

In verses 24 and 25 Paul tells us where the basis for our justification lies. In verse 24 he says that sinners are declared righteous through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. The word "redemption" carries the idea that Christ has purchased us out of our slavery to sin. And in verse 25 Paul says that God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement. The word "atonement" carries the idea that Christ made reparation or payment for the offense of our sins.

The terms "redemption" and "atonement" are used in the NIV. Other versions use such terms as "propitiation," "expiation," and "satisfaction."

Christ propitiated God with respect to our guilt (our liability to the transgressed law). Thus He appeased the wrath of God. As a result, God can be propitious or favorable to us and can both graciously and justly declare us righteous.

Christ also expiated all of the guilt and penalty of our sin, took it all on Himself and exhausted it. He paid the full penalty of our sin.

Christ also satisfied all of the requirements of the law of God by offering Himself as a sacrifice on our behalf.

In verse 25 Paul also says that God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood. The benefits of Christ's atoning work, wonderful as they are, become ours only through trusting in Him and His saving work.

In verses 25b and 26 we discover that Christ's atonement demonstrated God's righteousness. This is the first of the four meanings of "the righteousness of God," God's characteristic or attribute of righteousness. How did Christ's atonement demonstrate God's righteousness?

During the time from Adam to Christ it had looked as though God permitted people's sins to go unpunished. Although there were sacrifices for sin throughout this period, it must have been obvious to the worshipper who thought about it that the blood of lambs and bulls and goats could not take away sin permanently or even temporarily. For one thing, the worshipper had to keep on offering that blood again and again, and for another, the blood of animals was not valuable enough in itself to take away human sin.

Thus these sacrifices looked forward to and anticipated a perfect, complete sacrifice which would be valuable enough to atone for human sin once for all. Christ's atonement displayed God's punishment for sin (both past and future sin), and thus demonstrated God's righteousness and justice.