

Rebuilding the Foundations - Romans
Part 7
“The Cross Of Christ”
Romans 3:21-31
Pastor Charles Price

Now, if you've got your Bible, I'm going to read to you from Romans 3:21-31. Paul writes, "But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify. The righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance, he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. He did this to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through the same faith. Do we then nullify the law by this faith? Not at all. Rather, we uphold the law."

Now, for those of you who have been with us in recent weeks, you know we're looking through this letter of Paul to the Romans. And this section I want to talk about this morning is the central point in the argument that is being presented here by Paul. Everything preceding this leads to this section, and everything which follows grows out of this section. And therefore it is vital that we understand it because it's not just the centre of the book of Romans, I suggest to you, it is the

centre of the New Testament. In fact, it's the centre of the Christian faith we're going to talk about this morning, and therefore it's crucial.

And I trust and I'm praying that for many of us here this morning, we'll enter into a fresh understanding, which leads us into a fresh experience of what God can do in our lives. You see, let me just briefly remind you of what has gone before. Paul has stated that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. This is something which is powerful he says. And then he explains, because in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed.

Now, righteousness is God's moral character, it's what God intended every human being to display when he created us in his image, it's his moral image in which we were created. And he says, the gospel is about restoring the moral character of God and embedding the moral character of God into human experience. But having stated that, he then for over two chapters says, but there's a problem. And that is that there is none of us who display the righteousness of God. In fact, he talks about the fact that the wrath of God is being revealed against the godlessness and wickedness of men. And we spent a morning a couple of weeks ago talking about the wrath of God. This is not some kink in God's character. This is part of his love. The more you love something, the more you will hate and be angry at those things that threaten to destroy the wellbeing of the one you love.

And he talks about God's wrath on the ungodliness and the wickedness of men and how that in his wrath he hands us over to the logical end of our own choosing. We talked about that in some detail. And then he talks about the fact, but that is not all; there's going to come the judgement of

God. In chapter two and the early part of chapter three is about God's judgement. He says, "You're storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgement will be revealed. There's going to come a day, a day of judgement," he says.

And we talked about that last week and all this sums up in some statements he makes from Romans 3:9, when he says, "What should we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all. We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin." That we're all under sin. And then he says, "There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands. There is no one who seeks God, all have turned away. There is no one who does good, not even one." And so on, 16 times in the next few verses he uses an all inclusive term or phrase. There's no one who's righteous, all of us are in this same situation.

Saw it in Romans 3:23, which we read together just now, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." And these verses expose us, they charge us, and they condemn us. Now, of course we wouldn't have the insight to face this reality were it not for the fact that God reveals this as his verdict on humanity, neither will we have the courage to face it, were it not for the verses we're going to talk about this morning. Because having described this state of the human condition, Romans 3:21 says, "But now..." And those two words, "but now" turn everything around. But now what? But now, despite this history which is talked about of unrighteousness, but now a righteousness from God has been made known.

And it's that we're going to talk about this morning. There is a solution to the wrath of God, and that is to discovering the righteousness of God and dealing with the problem of our sin. And it's

this solution, we're going to talk about this morning, and this is so crucial that the end of my message this morning, I'm going to invite many of you to enter into a personal relationship with Christ, which as yet you've never come into.

In fact, I'm going to invite three categories of you at the end of my message this morning to come down here to the front of this building, stand here in the front, we're going to have prayer counsellors who will come with you. We're going to take you through to the room, on your are left over here, where we are going to just sit with you, talk with you and bring you into this assurance because it is vital and crucial that you come to know this for yourself. I'm going to invite three categories of people; there are those who are not yet Christians, and you know that here, this one, but God is at work in your heart, and you know that as well.

He's been drawing you. He's been speaking to you. And you've never come into that relationship where you are free and in dwelt by his Holy Spirit. But there's some of you, a second category, who lack assurance that you've ever come into this relationship. I've talked to a number of people here in this church, and you say, "Well, I've been around a long time. I prayed all kinds of prayers, but I still am not sure if I'm really right with God." I'm going to invite you to become sure this morning.

