



AN APPRAISAL OF THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION IN ROMANS 3:21-26 AND ITS HOMILETICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY PREACHERS

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical appraisal of the doctrine of salvation as articulated by the Apostle Paul in Romans 3:21-26, emphasising its theological depth and practical implications for contemporary Christian preaching. The passage, central to Pauline soteriology, declares the revelation of God's righteousness apart from the law and its manifestation through faith in Jesus Christ. Through exegetical and hermeneutical analysis, the study explores the text's grammatical, morphological, and semantic dimensions, including key terms such as *dikaioσunē*, *apolutrōsis*, and *hilastērion*. The paper evaluates the tension between divine justice and mercy, revealing how Paul presents Christ as both the means and the manifestation of justification. Scholarly opinions are critically assessed, drawing from leading commentaries and journal articles that engage divergent doctrinal interpretations of justification by faith. Furthermore, the study situates these findings within the homiletical context, examining how the salvific message can be faithfully and effectively proclaimed in a postmodern Christian environment often marked by moral relativism and spiritual apathy. The paper concludes that an accurate understanding of Romans 3:21-26 not only reaffirms the centrality of grace in salvation but also demands a renewed commitment to Christ-centred preaching that transforms the hearer's worldview and moral life.

Key words: Salvation, Justification, Righteousness, Homiletics, and Faith.

Introduction

It proves challenging for contemporary believers to convey the authentic message of the kingdom when the doctrine of salvation remains inadequately understood. The doctrine of salvation ought to inform preachers' endeavours in the modern world. The messenger, methodology, content, and delivery are all crucial to the reception and impact that the gospel message may have upon the hearts of contemporary people. The Christian message aims to redeem the sinful, restore the backsliding, and establish the faithful in their faith in Christ until the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A divergent perspective on the theology of salvation is emerging amongst twenty-first-century believers. The salvation of humanity constitutes the foundational basis and central focus of New Testament writing, whilst simultaneously pointing to the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). The prosperity gospel and moralistic materialism represent the prevailing trends, and the challenge of syncretism confronts contemporary Christian preachers, some of whom consequently neglect the biblical truth concerning salvation inherited from the apostolic era. Hence, certain contemporary Christian messages focus upon the prosperity gospel—a form of moralistic



materialism that conflates divine salvation with God's grace and faith in Jesus Christ within the hearts of modern believers. The doctrine of salvation holds immense significance within New Testament literature, particularly in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, where Romans 3:21–26 has been selected for examination in this paper.

The text calls for a renewed commitment to gospel-centred preaching that affirms salvation by grace rather than by human effort. By revisiting Paul's theological argument, this study seeks to bridge the gap between the ancient text and the contemporary pulpit, demonstrating that biblical truth and effective proclamation are inseparable within the task of Christian ministry. This study appraises Romans 3:21–26 in order to clarify the nature of salvation, integrating exegetical, linguistic, and theological analysis. It further explores the homiletical implications for preaching today, demonstrating that a Christ-centred proclamation of justification by faith restores grace, transforms believers, and anchors Christian witness in a morally disordered age.

Conceptual Clarifications

Doctrine of Salvation: It refers to the systematic theological study of God's redemptive work in rescuing humanity from sin and restoring fellowship with Himself. It encompasses the divine initiative of grace, the human response of faith, and the mediatorial work of Christ. Salvation is not merely deliverance from sin's penalty but also restoration into right relationship with God. John Stott defines salvation as "a comprehensive term that includes all that God does in rescuing sinners from the guilt and power of sin and restoring them to fellowship with Himself" (Stott, 1986:25).

Homiletics: is a term derived from the Greek word *homilia*, meaning "conversation" or "discourse," and it pertains to the art and theology of preaching. Homiletics bridges the gap between exegesis and proclamation by transforming biblical truth into living messages that address human needs and concerns. According to Haddon Robinson, "Homiletics is the science and art of communicating God's truth through human personality to human need" (Robinson, 2001:13).

