

**REVISITING ROMANS 3:21-26
AND THE RELATIONSHIP OF ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣΥΝΗ
TO THE PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE**

Kiandjaja Holik

Synopsis

This essay is to investigate Romans 3:21-26 exegetically and thematically – in particular the concept of δικαιοσύνη in relation to the purpose of the epistle of Romans. This pericope has been acknowledged as the heart of the letter by some earlier commentators, especially the reformers. The reformation’s concept of “justification by faith” emerges from this pericope. However, syntactical and theological difficulties are in the midst of most of the ancient and modern commentators’ minds. This essay puts together several opinions from commentators – both earlier ones such as Cranfield, Murray and Käsemann – and some modern ones such as Dunn, Moo, Jewett, Bruce, and Barnett. Some monographs on thematic issues are also in consideration for this essay – especially those focusing on the understanding of δικαιοσύνη in Romans.

Translation

21. But now, without law, the righteousness of God has been made clear, being testified by the law and the prophets,
22. the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. For there is no distinction,
23. for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;
24. they are now being justified freely by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus,
25. whom God had placed beforehand as a propitiation through faith, in his blood, [he did this] as a sign of his righteousness because he had passed over that sins previously occurred,
26. in God's forbearance, for the display of his righteousness in the present time, that he might be righteous even in justifying the one [who has] faith in Jesus.

Textual Commentaries*Verse 22*

There are three possible readings of *εις παντας*:

1. *εις παντας* is testified by several strong witnesses: Papyri P⁴⁰ from the third century; several strong uncials – \aleph , A and B; various miniscules and citations from the church fathers.
2. *επι παντας* is testified by only Vulgates manuscripts and several church fathers.
3. *εις παντας και επι παντας* is testified by \aleph^2 (was supplied by the second corrector of Sinaiticus); several later uncials (D, F, G); various miniscules; the common Greek text Byzantine and Greek Lectionaries; and some early versions (non-Greek languages) in Italian, Latin, Syriac. It was also quoted by several church fathers.

From the external attestation, the first and the third readings seem to be strong enough since they are supported by strong witnesses. However, the third reading is seen as a later modification, combin-

ing the first and the second, resulting in “redundant and tautological expression.”¹ Because the third is a longer reading and it may have been modified to cater for both the first and second. We conclude that the first reading seems to be the best one.

Verse 25

There are four possible readings of *δια [της] πιστεως* :

1. *δια της πιστεως* is testified by several strong witnesses: P^{40vid} (a third century and the most probable reading of P⁴⁰); B and several other uncials although they have been modified (C³, D²); several miniscules, textual receptus, Greek Lectionaries and some early church fathers.
2. *δια πιστεως* is testified by several strong witnesses as well: several strong uncials: \aleph , C* (original reading of Ephraemi Rescriptus), D* (original reading of Bezae); several miniscules, including the most probable reading of 0219 (5th century); and several church fathers citations.
3. *(της) πιστεως* is only testified by several translations such as Italian and Latin and a couple of church fathers documents.
4. Omitting is only attested by an uncial, a miniscule and a church father.

From the external attestation, the two most strong and probable readings are the first and the second options. Omitting the word (option 4) all together may be accidental.² Furthermore, both of them may not change the meaning of the text. However, Metzger suspects that the addition of the absolute pronoun *της* may well be due to the referral of *δια πιστεως Ιησου Χριστου* in verse 22.³

1. Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: UBS, 1994), 449.

2. Metzger, *A Textual*, 449.

3. Metzger.

Therefore the longer reading – with the addition of της – maybe possible since the internal attestation supports it.

Explanation

The pericope of Romans 3:21-26 is located at the beginning of what is called the good news in 1:17. It contains the availability of justification by faith to those who believe. This is the explication of Paul's main tenet in 1:17, since the two key terms in it are being reiterated in 3:21-26: δικαιοσύνη—3:21, 22, 25, 26; πίστις—3:22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31.⁴ While Romans 1:18-3:20 explains that all mankind has been unrighteous and is under judgment (3:20), including Gentiles and also Jews (3:9), now the imputed righteousness – instead of imparted – is available for those who believe in Jesus Christ (3:21-26). This is the critical point of his letter, as Martin Luther acknowledges the important ideas in this passage and he considers it “the chief point and the very central place of the Epistle and the whole Bible.”⁵ Cranfield also stands behind it, stating that this pericope is the centre of the epistle and it starts a new section by a proclamation statement – “But now...”⁶

This section extends all the way to 4:25 explaining that faith is essential for Jews and also Gentiles (3:27-3:31). Paul here emphasizes the implication of Gentile inclusion in the historical redemptive plan of God. Furthermore, he also thinks that faith does not nullify the law but complements it. In chapter 4, he explains the principle he builds on in chapter 3 expanding into an illustration with respect to Abraham in a

4. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* vol. 38A of *Word Biblical Commentary CD ROM* (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1988).