And then there's a third category of those who have heard this before, have known this before, but you've wandered away from God. You know the way you live and the attitudes of your heart are not conducive with someone in whose life is being restored, the righteousness, the moral character of God. I'm going to ask you to come and get right with him this morning and be

restored to that relationship which he wants for you. And that's why I'm going to invite you publicly. Jesus often called people publicly, in front of their families, in front of their friends, in front of their colleagues, because in so doing, you'll not forget this event and God is going to transform your life. We believe that, otherwise we can close a meeting and go home. If we don't believe that's the gospel, it transforms people's lives. Many of you need to know that for yourself.

What is the solution to the human dilemma? If the problem is "there is none righteous, no, not one," that's what Romans 3:10 says, that's the problem. The solution is, Romans 3:21, "but now a righteousness from God has been made known." There is none righteous, that's our problem, here's the solution, a righteousness from God is made possible. But the big question of course is how does this righteousness come about? And in Romans 3:25, Paul writes, "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood." I'm going to explain that sentence in a few moments, but he's talking about the cross of Christ.

And he says that God has presented Christ through the cross as the means of reconciling us to God. But if righteousness comes through the cross of Christ, then we need to ask what in the world was happening on the cross when Jesus Christ died? Because I find that many of us who may have been Christians for years who don't understand the cross. In fact, I talked already this morning to somebody who said, "I've been a Christian for years, I've never understood the cross until this morning." That was just an hour and a half ago.

And then many of us may be for whom that will become something too. We know that Jesus Christ died on the cross. And that it's a cross that is a means of getting rid of our sin. But why is

it the means of getting rid of our sin? On what basis is it the means of getting rid of our sin? I want to explain it in two ways. My first heading is that through the cross, "God is satisfied." I want to explain what I mean by that. You see, it's very important we do understand this. If I ask you personally, if I came along and said to you one by one, which of course we haven't time to do, "For whom did Jesus Christ die?"

I wonder what answer you'd give to me. Well, I don't know what answer you'd give me, but some of you would say, "Jesus Christ died for the world." Some of you might say, "Jesus Christ died for sinners." Some of you would make it more personal, "Jesus Christ died for me." And there's truth in all of that certainly. We are the beneficiaries of his death, but in the first instance, Jesus Christ did not die for you or for me, in the first instance, Jesus died for his Father.

I'm going to explain what I mean by that. You see, we don't demand death as a punishment for sin. In fact to us, that is extremely extravagant. We'd be very happy if we could come to God and say, "God, I've messed up again. And I'm really, really sorry about this. Will you please in your mercy, forgive me." And we'd be very happy for God to say, "Yes, I understand. And I can see you really are sorry. And I know you got failings, I made you, so I know all about your weaknesses. I know you're vulnerable to sin like everybody else. I know you're no worse than anybody else. And yes, I'm willing to forgive you."

Wouldn't you be happy with that and forget about the cross, just have God forgive us. Wouldn't that be enough? Clearly it's not. But why? If my son, Matthew, who's 12, did something wrong, and I came to him and said, "Matthew, you should not have done this. This is wrong. One of us is

going to have to die for this, you or me? Who is it going to be?" Would you say "that's very good parenting, I'm impressed." No, actually you'd probably call the police and say, "This is ludicrous." And yet God did that. Why did God do that?

Well, I'm going to make a statement that may sound absurd and may sound wrong and I'll explain it. And the statement is this. It is actually impossible for God to just forgive sin, it's impossible for God to just forgive sin. Think about it. If God could just forgive sin, as long as we say, "We're sorry." Why doesn't he just do that? Why do we need Christ to die on the cross? You see what lies behind the cross is not in the first instance the love of God. It is the wrath of God that lies behind the cross.

The brutality of the cross is an expression of God's anger and judgement. And we can never understand the cross until we understand his wrath. That's why Paul takes these two and a half chapters to explain this so clearly in the opening part of the book of Romans. And here in Romans 3:25, he says, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood." And that probably doesn't make a lot of sense to many of us. The margin of the New International Version, which I'm using says, "As an alternative to sacrifice of atonement." It means, "as the one who would turn aside God's wrath, taking away sin." The best word of all is the word the King James Version uses where it uses the word propitiation. Now that's not a word that's very common, we don't use it every day. But it's an accurate word. And to propitiate is to satisfy the anger and the wrath of someone. The King James says for this Romans 3:25, "Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood to declare his righteousness for

the remission of sins that have passed to the forbearance of God." And to propitiate is to turn away wrath by satisfying its demands and requirements.