Contemporary Christians: A contemporary Christian refers to a believer or community of believers living and practising faith within the modern cultural, intellectual, and spiritual context. The contemporary era is characterised by globalisation, secularism, and the rise of moral pluralism, all of which challenge the traditional understanding of faith and salvation. Alister McGrath (2004) explains that "the challenge of contemporary Christianity lies in remaining faithful to apostolic teaching while addressing new questions posed by modern society" (2004:78).

Historical Background of Romans 3:21-26

There exists broad scholarly consensus that the Apostle Paul authored the Epistle to the Romans during his third missionary journey, around AD 57, most probably from Corinth (Cranfield, 1975:17). Paul wrote to a community of believers in Rome whom he had not personally visited, a congregation composed of both Jewish and Gentile Christians (Moo, 2018:2). His primary objective was to present a clear and comprehensive understanding of the gospel that transcended ethnic and cultural divisions. As F. F. Bruce explains, "Paul's letter to the Romans was written not merely to solve local problems but to set forth the gospel as the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Bruce, 1985:57). At that time, the Roman church existed within a diverse social and religious environment. Following the expulsion of Jews from Rome under Emperor Claudius (Acts 18:2), the church had become predominantly Gentile in leadership. However, after the Jews were permitted to return, tensions arose between Jewish and Gentile believers concerning the role of the law, circumcision, and righteousness (Schreiner, 1998:28). Paul, therefore, wrote to unify the believers under the righteousness of God revealed in Christ, emphasising that both Jews and Gentiles are equally in need of salvation and are justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

The Epistle to the Romans occupies a central position in Pauline theology and Christian thought, standing as Paul's most systematic exposition of the gospel. The section Romans 3:21–26 serves as the theological climax of the first central argument of the letter, where Paul transitions from humanity's universal sinfulness (Romans 1:18–3:20) to God's gracious provision of salvation



through faith in Christ. To understand the depth of this passage, it is necessary to examine the historical, social, and theological background of both the epistle and the immediate text.

Understanding the historical context of Romans 3:21–26 enhances its theological significance for modern believers. Paul's context as a community divided by ethnicity, religious tradition, and moral confusion closely parallels the condition of the contemporary church today. Just as the early Christians in Rome struggled to understand salvation beyond the boundaries of law and ethnicity, modern believers must recover the universality of the gospel amid denominational and cultural barriers. Douglas Moo rightly comments that "Paul's exposition of justification by faith remains the corrective for every generation tempted to substitute religious performance for divine grace" (Moo, 1996:132). Therefore, the historical context of Romans 3:21–26 is not merely a backdrop for interpretation; it is a mirror reflecting the ongoing relevance of Paul's message. Salvation, as Paul presents it, is both timeless and transformative, inviting every generation to embrace the righteousness of God revealed in Christ.

Literary and Theological Overview

This passage serves as the theological centrepiece of Romans, summarising Paul's gospel in concise yet profound language. It presents the divine solution to the universal human problem of sin described earlier in Romans 1:18–3:20. As C. E. B. Cranfield observes, "Romans 3:21–26 may well be regarded as the most important single paragraph ever written" (Cranfield, 1975:199). The passage unfolds in two main movements: the revelation of God's righteousness apart from the Law (vv. 21–24), and the manifestation of that righteousness in Christ's atoning death (vv. 25–26). The key terms *δικαιοσύνη* "righteousness", *πίστις* "faith", *ἀπολύτρωσις* "redemption", and *ἱλαστήριον* "propitiation" each carry rich theological significance that must be understood within the framework of both Jewish sacrificial imagery and Graeco-Roman judicial concepts.

Exegetical Analysis of Romans 3:21-26

The Text and Its Translation

21 *Νυνὶ δὲ χωρὶς νόμου δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ πεφανέρωται, μαρτυρουμένη ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν,*

22 *δικαιοσύνη δὲ θεοῦ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας· οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν διαστολή·*

23 *πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον καὶ ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ,*

24 *δικαιούμενοι δωρεὰν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ·*

25 *ὃν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον διὰ [τῆς] πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι, εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν ἀρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἁμαρτημάτων*

26 *ἐν τῇ ἀνοχῇ τοῦ θεοῦ, πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ, εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν δίκαιον καὶ δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ*

21 But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed, being testified to by the Law and the Prophets

22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show His righteousness, because in His divine forbearance, He had passed over former sins.