5. Margin of the Luther Bible, quoted by Moo (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 218).

6. C. E .B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* vol. 1, *International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), 199.

rubric of circumcision. This summarizes the main doctrine of salvation that Paul may have defended in his Gospel ministry, especially from the Jews but also the Gentiles.⁷

In Romans 3:21-26, Paul sets forth the manifestation of the righteousness of God, the theme announced in 1:17. He recalls “the righteousness of God” in relation to God’s saving activity through the teaching of the Gospel (1:17) and to God’s judging act because of the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews (3:5).⁸ In this passage of six verses, the phrase “the righteousness of God” is cited four times (vv. 21, 22, 25, 26). The verb “to justify” is cited twice (vv. 24, 26) and the adjective “just” is found in v. 26.⁹ The passage itself can certainly be divided into four distinct parts. Firstly, it clarifies the revelation of God in connection with the Old Testament (v. 21). Secondly, it presents the fact that all sinful human beings have access to God’s righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ (vv. 22-23). Thirdly, Christ’s atoning sacrifice is shown to be the “source of God’s righteousness” (vv. 24-25a). And finally, this atonement is not only a source for justification for sinners but also shows God’s “just-ness” in the whole progression (vv. 25b-26).¹⁰

Revelation of God in the Old Testament (v. 21)

Paul has explained that apart from the law, no one can live righteously (1:18-3:20). He starts this new section by declaring that the greatest moment in history has now arrived: “But now...”¹¹ Dunn comments: “no one disputes that with the *νουν δε* of v. 21 Paul intends a decisive shift in the argument to a new stage: the eschatological state

7. For this I am indebted to Moo (Moo, *The Epistle*, 218).

8. Paul Barnett, *Romans: The Revelation of God’s Righteousness* (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 75.

9. Confirmed by Moo (Moo, *The Epistle*, 219).

10. Moo, *The Epistle*, 219.

11. Murray thinks this is the point which separates the era of dependence and independence of the law (John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 108).

of affairs brought about by Christ.”¹² This phrase is a normal transition point for Pauline writings (cf. 6:22, 7:6; 1 Cor. 15:20; Eph. 2:13).¹³ Most commentators opt *νυνι δε* to be temporal¹⁴ while Dunn thinks that it can be both logical and temporal.¹⁵ Jewett demonstrates that there is a logical antithesis in this opening.¹⁶ God has clearly started a new era, in which the former era of law is over, and the new has dawned with a new covenant.

In this verse Paul opens the debatable subject matter – *δικαιοσυνη θεου*. It is prefaced by the statement *χωρις νομου*, which is a contrast to the clause following the subject, that is *μαρτυρουμενη υπο του νομου των προφητων*. Most of the scholars do not seem to be troubled with these tensions, while Moo rightly suggests that this is a clear characteristic of Romans: continuity and discontinuity.¹⁷ Campbell thinks that the two laws may be referring to two different functions of the same law: the former in relation to “salvific system” and the latter to “Scripture.”¹⁸ Moo recognizes “the law” as a system – the “Mosaic Covenant, that (temporary) administration set up between God and his people to regulate their lives and reveal their sin until the establishment of the promise in Christ.”¹⁹ However, he suggested that the phrase *χωρις νομου* should be taken together with the verb *πεφανερωται* because here Paul is proclaiming the way in which God’s

12. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*; Ernest Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 92.

13. Confirmed by Moo, *The Epistle*, 221.

14. Moo, Cranfield, Barnett, Murray.

15. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

16. Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 272.

17. Moo, *The Epistle*, 222; Murray, *The Epistle*, 110.

18. Douglas A. Campbell, *Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3:21-26*, *Journal of the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 65* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 23.

19. Moo, *The Epistle*, 223.

righteousness has been manifested.²⁰ Note that the perfect tense of *πεφανερωται* indicates past action with present consequences taking place in preaching of the Gospel.²¹ Furthermore, as Dunn suggests, *χωρις νομου*, must also be understood as synonymous with the phrases *χωρις ἔργων νόμου* (v. 28); also *χωρις ἔργων* (4:6).²² The law in Pauline understanding is always the same – it is “the boundary marker” that differentiates between those who are within the law (who are also doing work of the law) and outside the law.

However, the discussion of this verse is more concerned with *δικαιοσυνη θεου* as a genitive construction. The definition of *δικαιοσυνη* itself is actually quite vague. It can mean uprightness as a characteristic of a judge. It can also mean fulfilling of divine statutes, blamelessness, piety, mercy, salvation, power, liberation, covenant faithfulness. Commentators struggled with the construction before determining the right translation of *δικαιοσυνη θεου*. Some earlier commentators found the objective genitive construction favorable, including Luther.²³ However, Calvin was more cautious and can't decide whether this phrase should be understood as righteousness before God or from God.²⁴ Most scholars understand that the construction here has to be understood in the same meaning as it has in 1:17 – that is as meaning a status of righteousness before God which is God's gift.²⁵ This position is also supported by Moo who understands that the *δικαιοσυνη θεου* is the “justifying activity of God,” which can be understood in two ways: from God, as an act of vindicating and delivering his people, and from human