And in the first instance, what the cross of Jesus Christ does is satisfy the wrath and judgement of God. Now I know this concept of propitiation and of satisfying God's wrath has been a controversial one, because it doesn't fit the stereotype we have created of a domesticated God, who's all loving, but never angry. But you cannot be all loving and never angry. If I love my children and I could not care about things which violate them and attack them and seek to destroy them, you'd question my love rightly so. The fact I love them means I become angry with those things that are going to threaten them.

And God's wrath and his anger, are an expression of the same character within God. And we have lost this idea of God. And so we've lost any real understanding of why the cross was necessary. And although it has been controversial, there are a number of different theories about what actually happened on the cross. The only one that really makes sense and takes into account everything taught in the scripture is that Christ died to propitiate, to satisfy, to turn away the wrath, the judgement of God.

You see, the early part of the book of Romans does not deal with sin as being our problem. It deals with sin as being a problem to God. Now, later in Romans 5, 6, 7 and 8, which we'll look at in a few weeks time, certainly he talks about sin as a problem to us, as it is. But if that's all sin was, it just messes us up and gets us into trouble, then the best solution is get some counselling,

get somebody to sort you out and it's all resolved, but that doesn't resolve it. Because the crucial issue about sin is what it does to God. It provokes his wrath and his judgement and his anger.

And if we don't understand that, we'll sentimentalise the cross and that's why I say Jesus did not die in the first place for you or for me, he died in the first place to turn away the wrath of his Father. You see, there are two things in the character of God that make the cross necessary, two things. First thing is God's justice. God is just. The second thing is his mercy, God is merciful. Now these things are both true of God. God is just, and God is merciful. When you stop to think about it, justice and mercy are incompatible with one another. You cannot be just and merciful at the same time towards the same person.

Justice you see by definition is giving people what they deserve, that's justice. Tit for tat, that's justice, giving people what they deserve. Mercy, by definition, is not giving people what they deserve. Now, how can you give people what they deserve and not give people what they deserve at the same time? Those are irreconcilable, aren't they? Well, there's only one possible way. And that is by the introduction of a third party into the scenario.

Let me illustrate this very simply. Any illustration is inadequate at this point, but I'll give you this one to try and help clarify our thinking. Just supposing I was driving my car down the freeway at 150 kilometres an hour. And before very long, I noticed in my rear view mirror bright flashing lights right behind me. And I pull over and a big burly policeman gets out, comes to my window and says, "Did you know you were driving at 150 kilometres an hour?" I say, "I wasn't looking at

the time." And he says, "Well, that's your problem because you were driving 150 kilometres an hour, the limit on this road is a hundred kilometres an hour."

And so he issues me with the piece of paper that I understand he issues people with. I did my research with Reg. And I'm given a couple of options, I can pay it right away or I can go in the court and I can fight my case against the policeman. I choose to go to court, let's say. And I stand up in court, and the magistrate says to me, "Are you guilty or not guilty of driving your car at 150 kilometres an hour in a hundred kilometre limit?" And by now I've cooled down, I'm getting honest, so I say, "I'm guilty, your honour." Is that what you'd say? I don't have a lot of it experience in this, so I'm not sure. I'm guilty, your honour.

Now having confessed my guilt, he can do one of two things, he can deal with me justly and say, "Because you're guilty and because you've violated the law, on the basis of the law of this land, I'm going to fine you \$250," or whatever the going rate is. That's one option. Another option is he can say, "Have you been here before?" And I say, "No." "How long have you been in Canada?" "Just over a year." "I see, well, you're still getting used to things." "I am. And yes, I'm really struggling with all of these different. I don't understand kilometres and miles." He says, "Right. Well, I understand that, I'm going to deal with you mercifully and I'm going to let you off, but don't ever come before me again. If you do, you are in big trouble, understand?" I say, "I understand."

