drop the charges, “It’s a bad neighbourhood, your honour, and she’s got to be punished to teach other people a lesson.”



LaGuardia turned to the old woman and said, "I've got to punish you; the law makes no exceptions. Ten dollars or ten days in jail." However, even while pronouncing sentence, LaGuardia reached into his pocket, took out a ten-dollar bill, and threw it into his hat with these words: "Here's the ten-dollar fine, which I now remit, and furthermore, I'm going to fine everyone in the courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Bailiff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant." With that the old woman was free to go, along with \$47 collected in fines. (© 2008 PreachingToday.com Jim Danielson, Kingsford, Missouri. Leadership, Vol. 11, no. 2.)

Jesus paid our redemption for us. The verdict has been given, the price has been paid and I am free to go.

When a defendant here's those words, "You're free to go," there may be one last question at the back of their minds: **"Is it really over?"** Will there be an appeal? Will I have to go through this all over again?"

I was finally relieved when the plaintiff in the copyright dispute signed on the dotted line, indicating that our payment was accepted and that the dispute was over. I was glad that I could put the issue to rest in my mind and move on.

Guy Paul Morin must have asked the question: Is it over? He was arrested in April of 1985 and charged with the murder of little Christine Jessop, the daughter of his neighbours. In early 1986 he was acquitted by a jury, only to have that verdict overturned on appeal by the crown. After a lengthy procedural wrangle, he was convicted in 1992 after a nine-month retrial.

Acquitted, appealed, convicted, appealed again -- for ten years the Attorney General's office in Ontario pursued Guy Paul Morin because they were not satisfied that justice had been served in his 1986 acquittal. Then in 1995 DNA testing, which had not been available in 1986, clearly showed that he was not the person who had assaulted and murdered Christine Jessop. The Attorney General's department asked the court to drop all charges against Mr. Morin and their ten-year pursuit of this man was over. Finally, it was really over! (as reported by Kirk Makin, "Crown to seek Morin's acquittal," *The Globe & Mail*, January 23, 1995)

Paul tells us that God's justice has been satisfied and it's over!

The amazing fact is that God himself has provided the means for us to be acquitted. God himself provided what was needed to set us free in the person of His Son Jesus Christ. Paul wrote about Jesus,...

"whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 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.” Romans 3:25-26

At the beginning I said that Paul introduced us to the three most important words in the dictionary of Christian liberty. We’ve already met two of them: **justification** and **redemption**. Now we meet the third...

Propitiation!
God’s justice has been satisfied

"Propitiation" is **the offering of a sacrifice that satisfies God’s demands for justice and sets aside God’s wrath against sin.**

Only when God’s wrath against sin has been removed will He relent from his prosecution of sin. Only when His justice has been satisfied will He rest from his action against sin. And only when His justice has been satisfied can we be reconciled with Him.

In Ontario, the DNA testing satisfied the office of the Attorney General of Ontario that justice had been served in Mr. Morin’s acquittal and they stopped pursuing him. In our case, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ has satisfied the demand of God’s law that sin be punished. God will not pursue us any more. It’s really over!

It’s important to see that Christ’s sacrifice on the cross deals with sins of the past, as well as the present and the future. Christ’s death stands at the centre of history and its effect radiates outward. In His forbearance, God “passed over former sins” -- He had not excused them or forgotten them, he was waiting for the day when He would punish them all in Christ.

The salvation He gave to the Old Testament figures of Abraham and Moses, to David and to others, flowed from the cross of Christ backwards in time to them, just like it flows forward in time to us.

God is satisfied that your sin has been dealt with -- **are you?** Everything that you’ve done or will do is already atoned for by the sacrifice of Christ. **Will you be satisfied that is over, just as God already is?**

Paul introduces this section with two little words that might fly past us unnoticed:

“But now....” Romans 3:21

Something has happened that has changed the eternal destiny of the human race. Up to this point, Paul has laid out our guilt before God in no uncertain terms. “But now...” something has happened. Jesus Christ has come, has died and has risen again and human spiritual history – **your spiritual history** – will never be the same again!



Martin Lloyd-Jones, a British pastor and theologian once said that “there are no more wonderful words in the whole of Scripture than just these two words, ‘But now.’” (as quoted in Moo, p. 133)

These two words appear in Paul’s writings to describe what we once were without God and what we now are because of God.

Once, we were slaves to sin...

“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God” Romans 6:22

Once, we were condemned by the Law and controlled by our sinful nature...

“But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.” Romans 7:6

Once, we didn’t know God...

“But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God...” Galatians 4:9

Once, we were strangers to God and alienated from Him...

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Ephesians 2:13

Once, we were enemies of God...

“But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation...” Colossians 1:22 (NIV)

And we could go on! This is far from an exhaustive list of Paul’s “but now” passages.³ Whenever he uses those two little words, “but now,” he is referring to an intervention by God into our lives that radically transforms our circumstance and draws us into his love and grace. The sacrifice of Christ for us has finally, completely, decisively satisfied God’s wrath against our sin – your punishment and mine has all been meted out to Jesus who took it on our behalf.

³ For a fuller list and exposition of the “but now” passages see Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2000, p. 133-135.



It's important to see that Christ's sacrifice was necessary in order to allow God to forgive us. He couldn't just excuse or ignore sin -- that would make Him unjust. He had set out the law and the law required punishment for law-breaking. How then could God declare us just and remain just Himself without punishing us?

When he "put forward" Christ as the sacrifice for our sin, God provided a way in which sin could be **both punished and forgiven**. God himself broke the connection between our sin and our punishment through the death of Christ on the cross.

Paul Harvey tells a story about Lieutenant Commander Edward Henry "Butch" O'Hare, the US Navy's first fighter ace of the Second World War. Chicago's O'Hare Airport is named after him.

What Butch O'Hare became, however, was made possible because someone else paid a great price. Butch's father, Edward J. O'Hare, was a slick lawyer for gangster Al Capone. "Artful Eddie," as he was known, had money and power but one day he decided to testify against Capone. The reason for the sudden change of heart? He wanted to give his son a break, he said. Before long, the mob silenced Artful Eddie with two shotgun blasts.

But because of Eddie's change of heart, his son Butch was accepted at Annapolis Naval College. Eddie's confession and subsequent death satisfied the admissions officers that the family's mob connections were severed. "Artful Eddie" paid with his own life for his son's chance to make good. (© PreachingToday.com Steven D. Mathewson, Helena, Montana. Leadership, Vol. 12, no. 1)

When Jesus died in our place on the cross, he severed our connections with sin and punishment and made it possible for us to "make good."

Our future has been decided!

The verdict is in – **God has declared us "justified"** -- declared just by God's grace. For us, life can begin because we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God accepts us and loves us.

The penalty has been paid – **God has redeemed us** -- Christ has redeemed us through his death. Our obligation to God's court has been paid.

God is satisfied -- there won't be any appeals. Christ's sacrifice of atonement is the propitiation of God's wrath against sin. The once-for-all sacrifice of Christ has rendered a once for-all satisfaction of God's justice. God's decision will not be overturned or appealed.

Because of three words, **justification, redemption and propitiation**, we can be **confident and secure** in our relationship with God.



And our secure standing before God leads to a new experience of God.

How does settling our standing before God affect our lives? Next week we're going to explore the life of the justified person that Paul summarizes at the beginning of chapter 5 with these words...

“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:1

Do you want peace in your life? Join us next week as we can to explore how “God’s Righteousness Transforms Our Lives.”

- **Invitation to Prayer**
- **Final Song:** Blessed Assurance (#572)
- **Benediction**