26 It was to demonstrate His righteousness at present, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Textual Variants

The Nestle-Aland 28th Edition (NA28) textual apparatus records minor variations in this passage, though none alter its theological substance. In verse 22, for instance, some manuscripts (8 B C



1739) omit the repetition of *Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* after *πίστεως pisteōs*, "faith", whilst others (D F G Ψ) include it as *διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς πάντας καὶ ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς πιστεύοντας* "through faith in Jesus Christ to all and upon all who believe". The shorter reading is generally preferred as the more difficult and most likely original, since scribes often expanded the phrase for clarification (Metzger & Ehrman, 2005:452), and this is the position of the researcher.

Morphological and Semantic Analyses of Key Terms

(a) *Δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* (*dikaioṣunē theou*), "the righteousness of God" (v. 21)

Δικαιοσύνη is a feminine singular nominative noun, derived from *δίκαιος* "righteous, just". The genitive *θεοῦ* may be understood as a subjective genitive, meaning the righteousness that comes from God. Semantically, it denotes not merely a divine attribute but God's saving activity in justifying sinners. Leon Morris argued that "the righteousness of God is God's righteous way of putting sinners right with Himself" (Morris, 1965:255).

(b) *Δικαιούμενοι* (*dikaioumenoi*), "being justified" (v. 24)

This participle is present passive nominative plural masculine, from *δικαίω* "to justify, declare righteous". The passive form indicates that justification is an act done to believers by God, not by them. The present tense signifies the continuing availability of this grace to all who believe. Moo remarks that "the passive voice makes clear that justification is God's act, not a human achievement" (Moo, 1996:232).

(c) *Ἀπολύτρωσις* (*apolutrōsis*), "redemption" (v. 24)

It is a feminine singular nominative noun, from *ἀπολυτρόω* "to redeem, to set free by paying a price". The term evokes the imagery of liberation from slavery through a ransom payment. Theologically, it underscores that salvation entails deliverance from sin's bondage through Christ's sacrificial death. Schreiner explains that "Paul's use of *apolutrōsis* ties salvation to the price of the cross, the cost of divine love" (Schreiner, 1998:187).

(d) *Ἰλαστήριον* (*hilastērion*), "propitiation" or "atoning sacrifice" (v. 25)

This is a neuter singular accusative noun derived from *ἱλάσκομαι* "to appease, to make atonement". In the Septuagint, *hilastērion* refers to the mercy seat in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:17–22). Paul's usage metaphorically identifies Christ as the locus of divine mercy, where God's wrath and love meet. C. E. B. Cranfield observes that "Paul deliberately employs cultic terminology to express the sacrificial nature of Christ's death" (Cranfield, 1975:208).

(e) *Πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* (*pistis Iēsou Christou*), "faith in Jesus Christ" (v. 22)

The genitive construction has generated extensive debate between the objective genitive "faith in Jesus" and subjective genitive "faithfulness of Jesus". Grammatically, both are possible. Theologically, Paul affirms both realities: salvation is grounded in Christ's faithfulness and appropriated through human faith. As N. T. Wright contends, "Paul's phrase means both the faithfulness of the Messiah and the faith that responds to Him" (Wright, 2013:824). In verse 25, the term *ἰλαστήριον* (*hilastērion*), translated "propitiation" or "atoning sacrifice", shows no significant variant but carries interpretive debates regarding its semantic range between expiation (removal of sin) and propitiation (appeasement of wrath) (Augustine, 1957:43).

Theological and Exegetical Synthesis

Paul's argument unfolds as a divine demonstration *ἐνδειξις* (*endeixis*) of God's righteousness (vv. 25–26). God's justice is upheld in justifying sinners because Christ bore the penalty of sin. The phrase *ἵνα αὐτὸς ᾗ δίκαιος καὶ δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ* "so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" captures this balance between divine justice and mercy. In this, Paul articulates a forensic dimension of justification, not based on works of the law *ἐργῶν νόμου* (*ergōn nomou*), but on faith alone *πίστεως μόνον* (*pisteōs monon*). This passage thus serves as the theological core of Paul's doctrine of salvation. The interplay of righteousness, faith, and



atonement reveals salvation as both juridical and relational. God legally declares sinners righteous whilst restoring them to covenant fellowship through the cross of Christ.