Now he can do one of those two things. He can deal with me according to justice, or he can deal with me according to mercy, what he cannot do is both. He can't say, "I'm going to fine you \$250

and I'm going to let you go free." Supposing because he's just and he has to stand by the law of the land, he fines me \$250 and I sit there and say, "Oh, \$250, how in the world am I going to pay that?" And a good friend of mine, Reg Andrews, comes to me and says, "Hey, what's the verdict?" I say, "I'm guilty, I'm afraid. I've been fined \$250." He says, "Man, a lot, you can't afford that, can you?" I say, "No, I can't." And Reg says, "Just hold on a few moments." Goes to the clerk of the court, takes out his chequebook and writes a check for \$250 payable to the court, puts it against my fine. And the records of that courtroom say this, "Charles Price, crime, speeding. Guilty. Punishment, fine \$250, paid in full." I go out of that court, the recipient of mercy, why? Because somebody else has met the demand of justice.

Now, any illustration is in danger of trivialising the cross and not telling the whole story. But that principle is what took place on the cross. When God declares, as scripture does, "there is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God." (Romans 3:10-11) "And the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) "The soul that sins should die." (Ezekiel 18:20) The verdict of a just God on me is that I live with the consequences of my sin, but the Lord Jesus Christ, who had no sin of his own in his perfection as a man, is the third party that steps in and in my place as my substitute satisfies the just demands of a holy God. So in the records of heaven, it says, "Charles Price, crime, sinner, not righteous, never righteous, coming short of the glory of God. Punishment, death, paid in full."

You see, I want to ask you an important question and I'm going to ask you to respond to this question. When God forgives you of your sin, or when you come and confess your sin to God, are you appealing to his justice or are you appealing to his mercy? I'm going to ask you to put

your hand up in a moment. If you are appealing to God's justice, would you please raise your hand? And there's a few, very few, three, four, five may be. If you're appealing to his mercy, would you please raise your hand? And that looks like the vast majority of you.

And the reason why I asked you that question was because I thought you might get it wrong and you did. And this is important that we understand. Do you know that verse, 1 John 1:9, it says, "If we confess our sins," do you know that verse? "He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins." It's on the basis of his justice that we confess our sins.

You see it says here in Romans 3:25, "He did this to demonstrate his justice." It says in Romans 3:26, "He did it to demonstrate his justice." What is going on in the cross is that the justice of God is being met and satisfied. And now on the basis of justice, he's able to forgive. You see, go back to the courtroom scenario. Reg just paid my fine. And as I move from my seat in the dock to leave the courtroom, a policeman puts his hand on my shoulder, "Excuse me, sir, where are you going?" And I say, "I'm going home." "But you were fined \$250. And if you don't pay that, of course, the option is 10 days in jail."

I say, "Well, that's right, but my fine is paid." He said, "Well, I've been watching you the whole proceedings, and you've never gone to the clerk of the court. You never took a pen. I've not seen a chequebook or any cash." I said, "Would you please check the records?" He takes me to the records and says to the clerk, "Would you please show me the records of Charles Price?" And they say, "Here it is, Charles Price, crime, 150 kilometres in a hundred kilometre limit. Guilty. Fine, \$250, paid in full." And he says to me, "How did that happen?" I say, "Well, I have a good

friend who paid my debt, who satisfied the justice of this court." And the policeman says, "Well, that's fantastic. Have a good day. I have no grounds to retain you anymore." And you walk out of that court on the basis of justice having been met. You see, my first point is that through the cross, God is satisfied, his wrath is satisfied. My second point is that through the cross, people are justified.

Let me explain that word because that word comes up here. And then it comes up a number of times in the rest of this letter. You see it's called being justified because it is a just act of God. You see, justification or justified is a legal term. It means justice has been satisfied. It is true that behind the cross lies the love of God in sending his son, lies the mercy of God in sending his son. But the event of the cross itself is meeting the just requirements of a holy God. And as a consequence, we are justified legally. Not mercified, there's no such word. Justified is through justice.