20. Moo, *The Epistle*, 222.

21. Cranfield *The Epistle*, 202.

22. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

23. Observed by Campbell, *Rhetoric*, 24.

24. Campbell, *Rhetoric*.

25. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 202; Murray, *The Epistle*, 110; Moo, *The Epistle*, 222; F.F. Bruce, *Romans*, Tyndale N.T. Commentaries. rev. ed. (Leicester: IVP, 1987), 96.

beings as a status that a person is declared just.²⁶ Based on the broad Old Testament usage, the term “righteousness of God” always means forensic.²⁷

Several modern commentators think of the construction as a subjective genitive. To their understanding, Paul’s meaning exceeds the limitations of grammar. They think that δικαιοσύνη is more in terms of salvation and liberation with covenantal associations rather than a strictly forensic notion of justice.²⁸ This opinion was originated in the 1900 with scholars such as Cremer, Bollier, and Bultmann, who points to the close relationship of “righteousness of God” with the Old Testament concept of covenant faithfulness (therefore the genitive is subjective rather than objective). This idea has been supported by even newer commentators who think of this phrase in relation to covenantal obedience.²⁹ One of the representatives of this view is Käsemann, who thinks “righteousness of God” is a term in Jewish apocalyptic, which can only be understood as belonging to God and not to human beings. This activity of God is seen in his commitment to the covenant, both to his people and to his creation in general.³⁰ Jewett thinks that God publicly “demonstrates his righteousness” in order to restore the entire cosmic order, to all groups, because of sin.³¹ Glenn N. Davies thinks that relating this concept to the phrase in 1:17 is to “betray a lack of

26. Moo, *The Epistle*, 222. For further and exhaustive discussion of the understanding of righteousness of God, please refer to Moo’s excursus in “‘Righteousness’ Language in Paul” (Moo, *The Epistle*, 79-90).

27. Although Moo understands that the difficulties in regard to its understanding in Romans 6. However, this is an exception of Paul’s understanding (see Moo, *The Epistle*, 88-89).

28. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*; Käsemann, *Commentary*, 93.

29. Dunn thinks that the absence of the verb in the phrase “righteousness of God” emphasizes the action of God instead of his character (Dunn, *Romans 1-8*); Supported also by Sanders, Wright and Jewett (Jewett, *Romans*, 273).

30. Käsemann, *Commentary*, 91.

31. Jewett, *Romans*, 273.

appreciation for the context of Paul's argument."³² Here Paul defends the righteousness of God in relation to Israel (3:1ff). Therefore, God's righteousness and his faithfulness to the covenant by providing salvation is at the forefront of this discussion. In addressing the primary question of this essay, the objective genitive reading of δικαιοσύνη θεου seems to be preferable.

The law, no doubt, testifies to the "righteousness of God" and at the same time suggests that the gospel is continuous with the Old Testament. The phrase 'the law and the prophets' in Romans is always referring to "the whole of the Old Testament."³³ This Scripture testifies to the coming of the Messiah and his saving work in bringing salvation to the nations. With the understanding that this law is the Mosaic covenant and related regulations (see above), Paul goes on to clearly affirm here that the righteousness of God is being manifested outside of these regulations. In this new covenant, these parameters are no longer required as they were made "obsolete".³⁴ Therefore the fundamental change here is absolutely happening in Jesus Christ.

All Sinful Human Beings Have Access to God's Righteousness through Faith in Jesus Christ (vv. 22-23)

Paul now states, in a distinctive manner that the "righteousness of God" is available to all who believe, through Jesus Christ. He recalls the language of 1:17 in which he "highlights faith as the means by which God's justifying work becomes applicable to individuals."³⁵ However, there is another ambiguous genitive introduced here within the expression διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. The traditional translation of "through faith in Jesus Christ" – reading as objective genitive – is

32. Glenn A. Davies, *Faith and Obedience in Romans: A Study in Romans 1-4*, Journal of the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 39 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 105; so is Jewett, *Romans*, 272-3.

33. Barnett, *Romans*, 77.

34. Moo, *The Epistle*, 223.

35. Moo, *The Epistle*, 224.

now being challenged by another “through faith of Jesus Christ” – reading as subjective genitive. While the former emphasizes in the role of the believer’s faith in appropriating salvation through Christ, the latter puts emphasis on Jesus’ faithfulness as essential in the salvation of humanity. Cranfield rejects this idea by saying that it is “altogether unconvincing” and so did Murray – although, according to Murray, the idea is not against the Scripture in general.³⁶ Moo admits that this challenging interpretation has some advantages: it avoids “tautology” appearing in traditional view, in which Paul states twice the importance of human faith (“faith in Jesus Christ” and “to all who believe”).³⁷ Furthermore, Jewett thinks the subjective genitive reading makes a natural understanding of Pauline “divine initiative and human response.”³⁸ Moo accepts the traditional understanding that a genitive following ΠΙΣΤΕΙΣ depends on the word employed. If it is a personal pronoun, it may be interpreted as subjective, while if it is a divine name, it is mostly objective.³⁹

On the other hand, there are more recent scholars who think that this phrase should be read as a subjective genitive. Davies supports the idea that God’s righteousness has been manifested in salvation, through the faithfulness of Christ to all who believe.⁴⁰ He thinks that the focus of Paul’s attention in 3:21-26 is the fulfillment of that promise, the manifestation of his righteousness and faithfulness to the covenant, to which the Old Testament had witnessed. The redemptive activity in Jesus demonstrates God’s righteousness in this age, so that “he might be righteous and declare righteous the one who lives out of the faithfulness of Jesus.”⁴¹ Campbell’s research shows that Hab.

36. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 203; Murray, *The Epistle*, 111.

37. Moo, *The Epistle*, 224.

38. Jewett, *Romans*, 278.

39. Moo, *The Epistle*, 225.

40. Davies, *Faith and*, 108.

41. Davies, *Faith and*, 110.

2:4 is significant in the understanding of διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.⁴² His finding is that there is semantic relationship between the verse and 1:16-18, particularly 1:17. He convincingly concluded that the phrase of 3:21-26 “should be read as a reference to the messianic faith of Christ.”⁴³ When we interpret the “faith of Jesus Christ,” it should mean more “the ‘pattern’ for our faith rather than the object of our faith.”⁴⁴ However, this interpretation places too much of a burden on Christ as an example in the redemptive process.

Paul now continues with the famous statement of this epistle, the condition of sinful human beings – “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” both Jews and Gentiles. This is the summary of what Paul has been arguing so far in 1:18-3:20. No one can claim to be righteous before God no matter how good they are. God’s glory is far more unattainable than any goodness of human beings could aspire to. The word δόξης in general can mean brightness, splendor or radiance. However, the concept has been enlarged to denote glory, majesty, and the sublimity of God in particular. However, Paul’s concept of δόξα is quite unique in his epistle, in that he drew the meaning from the LXX – where for human beings, it means honor, importance, prestige and for God it means a weighty or magnificent presence revealed in nature, tabernacle and the climax of history.⁴⁵ Moo thinks that this concept is closely related to the “magnificent presence of the Lord and the eternal state” which the people of God will experience in eternity.⁴⁶ Recalling the language of the fall, the lack of God’s glory (or presence) may be understood as definitive of the condition of sinful human beings. This

42. Campbell, *Rhetoric*, 204-13.

43. Campbell, *Rhetoric of*, 212.

44. Moo, *The Epistle*, 225; Cf. Cranfield who says that the genitive of Χριστοῦ expresses the object of faith (Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 203).

45. See Moo, *The Epistle*, 226.

46. Moo, *The Epistle*, 226; See also Isa 35:2; Rom. 8:18; Phil. 3:21 and 2 Thess. 2:14.

condition is not only applicable for those who do not believe the saving knowledge of the Christ but also for Christians as well.⁴⁷

Christ's Atoning Sacrifice is the "Source of God's Righteousness" (vv. 24-25a)

As noted by Moo, the connection of the previous verse and these two verses is not clear.⁴⁸ It seems that it does not add any new meaning to the passage as Paul's discussion continues through vv. 24 and 25. There are also several lexical problems in v. 24 alone. The first problem focuses on the participle *δικαιούμενοι* at the beginning of v. 24. Cranfield realizes this problem too and decides to take it as dependent on *πάντες* in v. 23.⁴⁹ By doing this, Paul actually makes "a substantial addition to the treatment of the main theme of the paragraph."⁵⁰ Furthermore, *δικαιούμενοι* "indicates not universality ('everybody') but lack of particularity ('anybody')."⁵¹ Campbell highlights the opinions of Bultmann and Käsemann as an alternative possible explanation.⁵² The participle functions as "a transition of Paul's free composition to the quotation of early church confessional material – perhaps a short creed, or something similar."⁵³ Dunn is definitely in favor of this opinion, although may be cautious in affirming it.⁵⁴

Furthermore, the status of the *δικαιούμενοι* still needs to be resolved because it is problematic. This is the first time Paul uses this word in this epistle to portray his understanding of the salvation in Jesus Christ.⁵⁵ Its root is in the verb *δικαίωω* which can be used in relationship to God and to human beings, although God's righteous-

47. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 203.

48. Moo, *The Epistle*, 227.

49. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 205.

50. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 205.

51. Moo, *The Epistle*, 227.

52. Campbell, *Rhetoric*, 27.

53. Campbell, *Rhetoric*.

54. Dunn, *Roman 1-8*.

55. This observation is supported by Moo (Moo, *The Epistle*, 227).

ness is always the origin of human righteousness.⁵⁶ The possible translations of this participle, δικαίουμενοι, fall between the forensic and the ethical understandings. Moo has convincingly demonstrated that, within this context, what Paul means is certainly not “to make righteous” (ethical meaning) nor “to treat as righteous” but “to declare righteous.”⁵⁷ He emphasizes that “‘to be justified’ means to be acquitted by God from all ‘charges’ that could be brought against a person because of his or her sins.”⁵⁸ Käsemann, following Barth, opts for a meaning where the “righteousness of God” must remain God’s, not humanity’s.⁵⁹ It is the saving activity of God to his people and his creation, as seen in his commitment to the covenant. We should maintain both ends of the appreciation of this concept, since God’s character cannot be separated from his saving action toward humanity in Jesus Christ.