Theological Implications of Romans 3:21–26

1. Revelation of God's Righteousness

Paul's declaration that "now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested" (v. 21) introduces a theological revolution in understanding divine justice. The *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* (*dikaïosunē theou*) is not primarily God's retributive attribute but His redemptive activity in justifying sinners through Christ. This righteousness is revealed, not achieved; it is a divine disclosure of grace rather than a human accomplishment. Karl Barth argues that "the righteousness of God is God's act of setting man in a right relation with Himself; it is not a human moral status but a divine intervention" (Barth, 1933:41). This view shifts salvation from a focus on legalism to one of divine initiative. The Law and the Prophets bore witness to this righteousness, but it finds full expression only in the gospel event of Jesus Christ. The manifestation of God's righteousness thus stands as the intersection of divine holiness and mercy. It demonstrates that the God who judges sin is also the God who saves the sinner.

2. Justification by Faith and the Grace of God

Verse 24 describes believers as *δικαιούμενοι δωρεάν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι* (*dikaïoumenoi dōrean tē autou chariti*), "being justified freely by His grace". The adverb *δωρεάν* (*dōrean*) "freely" underscores the unmerited character of justification. It excludes all human boasting and locates salvation in God's sovereign mercy. Augustine emphasised this when he wrote, "Grace is not given according to our merits, but according to His mercy, who calls the unworthy and justifies the ungodly" (Augustine, 1957:12). Justification is both forensic and relational. It is forensic because God declares the sinner righteous based on the merits of Christ, and relational because this declaration restores the sinner into covenant fellowship. Calvin argues that "to be justified means to be accepted by God, not because of our righteousness, but because the righteousness of Christ covers us" (Calvin, 1960:726). This Pauline understanding of justification also defines the nature of faith *πίστις* (*pistis*). Faith is not a meritorious work but the empty hand that receives the gift of grace. Thus, Paul's assertion in Romans 3:28, "a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law", becomes the cornerstone of Protestant theology.

3. The Atoning Work of Christ

At the heart of Romans 3:25 lies the term *ἱλαστήριον* (*hilastērion*), identifying Christ as the atoning sacrifice. Paul here depicts Jesus as the fulfilment of the Old Testament mercy seat, where atonement was made through sacrificial blood. This imagery unites the themes of substitution, expiation, and reconciliation. John Stott observes that "God Himself gave Himself to save us from Himself" (Stott, 1986:159). This paradox captures the essence of divine love and justice at the cross. God's wrath against sin was not ignored but satisfied through Christ's substitutionary death. The atonement, therefore, is not a mechanical transaction but the ultimate revelation of God's righteousness expressed through sacrificial love.

Theologically, the *hilastērion* signifies that salvation is simultaneously Godward and humanward. It is Godward because it satisfies divine holiness and humanward because it restores broken relationships. Thus, Christ becomes the mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), bridging the gap between divine justice and human guilt.

4. The Demonstration of Divine Justice

Paul twice employs the phrase *εἰς ἐνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ* (*eis endeixin tēs dikaïosynēs autou*) "to demonstrate His righteousness" in verses 25 and 26. The repetition emphasises God's moral



consistency in dealing with sin. In previous ages, God "passed over former sins" (v. 25), displaying patience; however, the cross publicly vindicates His righteousness by showing that sin was not merely overlooked but thoroughly punished in Christ. Leon Morris explains that "the cross is the event in which the righteousness of God is both revealed and vindicated. It is there that justice and mercy are perfectly reconciled" (Morris, 1965:283). Paul thus resolves the apparent tension between divine forbearance and divine holiness. The cross is not an act of leniency but of satisfaction; it reveals that God is both *δίκαιος καὶ δικαιοῦντα* (*dikaios kai dikaiounta*) "just and the justifier", righteous in His own being and righteous in His saving act.