In the days in Britain when capital punishment was still in force, in Scotland and Scottish law is different to English law. If a man was executed, hung for his crime, they'd post a notice outside the prison or on the prison gates, announcing that he'd been hung that morning. And the way they worded it was this, they'd say, 'on such and such a day, giving the date, so and so was justified at 9:00 AM.' What do they mean when they said that the criminal who had been hung had been justified? Were they saying he didn't do it after all? No, that is what being justified means. It means from nine o'clock this morning, case closed. The case is closed. There's nothing more to deal with this. We can now put the books away into the archives, it's dealt with.

And when it talks about being justified in scripture, it doesn't mean we never committed the sins because of course we committed the sins, we know that and God knows that, but it means the case is settled because the just punishment for sin was met. It was met in the cross of Jesus Christ. You see, if we don't understand that and we appeal to God's mercy, I'll tell you what'll happen. You'll come to God and say, "God, please forgive me." You'll come back again, "Please forgive me again." You'll come again, "Please forgive me again." About the 165th time you'll come and you'll say, "God, I don't know if you can forgive me for this again, because this is the 165th time I've done the same thing." And you begin to wonder, have I exhausted the mercy of God? But he doesn't forgive us on the basis of mercy, he forgives on the basis of justice because it's been satisfied.

And Peter in his epistle in the letter of the Peter in New Testament talks about Christ in terms of currency, the blood of Christ, the precious, it's more valuable than any gold or silver. He says, 'The precious blood of Christ, which alone can cleanse us from sin.' (1 Peter 1:18-19) And he's using the analogy there of the blood of Christ as currency. Now don't take from this, which Paul raises later, does that mean then this is great news, because that means it's all paid for, I can sin as much as I like. Paul raises that question later and says, "Does that mean because of God's grace we can continue in sin." And he says, "Of course not." And the reason is this, the whole purpose of salvation is not just to clean up our mess, it's to restore to us the moral character of God to make us godly, Christ like again. That's why it's not just about forgiveness, it's about the indwelling and the working and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. It's not just getting out of our sin, it's getting into something new.

But the point is this, that we stand before God in ourselves, helpless, powerless, with no cash in our pockets. That's why in Romans 5, Paul says, you can read this sometime, Romans 5:6, "While we were still powerless, Christ died." He said in Romans 5:8, "While we are still enemies, Christ died for us." He says in Romans 5:8, "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." In Romans 5:10, "While we were enemies, we're reconciled through the death of his son." And he's saying there that we stand before God powerless, sinners, enemies by nature. We cannot reach from that position to him, but he from his position has reached to us and has legally dealt with the whole question of our sin.

We're told in the scripture that the devil is the accuser of God's people, that is, he comes along and he accuses us and condemns us and rubs our nose in the dirt. But we're also told that we have an advocate, that means a lawyer in the more common term that we would use. We have a lawyer who represents us before God, his name we are told in 1 John 2, is Christ. When Satan comes and says, "Charles Price, you are such a fumbling, weak, pathetic failure. Look at all these sins you did yesterday. And look at the ones the day before what a mess you are."

And as he's accusing me, the Lord Jesus, my lawyer intervenes, "Excuse me, I'm his lawyer. Father, everything the devil says about Charles Price happens to be true. Because he is a failure, he is a sinner. There is a catalogue of yesterday's sins and today's sins. Father, I want you to look at the cross. I want you to look at the innocent victim who is his substitute." And the Father says, "He's clean. I declare him clean." Isn't that fantastic?

And this can be true for everyone of you here this morning. You see, that's why Paul says in Romans 3:27, "Where then is boasting?" Well, of course there's no grounds for boasting. He says, "It's excluded, for we maintain a man is justified by faith," that is his faith in Christ, his attitude towards Christ that says, I cannot do this by any virtue of my own. You have to do this for me. You've done it for me, and I receive it. You see, we contribute nothing to our salvation and the words of Archbishop William Temple, who was the Archbishop of Canterbury, the leader of the Anglican church, in early part of the 20th century.

He said this, I think it's a profound statement, "The only contribution we make to our salvation is the sin which makes it necessary for us to be saved." That's your only contribution is the sin which makes it necessary for us to be saved, so we come with all our sins, this is all I can bring and discover that Christ has done everything necessary in meeting the just demands of God. And as a result, the rest of Romans begins to talk about the fact that we are clean.