Paul here, therefore, explains the mode of ‘being justified’ as being “freely by his grace.” The status of “being justified” can only be gained by faith and not by works or law. The word “freely” is based on the understanding that δωρεαν (“gift”) is being used adverbially.⁶⁰ Dunn emphasizes this in his translation, that the activity of being justified is a “free gift, without payment.”⁶¹ However, he acknowledges the difficulties in understanding χάρις, since the word is very vigorous. Following Jewish understanding of the Hebrew form of this concept, Dunn puts heavy weight of this word, in its relationship with the unconditional character of God as the covenant giver, and explaining δωρεαν.⁶² Moo, however, highlights χάρις, in not only portraying the

56. This example can be seen both in the OT and NT, and especially in Pauline understanding (see Rom 5:17 and 21).

57. Moo, *The Epistle*, 227.

58. Moo, *The Epistle*, 227.

59. Käsemann, *Commentary*, 96; See also the discussion of the righteousness of God in v. 21

60. Moo, *The Epistle*, 228.

61. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

62. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

character of God, but also in God's gracious action in Christ.⁶³ While God's action is based on grace, human beings should receive it by faith.

The following phrase, *δια της απολυτρωσεως*, explains the "costly means" of God's justification of sinners. The problem here in this verse concerns the uncommon word *απολυτρωσις*. The most common understanding of this word is "liberation through payment of a price."⁶⁴ The understandings 'redemption' or 'ransom' can be advanced to support a substitutionary conception of the atonement. Cranfield supports this position, although he thinks that the question must be left open.⁶⁵ The problem is that the word itself can be reckoned as "liberation" or "deliverance." According to Dunn and Moo, who studied this word in a Jewish context, it has a sense of ransoming a "captive or prisoner of war from slavery."⁶⁶ However, Cranfield renders this word simply as "deliverance" or "emancipation," although he realizes that this word in the LXX and classical Greek relates to the ransom idea.⁶⁷ In this verse, there is no doubt Paul alluded to the Old Testament, which conveys the meaning of this word in the series of actions of God in releasing his people from captivity in Egypt and again later from exile in Babylonia.⁶⁸ In Pauline understanding, the ransom must refer to Christ's sacrificial death on the cross as a payment made by God for all people because of the debt "owed" due to sin.⁶⁹ God is portrayed as the initiator of the ransom, while Christ's death on the cross is the ransom itself. The ransom is paid to God himself – not to Satan – who is the just judge.⁷⁰ According to Käsemann, then supported by Dunn, in Christian understanding, the meaning of the

63. Moo, *The Epistle*, 228.

64. Moo, *The Epistle*, 229.

65. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 206-8.

66. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* and Moo, *The Epistle*, 229.

67. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 206.

68. Observation done by Dunn (Dunn, *Romans 1-8*).

69. Moo, *The Epistle*, 229.

70. Moo, *The Epistle*, 230; Early Christian church believe that the ransom is paid by God to Satan (Moo, *The Epistle*, 230).

word is not referring to the unique event on the cross, but also to the ongoing life of believers.⁷¹ Cranfield is certain that the phrase *δια της απολυτρωσεως* is closely related to *δικαιουμενοι*, where the action of God redeems human beings from his wrath and condemnation – their unrighteous position before God.⁷² Moo, however, is not certain whether the word refers specifically to the event at the cross involving Jesus Christ or the ongoing life of believers.⁷³ Therefore, as commentators are varied in their opinion, according to this observation, the issue here is far from settled.

Furthermore, still in the same verse, Paul adds Christian understanding to the event and process of ransoming by his famous phrase *εν Χριστω Ιησου*. Dunn notes more than 80 times uses of this phrase in Pauline letters.⁷⁴ Moo observes two other instances where Paul specifically used the term ‘redemption in Christ Jesus: Ephesians 1:7 and Colossians 1:14.⁷⁵ Dunn believes that the phrase “in Christ” does not only refer to one unique act of Christ’s death and resurrection, but also the continuing significance in the life of believers.⁷⁶ The process of dying and rising in Christ has to be practiced in every circumstance of the believers’ life. However, Cranfield thinks that “in Christ” focuses specifically on the redeeming action of God through Jesus on the cross – a past action instead of the present union with Christ.⁷⁷

71. Käsemann, *Commentary*, 96. Dunn believes the notion of already and not yet in the word itself (Dunn, *Romans 1-8*)

72. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 208.

73. Moo, *The Epistle*, 230.

74. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

75. Moo, *The Epistle*, 230.

76. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

77. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 208.