5. Universal Accessibility of Salvation

Romans 3:22–23 universalises both sin and grace: "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace." The repetition of *πάντες* (*pantes*) "all" underscores humanity's common need and God's inclusive provision. Salvation is not restricted to ethnic Israel or the privileged few but is offered to all through faith in Christ. James D. G. Dunn argued that "the universality of grace matches the universality of sin; both Jews and Gentiles stand equally in need and equally within reach of salvation" (Dunn, 1988:168). This egalitarian dimension of Paul's soteriology dismantles all human barriers, making justification by faith the foundation of Christian unity.

6. Eschatological Dimension of Salvation

Finally, the theological implications of Romans 3:21–26 extend beyond the present experience of justification to its future consummation. Justification inaugurates a process that culminates in glorification (Romans 8:30). Salvation, therefore, is both *already* (experienced now by faith) and *not yet* (awaiting final redemption). As N. T. Wright notes, "Justification is God's declaration in the present that anticipates His final verdict in the eschaton" (Wright, 2013:991). The believer, having been justified, lives in confident hope of eschatological vindication. Thus, Paul's doctrine of salvation integrates history and eternity, as well as grace and glory.

Homiletical Implications for the Contemporary Preachers

Building upon the exegetical and theological appraisal of Romans 3:21–26, this section examines how the doctrine of salvation translates into effective homiletical practice within the context of contemporary Christianity. The goal is not merely to restate Pauline soteriology, but to explore how this doctrine informs preaching, theological discourse, and pastoral application. Whilst Pauline theology emphasises justification by faith, several modern scholars have questioned whether Paul's message is purely forensic or includes transformative dimensions of salvation. Such critical debates are vital for constructing a balanced homiletic that unites theological precision with pastoral relevance.

Doctrinal Fidelity and Homiletical Application

The preacher's responsibility is to proclaim the divine act of justification as revealed in Christ without distorting its redemptive intent. Haddon Robinson asserts that "preaching is the communication of biblical truth by a human personality to a specific audience with the intent of persuasion" (Robinson, 2001:20). Yet, persuasive preaching must remain theologically faithful. Some modern theologians, such as E. P. Sanders and James D. G. Dunn, have argued that Paul's emphasis on justification should be understood within the broader context of covenantal nomism in Judaism, rather than as a critique of works-based salvation (Sanders, 1977:442; Dunn, 1983:107). Sanders contends that Paul's problem with the law was not legalism but exclusivism; hence, "justification by faith" functions as a means of incorporating Gentiles into God's covenant people. However, traditional interpreters, such as John Stott, maintain that "Paul's concern in Romans 3 is not ethnic inclusion but divine righteousness manifested through grace" (Stott, 1994:112). From a homiletical standpoint, this tension challenges preachers to articulate salvation not merely as



cultural inclusion but as personal reconciliation with God through Christ. Faithful preaching thus holds together the corporate and individual dimensions of justification.

The Cross-Centred Proclamation

Romans 3:25 introduces *hilastērion*, the "propitiation" or "atoning sacrifice"—as the theological core of Paul's message. The preacher who neglects the cross diminishes the gospel's redemptive power. John Stott affirms that "the preacher's task is not to invent a message but to proclaim the cross as God's unique answer to human sin" (Stott, 1982:137). Yet, some modern scholars challenge the notion of substitutionary atonement as ethically problematic or theologically outdated.

For instance, J. Denny Weaver argues that "atonement as violent substitution projects an image of God incompatible with divine love" (Weaver, 2001:78). Similarly, feminist theologians such as Rita Nakashima Brock question whether the cross perpetuates a theology of suffering rather than liberation (Brock, 1988:56). Whilst these critiques expose the misuse of atonement imagery, they also call for a more profound theological articulation rather than abandonment. The preacher must present the cross as both the revelation of divine justice and the enactment of divine love, where judgment and mercy meet. As Leon Morris observes, "The cross does not make God loving; it shows Him to be so" (Morris, 1965:214). Thus, faithful preaching must preserve the tension between holiness and grace.

