

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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FOUR WORDS THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

In reference to the Apostle Paul's writings, the Apostle Peter stated that in all his epistles "are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (II Peter 3:16). He did not say they could not be understood, but they were "hard" to understand. One such passage that would fall into the category stated by Peter is Romans 3:21-26. We might think this passage is more theological than practical and is couched in theological language that is hard to read much less understand. We find three theological words in this passage foreign to most people and understood by less. The words are: "propitiation" "redemption" and "justification". We can add to these the word "reconciliation" from Romans 5:10,11. Most Christians have heard and read them but few have understood them, or see a need of understanding them, asking, "What difference does it make?" J.I. Packer in *Knowing God* calls this passage "The heart of the Gospel." In his momentous work on Romans, Martin Lloyd Jones says this passage is "an essential statement of the Christian faith." William Barclay in his *Daily Bible Studies* says this is "a passage full of riches." German Theologian Anders Nygran in *A Commentary on Romans* says this passage is "one of the more difficult passages of the epistle, but there is in it a clear and harmonious meaning." Somewhere along the way I was told it was this passage that changed the life of Martin Luther and triggered the Protestant Reformation. These four words are pictures or images of our salvation in Christ. They are not dull theological concepts but relate to our everyday living the Christian life. Christ did not come to simply tell us of God's love, he came to accomplish our salvation by demonstrating His love. Grace does not happen by statement from God. He does not merely "say", He demonstrates His love in His son who accomplishes our redemption in such a way that establishes God's righteousness and excludes any boasting on our part.

Propitiation: The ancient Greeks used this word to describe rituals at a shrine. The word is used four times in the New Testament although it is not always correctly translated in some versions. Here in Romans 3:25 it is translated "atonement" in the NIV and "expiation" in the RSV. In Hebrews 2:17 it is translated "reconciliation" in the KJV, "atonement" in the NIV and "expiation" in the RSV. It is used twice in I John, chapters 2:2 and 4:10 and in both verses it is translated "atoning" in the NIV and "expiation" in the RSV. In order to understand why these translators have refused to use the word "propitiation" we need to understand the meaning of the word. It basically means a placating or pacifying displeasure due to an offense. The words "atonement" and "expiation" denotes a *covering, putting away sin* whereas "propitiation" includes this but it also means *pacifying the wrath of God*. The word denotes not only the putting away of sin, but carries the sense of appeasing God's anger. The problem is modern theologians do not believe in the wrath or anger of God concerning sin. An example is seen in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* that states: "There is no idea of the wrath of God being propitiated by the sacrifice of Christ...nowhere in the N.T. Does the idea of propitiation occur." This is a flat denial of Romans 1:18: "For the wrath of God is re-

vealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness," and 3:25: "God displayed (Christ) publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith." All mankind was under the wrath of God but through the death of Christ the anger of God is quenched and we are "saved from wrath through Him" (Rom. 5:9). As W. E. Vine states in *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*: "It is God who is propitiated by the vindication of His holy and righteous character. He has so dealt with sin that He can show mercy to the believing sinner in the removal of guilt and the remission of his sins." As a result of the propitiation in Christ's blood God is shown to be "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26).

The Scripture's most vivid description of God's wrath and anger is found in Romans 1:18-32. Three times it is stated that "God gave them over" to the lust of their heart, to degrading passions and a depraved mind. This is a description of our society today indicating it is under the wrath of God. Modern man, and much of the religious world today have denied the reality of sin and therefore set aside any thought of wrath and judgment. We are beginning to see this wrath and anger of God expressed in our nation today. When God's judgment falls upon this nation, as it surely will sooner rather than later, aren't you glad that you, as a Christian, because of the propitiation of Christ, have been "set free from the wrath to come?"

Redemption: There are two words translated "redeemed" in the New Testament. One word signifies "buying" especially of the purchasing of a slave with a view to his freedom. The Scripture does not say to whom the price is paid. It is used in Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5 for "redeeming the time". It is in some versions translated "making the most of your time" but primarily means to "buy out". It is used in Galatians 3:13 and 4:5 showing that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, and in Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45 it is used to signify Christ's giving himself as "a ransom for many". It is translated "bought" in II Peter 2:1 and I Corinthians 6:20, 7:23. Showing our redemption is purchased by the blood of Christ. This word does not signify the actual redemption, but the price paid with a view to redemption. The second word, used more frequently, means not only paying the price but actual deliverance and the setting at liberty. Thus it is stated in Hebrews 9:12 that when Christ appeared as high priest it was "not though the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, he entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" for us, and in I Peter 1: 18, 19: "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things...but with precious blood as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ". Our justification is "a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith." (Rom. 3:24,25).

It is interesting that God would choose the figure of a market place, buying and selling, to illustrate salvation, yet it is in the market place that men look for success and happiness. What the world can buy and sell, eat and drive, use and own, wear and drive is what they are enslaved to. So redemption has to do with

the purchasing of slaves and setting them free. The Apostle states in Romans 6:16: "When you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death or of obedience resulting in righteousness." Christ's redemption frees from the slavery of sin.