The Atonement is Not Only a Source for Justification for Sinners but Also Shows God's 'Just-Ness' in the Whole Progression (vv. 25b-26)

In vv. 25-26, Paul now explains the character of the “redemption in Christ Jesus” that is initiated by God. Paul starts with a relative pronoun in the accusative on, instead of starting normally a new sentence. Cranfield thinks the pronoun is the link between verses 25 and 26 and the clause Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ in v. 24.⁷⁸ He regards vv. 25 and 26 as one relative clause “depending on Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.” Moo thinks that it would better to start a new sentence, since the focus here moves from “human reception of God’s justifying work to God’s initiative in providing for it.”⁷⁹ Murray argues thematically that these two verses start a new segment which explains our condition that God has justified us.⁸⁰ Whatever the opinion, it seems that the connection of vv. 25-26 to the rest of the verses in this pericope still remains vague.

The first verb in v. 25, προεθετο, is not certain in its meaning. This is one of the rare words that Paul used in his letters. Some translations choose a meaning of “designed” but others “displayed.” While Cranfield opts for the former, although with ‘little doubt’, Moo, in unison with Dunn, Käsemann and Sandy and Headlam opt for the latter.⁸¹ Moo’s and Dunn’s positions may be right, since the word may portray Christ’s shameful death as a public display of God’s propitiation,⁸² and in agreement with the context of the rest of the verse.

The dominant image in vv. 25-26 lies in the word *ἱλαστήριον*. Although this is another rare word used by Paul – the only other occurrence in NT is in Hebrews 9:5 but it appears 21 times in the LXX of Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers – it conveys a significant meaning in

78. Cranfield, *The Epistle*.

79. Moo, *The Epistle*, 230.

80. Murray, *The Epistle*, 116.

81. See Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 208; Moo, *The Epistle*, 231; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

82. Moo, *The Epistle*, 231; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

Pauline understanding of atonement.⁸³ There several issues at stake in discussing this word. Scholars question if this word is a specific allusion to “the mercy seat,” which is the axis of the annual Jewish Festival Day of Atonement (cf. Leviticus 16:2), or to a more general sacrificial term. They also probe whether the word means settling down an angry God because of the sins of humanity, or is meant to be read in the sense of cleansing.

Dunn and Moo have carefully considered whether this word may relate to the Old Testament’s mercy seat or the place of expiation, based on the testimonies of the LXX (especially Exodus 25 and Leviticus 16), NT (Hebrews 9:5), and extra Biblical citations of Philo.⁸⁴ In the Old Testament, on the Day of Atonement festival, the high priest enters in to the special room, “Holy of Holies,” and sprinkles the blood of the victim as *ἱλαστήριον* on the mercy seat. Paul’s usage of the Old Testament imagery may mean that he considers Jesus Christ as the “antitype” to the Old Testament atonement or to the place of the ritual itself – since the ritual was not public in the Old Testament, but now God has displayed publicly by Christ’s death on the cross.⁸⁵ The problem with this position is that Jesus cannot ‘easily be simultaneously the site of the offering and the offering itself.’⁸⁶

The alternative meaning of *ἱλαστήριον* as “the means of expiation” can be drawn from the ordinary sense of the Greek, the LXX of Genesis 6:16 and also from extra Biblical testimonies in 2 Maccabees 7:30-38 (the speech of the youngest of the seven martyr brothers), 4 Maccabees 6:27-29 (the prayer of Eleazar and the statement about the

83. There are debates whether the Christians in Romans may have understood this concept. However, this is ruled out by Käsemann and Moo with different reasons (see further Moo, *The Epistle*, 233; Käsemann, *Commentary*, 97).

84. See Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.; Moo, *The Epistle*, 232-40

85. Moo, *The Epistle*, 232; also affirmed by Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 214.

86. Käsemann, *Commentary*, 97.

seven), some Jewish writing on the “Binding of Isaac” and some writings of Josephus.⁸⁷ Paul may have been familiar with some of the extra Biblical writings in portraying the death of Christ as a victim of God’s righteous wrath. C. H. Dodd, quoted by Moo, agrees with this view, however he eliminates all the sense of appeasing God’s anger. According to the context of Romans 1-3 (see 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5), the wrath of God is clearly a common thesis and cannot be avoided in the meaning of *λασθηριον*.⁸⁸ Most scholars who choose this option translate *λασθηριον* in general as “means of atonement,” “atoning,” or “expiatory sacrifice.”⁸⁹ For example, Dunn thinks that it’s hard to make a clear distinction regarding which meaning is primary; however, “means of expiation” is his preferred option.⁹⁰ This is due to the weight he places on the association of Jesus’ blood with the sprinkling of the blood on the Day of the Atonement among the Jewish diaspora community.⁹¹ Furthermore, he associates this meaning with the extra Biblical evidence that relates this word to the death of the Jewish martyrs – hence it conveys the idea of a gift or sign of expiation.⁹² However, he also believes that “the wrath of God is somehow averted by Jesus’ death...but the passage also portrays God as offerer of the sacrifice rather than its object.”⁹³ Moo opts for this meaning although still retaining the translation as “sacrifice of atonement.”⁹⁴ In his opinion, the word should be taken symbolically – even though there is no reference to either Christian or Jewish Greek literatures on it – since

87. See Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 217; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*; According to Moo, this position is sounded by C. H. Dodd who translates “means of expiation” in 3:25 (Moo, *The Epistle*, 234).

88. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 216; Moo, *The Epistle*, 234-5.

89. Moo, *The Epistle*, 234.

90. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

91. Jesus’ death in the early tradition of Christians was not portrayed as bloody and horrific one (see Dunn, *Romans 1-8*)

92. See Käsemann, *Commentary*, 97 and Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

93. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

94. Moo, *The Epistle*, 236.

Christ's death is a sacrifice as portrayed by the mercy seat function in the Old Testament as the center of God's atonement for his people. The sensible translation of *ιλαστηριον* seems to be "expiation" with a sense of God's wrath being poured upon it. This biblical imagery is unique among all other pagan religions – where God offers even himself as the propitiatory offering because of his wrath against the sin of humanity.⁹⁵

There are several complex prepositional phrases that follow *ιλαστηριον*. Firstly, *δια πιστεως*, signifies the means by which we benefit from Jesus Christ as our "propitiation."⁹⁶ The clause can hardly be taken as modifying *προεθετο*, since faith is never a means by which God "placed beforehand" Christ as "propitiation."⁹⁷ Furthermore, Paul never takes *εν* together with *πιστις*.⁹⁸ "Faith" may be understood as God's covenant faithfulness in reaching out to sinful humanity.⁹⁹ Secondly, *εν τω αυτου αιματι*, is most likely modifies 'propitiation' rather than being an object of faith.¹⁰⁰ Yet the confidence of our salvation remains only through his blood. It is by shedding of Christ's blood that we have Christ as our *ιλαστηριον*.¹⁰¹ The third phrase explicates the purpose for which God placed beforehand Christ as the propitiation: *εις ενδειξιν της δικαιοσυνης αυτου δια την παρεσιν των προγεγονοτων αμαρτηματων εν τη ανοχη του θεου*.¹⁰² According to Moo, there are two possible translations based on the interpretations of the word *δικαιοσυνης*: 1) "in order to demonstrate [or show] that God is just, acting in accordance with his own character, [which was necessary] because he had passed over sins committed before, in the

95. Moo, *The Epistle*, 235; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

96. Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, 210; Moo, *The Epistle*, 236.

97. Moo, *The Epistle*, 236.

98. Käsemann, *Commentary*, 98.

99. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

100. Moo, *The Epistle*, 237.

101. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 210

102. On the discussion of the word *δικαιοσυνη*, see above (v. 21).

time of his forbearance” or 2) “in order to manifest his saving faithfulness through his forgiving of sins committed before, in the time of his forbearance.”¹⁰³ To choose the appropriate translation, the critical decision falls on the understanding of the phrase *δια την παρεσιν των προγεγονοτων αμαρτηματων*¹⁰⁴ If one understands *δικαιοσυνης* as God’s covenant faithfulness, then the translation should be “for the sake of the forgiveness of sins committed beforehand.”¹⁰⁵ The problem is that the word *παρεσιν* cannot mean “forgiveness” (*αφεσις*).¹⁰⁶ It is the word that conveys the meaning of “postponing” or “passing over” or “leaving unpunished” but not “overlooking” or “disregarding.”¹⁰⁷ However, it does not make sense when one says that *παρεσιν* is because of God’s saving faithfulness, since the meaning contradicts God’s righteousness as shown in his justness and mercy.¹⁰⁸ The other deciding factor is the meaning of *των προγεγονοτων αμαρτηματων*, which refers to the sins committed before Christ came to this world. The phrase conveys that God, in his ‘forbearance’ (*ειν τη ανοχη του θεου* – the first phrase of v. 26), “postpones” the full penalty of the sins committed before Christ came, so that sinners may stand before God with to face the sufficient demands of his holiness.¹⁰⁹ The first option of the translation may be

103. Moo, *The Epistle*, 237-8.

104. Moo, *The Epistle*, 238.

105. Moo, *The Epistle*, 238.

106. It is the only instance in the Greek Bible (Dunn, *Romans 1-8*)

107. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 211; Moo, *The Epistle*, 238; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

108. Although Cranfield discovers that the understanding of “God is holding back His wrath is familiar in Judaism.” (Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 211).

109. Moo, *The Epistle*, 240; Dunn still puzzles in regard to the function of the Old Covenant’s sacrifice: does the postponing mean that only Christ’s sacrificial death as the effective sacrifice? Or does it mean that OT sacrifices as effective but no longer needed by the death of Christ? (see Dunn, *Romans 1-8*).

adopted as long as δικαιοσύνης is reckoned as the consistency of God's acting to his own character.¹¹⁰

All of these phrases are connected by two purpose clauses in v. 26, προς την ενδειξιν της δικαιοσύνης αυτου εν τω νυν καιρω and εις το ειναι αυτον δικαιον. This first clause signifies that all of those demonstrations of God's righteousness – in the death of Jesus Christ – are not only for the past time but also for the present time.¹¹¹ Dunn is right in suggesting that εν τω νυν καιρω does not only signify a particular time, but a period of time – the period between the death and resurrection of Christ and his second coming – where the promises are being realized but not yet completely received.¹¹² The second purpose clause is translated: “in order he might be just righteous” but not “in order he might show that he is righteous.”¹¹³ Paul here does not present that God shows that he's righteous but God himself is righteous.¹¹⁴ Moo and Cranfield rightly take the relationship to be “concessive” which translates the phrase “righteous even in justifying,”¹¹⁵ while Dunn thinks that God has taken action according to the covenant obligation in Jesus to open up to a wider acceptance to the faith in Jesus.¹¹⁶ God, who is righteous, exercised his righteousness even when he justified sinful human beings. Only Christ satisfied the demand of God's justice. The connection to the previous phrases is not clear, whether to the beginning of v. 25 or v. 26.¹¹⁷ However, the

110. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 211; Moo, *The Epistle*, 240.

111. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 211; Moo, *The Epistle*, 241; Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

112. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*; Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 212.

113. Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 213.

114. Cranfield, *The Epistle*.

115. Moo, *The Epistle*, 242; Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 213

116. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

117. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*.

immediate context of v. 26 seems to make the link clearer – when taken as parallel instead of dependent.¹¹⁸

An Observation of Δικαιοσύνη in the Light of the Purpose of Romans

The purpose of Romans has admittedly been very obscure in comparison with any other Pauline letters.¹¹⁹ However, since other letters of the apostle were written out of the demands of complex situations, so is Romans.¹²⁰ Therefore, there must be a purpose to this letter. There are three main opinions as to the purpose of Romans: 1) Theological – this is out of the apostle’s desire to explain his gospel and theological stand; 2) Missionary – this is driven from Paul’s own vision to expand his ministry abroad; and 3) Pastoral – to give pastoral advice to correct error – both doctrinal and practical – in the church of Rome.¹²¹

Discovering a theme or a content of Romans may be a pre-requisite for determining the purpose of Romans.¹²² For most of the reformers, the theme of “justification by faith” dominates the letter to Romans, at least the first five chapters of it.¹²³ Therefore, most of the earlier commentators think that the purpose of Romans was to lay out an apologetic for the doctrine of justification by faith – which can be adopted in a form of circular letter.¹²⁴ Some modern commentators,

118. Moo, *The Epistle*, 241; Cranfield does not really bother whether the relationship to be parallel or dependent (Cranfield, *The Epistle*, 213).

119. L. Ann Jervis. *The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation*, Journal of the study of the New Testament Supplement Series 55 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 11.

120. Baur, as quoted by Jervis, *The purpose*, 12.

121. Jervis, *The purpose*, 14.

122. Confirmed by Jervis, *The Purpose*, 27.

123. Certainly for Luther, however, Calvin acknowledges only the first five chapters (see Moo, *The Epistle*, 23).

124. In the modern era, Karl Barth subscribed to this position; This letter might also read in three other churches: Ephesus, Thessalonica and an unknown church.

such as Käsemann, also agreed with this position, however, the theme should be more general, “righteousness of God.”¹²⁵ He explains that the righteousness of God refers to the power by which the creator’s right over his creation is expressed.¹²⁶ However, any proposed theological purpose was only based on the first eleven chapters of Romans. There are other themes developed such as the doctrinal battle against Judaizers, union with Christ, the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God, and specifics related to the congregation of Rome.¹²⁷ Therefore, to select a particular theme of this letter is challenging, since the letter is so complex and the issues are so broad. In some cases, those who think that the purpose of Romans is missionary, rest their argument only on a small portion at the end of Romans. For example, Jewett, one of the proponents of this view, interestingly observes that the phrase “for all who believe” (v. 22) signifies the evident of missionary purpose.¹²⁸ The most general approach so far has been the pastoral one – since Romans is so theologically complex and doctrinally loaded, then Paul must be addressing issues then current in Rome.

Paul’s purpose in writing Romans may well be about the Gospel.¹²⁹ Its purpose is clearly to evangelize or preach the gospel to Roman believers by letter – since he himself has never been in Rome. This is evident at both the beginning and the end of Romans as they function as a frame. The theme rests on 1:16-17: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel...”¹³⁰ These factors overarch the other themes mentioned above. It is the extraction of Paul’s gospel, as he evangelizes to the Jews and Gentiles.

125. Moo, *The Epistle*, 23.

126. See Jewett, *Romans*, 272; Moo, *The Epistle*, 23.

127. Moo, *The Epistle*, 23.

128. Jewett, *Romans*, 271.

129. Moo, *The Epistle*, 29; Jervis, *The Purpose*, 164.

130. Moo, *The Epistle*, 29.

Therefore, the relationship between δικαιοσύνη and the purpose of Romans lies in the meaning of δικαιοσύνη and its relationship to the Gospel. The exegesis of Romans 3:21-26 demonstrates that δικαιοσύνη cannot be removed from the understanding of the Gospel, which is God's righteousness shown in the sacrificial death of Jesus, to save sinful humanity from the wages of sin and to be received only by faith. "The righteousness of God" is seen both in relation to God's saving activity through Jesus Christ, and to God's judging act, because of the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews. When we understand this relationship to the Gospel, we see the significance of δικαιοσύνη to the purpose of Romans.