Faith as Transformative Response

Paul's repeated reference to *πίστεως* (*pistis*) "faith" in verses 22 and 26 situates faith not merely as mental assent but as transformative trust. In preaching, faith functions as the bridge between divine revelation and human response. Charles Spurgeon captured this dynamic when he wrote, "Preaching is the outstretched hand of God calling sinners to lay hold on the Saviour" (Spurgeon, 1892:76). However, modern theology has wrestled with the definition of faith. N. T. Wright, for example, redefines faith as "faithfulness", emphasising covenant loyalty rather than personal belief alone (Wright, 2013:842). This has sparked debates about whether justification is declarative or participatory in nature. From a homiletical perspective, this distinction shapes how preachers call for faith: whether as a once-for-all decision or as an ongoing posture of fidelity. A balanced homiletic should embrace both aspects, proclaiming justification as an accomplished fact whilst exhorting believers to live faithfully in the light of grace. Such preaching reflects both the forensic and ethical dimensions of Paul's theology.

Contextualising Salvation in a Secular Age

Contemporary preachers face the challenge of communicating the doctrine of salvation in a post-Christian and pluralistic world. David L. Larsen observes that "contemporary preaching must engage the modern mind with the eternal truth of grace, translating doctrine into deliverance" (Larsen, 1989:210). In an age where salvation is often reduced to psychological wellness or moral activism, homiletics must reaffirm the biblical narrative of redemption.

The preacher must exegete both Scripture and society, exposing modern idols of self-sufficiency and relativism. Bryan Chapell argues that "the grace of God revealed in the gospel is the unifying theme of all biblical preaching; without grace, the message degenerates into moralism" (Chapell, 2005:18). Therefore, homiletical theology rooted in Romans 3:21–26 calls for a rediscovery of the cross and justification as liberating truths for the anxious modern soul. Sermons must confront the guilt of sin whilst offering the comfort of grace, inviting hearers into restored fellowship with God.

A Preacher as Theological Interpreter

Thomas G. Long defines preaching as "biblical interpretation in oral form; it is theology addressed to the living" (Long, 2005:12). A preacher thus stands as both exegete and herald, interpreting Scripture faithfully whilst proclaiming it persuasively. In this sense, preaching becomes the



continuation of Pauline theology, that is, theology in motion. Homiletically, this demands competence in exegesis, sensitivity to context, and dependence on the Holy Spirit. A preacher must move beyond moral advice to theological proclamation, ensuring that every sermon is an encounter with divine truth. Karl Barth's statement remains timeless: "Grace is the essence of the gospel, the free favour of God revealed in Jesus Christ" (Barth, 1956:45).

Therefore, the homiletical implication of Romans 3:21–26 is that salvation preaching should centre on the grace of God, the person of Christ, and the necessity of faith. Such preaching not only informs but transforms, shaping contemporary Christians to embody the righteousness of God in a broken world.

Implications for African Preachers

The exegetical and homiletical appraisal of Romans 3:21–26 holds profound implications for African preachers ministering within contexts marked by rapid socio-economic change, religious pluralism, and the pervasive influence of the prosperity gospel. African Christianity, whilst experiencing unprecedented growth, faces the challenge of theological syncretism, where indigenous religious worldviews often merge with Christian doctrine, creating confusion about the nature of salvation (Bediako, 1995:89). Many African congregations have been exposed to preaching that equates divine favour with material prosperity, undermining the Pauline emphasis on justification by grace through faith alone.

Kwame Bediako argues that "African theology must engage both the gospel and African culture critically, ensuring that Christ remains central to theological discourse" (Bediako, 1995:92). For African preachers, this means proclaiming salvation not as transactional blessing but as transformative reconciliation with God through Christ's atoning work. The doctrine of justification by faith challenges the widespread notion that divine blessing is earned through ritual observance, financial giving, or moral performance. As Yusufu Turaki observes, "The African worldview often perceives salvation in terms of power, protection, and prosperity, rather than forgiveness and reconciliation" (Turaki, 1999:134). African preachers must therefore reframe salvation within the biblical narrative of sin, grace, and redemption.