Redemption means not only the salvation of our soul, but also the redemption of our bodies and, unknown to most Christians, the redemption of the whole creation (Rom. 8:18-25). Paul is discussing the sufferings of the Christian in "this present time" but it is not only we who suffer, the whole creation is suffering from the effects of sin. Not only did the sin of Adam bring a curse upon the whole human race but the earth suffered a curse as well. We are waiting for the redemption of our body (ver. 23) but "the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God" (ver. 19). So man is not the sole object of redemption. The redemption of man is a great and mighty event but it goes beyond this. Not only is man redeemed from death the earth will be redeemed from the curse. In commenting on Romans 8:19-22 Eric Sauer in *The King of the Earth* states: "The redemption of the earth is most intimately bound up with the perfecting of man. Great and mighty as is the redemption the Lord has brought to man, it goes inconceivably far beyond it. The plan of redemption, just as it works through man is linked to things in the heavens (Heb 9:23; Isa 30:26), on earth (Rom 8:21-23) and things under the earth (Phil. 2:10)." In verse 23 the Apostle speaks of our final redemption, that is the redemption of our body. He says this is our hope. We only hope for "that which we do not see" which means the only thing the Christian does not now have is his new body, which will be realized in the resurrection at the return of Christ (I Cor. 15:42-44). This will complete our redemption.

Justification: As "redemption" was a word denoting transactions in the market place, so "justification" is a legal term used in a court of law. A court of law gives us legal standing. The believer stands before God as being righteous, not according to the works of Law but by a gift of His grace. In Romans 3:20-26 the word "righteousness" is used four times and the word "justified" (just, Justifier) is used three times. In the original language they are both the same word. To be justified is to be declared righteous. Basically this means "to be right". When applied to God it means He has done and is doing the right thing. When applied to the Christian it means to be right with God. Someone has defined the word "justified" as: "just as if I'd" never sinned. This passage says God was right in accepting our faith as righteousness and we are made righteous, "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (ver. 24). This is a concept that we as Christians sometimes find quite hard to accept. Knowing our weaknesses and failures it is hard to accept the fact that we are righteous or that we can appear before God "just as if I'd" never sinned, that is, justified. The truth is that we within ourselves are not righteous, but are "reckoned" as righteous. That is, God accepts our faith and counts us righteous, not because of anything we are or have done, but because of the cross of Christ (Rom. 3:24,25). Abraham is an example of this: "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness....Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness" (Rom. 4:5,9). Then note this: "It was not for his sake only was it written, that 'it was reckoned to him' but for our sake also to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Rom. 4:22-24).

Paul knew this would be difficult for the law keeping Jew to accept, so he gave Abraham as an example and stated that "with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver (stagger KJV) in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God" (Rom. 4:20).

We are counted as being righteous before God and accepted as being perfect before him. Hebrews 10:10-14: "By (His) will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...for by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." The writer continues: "And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; 'and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.' Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin" (vers. 15-17). Now "we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus" (ver.19). The holy place is "heaven itself" (Heb. 9:24). Were we not justified and made righteous we would never have this opportunity.

Reconciliation: Reconciliation describes experiences in a home or family (example: the prodigal son). Justification leads to reconciliation. The word is used three times in Romans 5. We have been justified by his blood, and "we shall be saved from the wrath of God through him." We are assured of this because "while we were enemies, we were *reconciled* to God through the death of His Son, much more having been *reconciled*, we shall be saved by His life." (ver. 9,10). It is further stated in verse 11 "we have now received the *reconciliation*" through our Lord Jesus Christ. The KJV translates the word here as "atonement". This is an unfortunate translation as "atonement" is not a New Testament word, but an Old Testament word, and means basically "to cover". Our sins have not been "covered" but completely taken away and we are now, because of our justification, reconciled to God. He has removed our sins "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12) and He will "remember their sins no more" (Heb. 8:12). We were at one time enemies of God (ver. 10) but now we have been reconciled and brought into a completely different relationship with God. It is God who has brought about this reconciliation through Christ (ver 11).

Reconciliation is opposite of alienation. This is illustrated in fact that the alienation between Jew and Gentile, which was a gulf regarded as unbridgeable, has been abolished by Christ and they have been reconciled. Christ "broke down the barrier of the dividing wall by abolishing in his flesh the enmity that in himself he might make the two in one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by having put to death the enmity" (Eph. 2:14-16). Not only are we reconciled to God and one another, it was the Father's good pleasure "to reconcile all things to Himself through the blood of his cross, whether things on earth or things in heaven," and "He has now reconciled you in his fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach" (Col. 1:20-22).

Reconciliation is not an act of God which is complete, rather it is the continuous activity of God through His people; "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors of Christ, as though God was entreating through us, be ye reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:19, 20). The KJV says "we stand in his stead." We are his ministers of reconciliation.