Let me read you a few verses, Romans 4:8, is quoting Psalm 32, "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin, the Lord will never count against him." Isn't that incredible. You may be sitting here this morning and there's guilt in your life and you're conscious of that guilt. It plagues you, it keeps you awake at night. Blessed is the person whose sin, the Lord will never count against him. Why? Because he counted against Christ, that's why.

Romans 5:1 says this, "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ." Earlier he talked of the wrath of God, the judgement of God.

Now he says, we have peace with God because we've been justified through faith. Romans 5:10 says, "if when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son," we were reconciled he says, we're not enemies anymore. And in Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." No condemnation, what an incredible thing.

I have a friend who says that when he first discovered that verse, soon after he became a Christian, he took his pen, underlined it so heavily, the ink went right through the book of Philippians. He said it ruined his Bible, but it saved his soul because he realised I'm under no condemnation anymore.

One of the biggest needs of the human heart is the need to be forgiven. Some of you listening to me right now, some of you watching on television, and you'd give anything to know that you could be forgiven, anything at all. And the wonderful thing is that you can, you can be forgiven and it'll cost you nothing other than the acknowledgement and the repentance of your sin because Christ has paid it all.

I heard the head of a psychiatric hospital in Scotland say on one occasion, I think I've quoted this to you before but I heard it on the radio. He said, "If my patients could be assured of forgiveness, half of them could go home tomorrow." In his psychiatric hospital, I have no way of verifying this, I'm just quoting him, he says, "Half of my patients were there because of guilt." You can be clean this morning. This is the entry point into the gospel. It's not the whole gospel, because he gets rid of our sin, not just to clear the decks, but to build something fresh and new, to become a

new creation. It's the entry point. We come and recognise our sin and need for forgiveness. There are two things you have to do, two things you have to confess.

1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness." To confess is to acknowledge them. I have probably said this to you before. The only way sin ever leaves our body is through our mouth. Doesn't mean you have to name everything in your life that would be impossible, but you acknowledge before God, I am a sinner. And where there are specific things of which I'm particularly conscious, where the Holy Spirit may be bringing conviction, I confess them before him.

And to confess means to acknowledge them, to take responsibility for them and to repent of them, to say I'm turning away. But the second thing you need to confess, we confess our sins and we confess our saviour. What do I mean by that? Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved, for it's with your heart that you believe and are justified. It's with your mouth that you confess and you're saved." I confess my sin, but I'm confessing, there is a solution, it is Christ. And in confessing my sin and confessing my saviour, I bring the two together because it's Christ alone who can deal with my sin. And I'm out of the picture, it's not what I do now, it's not to do with my efforts or my discipline or my goodness, it has to do exclusively what Christ does.

That's what I'm going to ask many of you here this morning, to let Jesus Christ do this in your life in a way that has never taken place. You see, coming to Christ is a bit like getting married. When a person marries, the bride and the bridegroom stand in front of a congregation of people

and turning to the bridegroom, to the man, he'll be asked a question, "Will you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife? Will you love her, cherish her, in sickness and in health?" And he answers, "I will." Not married yet, he says, "I will." Then he turns to the bride and he says, "Will you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband? Will you love him, cherish him, care for him in sickness and in health?" And she says, "I will." Then the minister says, "I now pronounce you man and wife." Now they're married.

You see, there was a day when God looked to his son spreadeagled on a Roman cross and said in fact, "Will you take these people with all their sin, with all their failure, with all their unrighteousness, will you take them and cleanse them and justify them? Will you give to them the gift of your Holy Spirit to live within them? And will you give to them the gift of eternal life that they may never perish?" And from the cross he said in effect, "I will." It's finished. He said to his Father, "I will."

He's not married, he's not a Christian because of that. Now the Spirit of God turns to you and he says, "Will you take the son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who as the innocent one suffered your penalty, will you accept his forgiveness? Will you receive his gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell you and fill you and work through you? Will you receive the gift of eternal life by confessing your sin, by confessing your saviour?" And he's waiting for your answer. I will.