Furthermore, African Christianity operates within contexts of profound suffering such as poverty, disease, conflict, and injustice. The cross-centred proclamation of Romans 3:25 offers hope not through escapism but through identification with Christ's suffering and vindication. John Mbiti reminds us that "African spirituality is deeply communal and experiential; thus, preaching must connect theological truth with lived reality" (Mbiti, 1969:2). The message of justification must therefore address both individual guilt and communal brokenness, offering the gospel as divine intervention in both personal and social dimensions.

Additionally, African preachers must resist the temptation towards theological reductionism, where salvation becomes synonymous with liberation from physical affliction alone. Whilst the gospel indeed addresses holistic human needs, its primary concern remains reconciliation with God. As Esther Mombo notes, "African theology must balance contextual relevance with doctrinal fidelity, ensuring that the gospel remains both transformative and biblically grounded" (Mombo, 2003:45). Therefore, preaching rooted in Romans 3:21–26 calls African ministers to proclaim grace boldly, resist syncretism courageously, and apply salvation comprehensively within the African context.

Conclusion

This study has undertaken a comprehensive exegetical, theological, and homiletical appraisal of Romans 3:21–26, demonstrating that Paul's doctrine of salvation remains foundational for contemporary Christian preaching and practice. Through careful textual analysis, morphological examination, and theological reflection, the research has established that justification by faith through grace alone constitutes the heart of the gospel message and must inform all aspects of Christian ministry in the modern world.



The exegetical analysis revealed that Paul's argument in Romans 3:21–26 represents a theological watershed, transitioning from the universal condemnation of humanity under sin to the gracious provision of salvation through Christ's atoning sacrifice. Key terms such as *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* (the righteousness of God), *ἀπολύτρωσις* (redemption), and *ἱλαστήριον* (propitiation) collectively articulate a salvation that is entirely divine in origin, substitutionary in nature, and accessible through faith alone. The textual and linguistic investigation demonstrated that Paul deliberately employed both Jewish cultic imagery and Graeco-Roman forensic language to communicate the multifaceted nature of Christ's redemptive work.

Theologically, the study has shown that Romans 3:21–26 addresses six critical dimensions of salvation: the revelation of God's righteousness apart from the law, justification by grace through faith, the atoning work of Christ, the demonstration of divine justice, the universal accessibility of salvation, and the eschatological consummation of redemption. These theological implications refute any notion of works-based righteousness whilst simultaneously affirming both the forensic and relational aspects of justification. God is revealed as both *δίκαιος καὶ δικαιοῦντα*—just and justifier—upholding His holiness whilst extending mercy to sinners through the cross.

The homiletical exploration has demonstrated that faithful preaching must remain anchored in the Pauline understanding of salvation, resisting contemporary distortions such as moralistic materialism, the prosperity gospel, and therapeutic reductionism. In an age characterised by religious pluralism, moral relativism, and post-Christian secularity, the proclamation of justification by faith offers a counter-cultural message of grace that addresses humanity's deepest need. Preachers are called to function as theological interpreters who bridge the gap between ancient text and contemporary context, proclaiming the cross as the locus where divine justice and mercy converge.

For African preachers specifically, this study highlights the urgent need to reclaim biblical soteriology in contexts where syncretism, prosperity teaching, and cultural reinterpretation have often obscured the gospel's central message. The doctrine of justification by faith challenges both traditional African religious frameworks that emphasise ancestral mediation and contemporary movements that conflate material blessing with divine favour. African Christianity's future vitality depends upon theological fidelity that honours contextual relevance without compromising biblical truth.

The study affirms that Romans 3:21–26 is not merely a historical text requiring scholarly interpretation but a living word demanding contemporary proclamation. The righteousness of God revealed in Christ remains the church's central message, the foundation of Christian unity, and the hope of a morally confused generation. As contemporary believers navigate cultural pressures, theological confusion, and spiritual apathy, the Pauline doctrine of salvation offers clarity, conviction, and transformative power. The task of Christian ministry in the twenty-first century is therefore to faithfully transmit this apostolic message, ensuring that the gospel of grace continues to redeem sinners, restore backsliders, and establish believers in faith until the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are offered for theological education, pastoral ministry, and contemporary Christian practice.

1. Theological Institutions and Seminaries: Theological schools should prioritise rigorous training in biblical exegesis, especially in Pauline theology and soteriology. Courses on justification must be central so that ministers graduate with both exegetical skill and doctrinal clarity. Programmes should integrate Greek and Hebrew with practical homiletics, enabling students to move responsibly from interpretation to proclamation. African seminaries should also design contextual curricula that



address syncretism, prosperity teachings, and cultural hermeneutics while maintaining fidelity to apostolic doctrine.

2. Christian Preachers and Pastors: Preachers should consistently centre sermons on the cross of Christ and justification by faith, emphasising salvation as God's gracious act rather than human effort. They must avoid moralistic preaching, engage in thorough exegetical preparation, and rely on reputable commentaries and linguistic tools. Pastors should boldly confront popular but unbiblical teachings, particularly the prosperity gospel, offering instead the liberating message of grace that transforms individuals and communities.

3. Church Leaders and Denominational Bodies: Denominational leadership should establish accountability structures that protect sound doctrine. This includes doctrinal reviews, continuing education for ministers, and the development of clear statements on justification, atonement, and salvation. Leaders should organise theological conferences and workshops addressing contemporary challenges to orthodox faith. Ecumenical dialogue based on shared soteriological commitments should also be encouraged.

4. Christian Educators and Discipleship Programmes: Churches should invest in robust discipleship programmes that teach the fundamentals of Christian doctrine, especially salvation. Bible study curricula and catechetical materials must present justification in accessible but substantive ways. Educators should use creative teaching methods to help believers grasp Paul's soteriology. Youth and children's ministries should incorporate age-appropriate teachings on salvation to ground future generations in biblical truth.

5. Missions and Evangelistic Outreach: Evangelism should recover the clarity of the gospel as presented in Romans 3:21–26. Salvation must be proclaimed as reconciliation with God through Christ's atoning death, not as self-improvement or material gain. Mission training should prepare workers to communicate justification across cultures without compromising theological integrity, addressing syncretism and affirming cultural identity under biblical truth.

6. Academic Research and Scholarship: Further study is needed on how Pauline theology informs preaching in contexts shaped by urbanisation, digital culture, and secularism. Scholars should explore how justification addresses ethical questions, social justice, and interfaith engagement. Comparative studies on how different traditions interpret Romans 3:21–26 would enrich ecumenical understanding. Research in African theology and Pauline soteriology is especially crucial.

7. Personal Spiritual Formation: Believers should engage deeply with Scripture through study, meditation, and memorisation. They must cultivate theological literacy and practice regular self-examination in light of the gospel. Christians should resist works-based righteousness and cheap grace, understanding justification as a completed act and sanctification as an ongoing process.

8. Addressing Theological Distortions: The Church must confront distortions such as the prosperity gospel, moralism, and therapeutic reductionism. Leaders should provide biblical alternatives demonstrating how the gospel addresses human concerns within the redeeming work of Christ, using teaching, publications, and media to reclaim theological balance.

9. Ecumenical Unity and Dialogue: Justification by faith should serve as a unifying doctrine across denominations. Churches should pursue dialogue, joint statements, and shared worship that reflect our common standing in grace and witness to a divided world.

10. Engaging Post-Christian and Pluralistic Contexts: Christians must articulate the distinctiveness of the gospel graciously in secular and pluralistic contexts. Apologetic training



should equip believers to explain the coherence and beauty of Christ's atonement while engaging respectfully with other faiths.

In conclusion, the contemporary church stands at a critical juncture where theological clarity determines missional effectiveness. The recovery of Pauline soteriology, as exemplified in Romans 3:21–26, offers the church a solid foundation for preaching, teaching, and witness in the twenty-first century. By embracing these recommendations, Christian leaders, institutions, and believers can ensure that the gospel of grace continues to transform lives, build authentic communities, and glorify God across all nations until Christ's return.

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