

Romans 3

The Righteousness of God Through Faith

Pastor Paul LeBoutillier · June 11, 2026

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

As we kind of get started here this evening, I want to kind of make a little note about, it's a little procedural note if I could, many of you have probably noticed, for those of you that have been with us for the first three studies, that I usually read through the entire section that I'm going to teach and then we go back and we look at the verses individually. Tonight, we're going to do it a little bit differently and the reason is because I think chapter three, as we get into it, is going to demand a slightly different approach where we're going to take it by chunks. We're going to hopefully get through the whole chapter. And by the way, I've never, you know, when I was teaching in my own fellowship for so many years, I usually taught the New Testament on Sunday morning and the Old Testament on Wednesday night. And of course, Sunday morning, you know, you don't get to teach as long.

We had multiple services just like you guys do here in Meridian and I got to the point where my Sunday morning teaching was about 30 to 35 minutes. Well, on a Wednesday night, you know, you can go longer. We have a slightly shorter worship time and we just kind of get into the Word and I can usually teach for upwards of about an hour. So this affords me the opportunity to go a little bit more quickly with you through the book of Romans than what I would normally be able to do, you know, on a Sunday morning. So anyway, that being said, let's pray and we'll get into it here tonight.

Father, we do thank you so much for the opportunity to just really have your Word and then to dig into it. We thank you also, Father, for your Holy Spirit who imparts wisdom and understanding and insight without whom we would be lost. And we thank you, Father, that as we humble ourselves before your throne and open our hearts to hear you, that you are more than willing to accommodate us. And I pray, my Father God, that you would speak to each and every heart here tonight because Lord, you know who your children are. You know what's going on in their lives.

You know what they need to hear most. You know what they're longing for. You know how best to nourish your children, and I pray that you would do that tonight. And I thank you, Lord, for your

faithfulness. And we pray all of these things in the authority granted us through the name of Jesus our Savior.

Amen. Amen. In chapters 1 and 2 of Romans, we saw how the Apostle Paul really kind of took on the role of a prosecuting attorney. And what he did in those first two chapters is he argued for the guilt of mankind. And he did it, as we saw in those studies, by dividing mankind into three categories, the godless, the educated moralist, and the religious.

And he showed why each one has broken God's perfect law, stands guilty before God, and is therefore subject to the wrath of God. And he told us in the very first chapter, the wrath of God is coming, and you can be certain of that. Now, as Paul kind of began to, at the end of the last chapter, outline and confront the religionist, of course the religionist of his day was the Jew, essentially that group that he had come out of. He had been a Pharisee himself, and he pinpointed the fact that the Jews were trusting in their religious observance and in their Jewish heritage in order to, you know, be acceptable before God. Remember that when we ended the chapter last time, he was talking about the right of circumcision, which of course was something the Jews believed very much secured their eternal favor with God because circumcision was their covenant sign, the sign that God had created with their father Abraham and so forth.

But Paul argued that circumcision is useless in the sense of being accepted by God into heaven. It was a wonderful thing as its own covenant sign, but Paul argued that it's no guarantee of anybody reaching heaven. So on the heels of that rather controversial statement, we come to chapter 3 where the apostle Paul begins to ask a series of questions that are based upon the statements that he's been making over the course of the first two chapters. Now remember, when Paul wrote this letter, there were no chapters. There were no verses.

Paul just wrote a letter like you and I would write a letter. We've put in chapters and verses many, many, many hundreds of years later to aid us in our study, but we have to remember this is just one continuous letter. And so Paul goes on to speak about the things that he's been saying, but to challenge his hearers in the form of questions. And he begins in verse 1, if you'll look with me in your Bible, by asking then what advantage has the Jew and what is the value of circumcision? Because he's basically already told them that it can't save them.

He made that very clear. Circumcision can't save you. And so in light of that statement that he had made, now he's asking the question, so what good is it? What's the benefit, right? Now you've got to understand something.

When Paul makes reference to circumcision, he's not referring to the surgical procedure. He's referring to the covenant sign that God gave to Israel through Abraham, right? And so that's the significance of circumcision. It is the covenant sign. And so his response to the question, he answers his own question by saying, what advantage is there?

And what value is there in circumcision? He says in verse 2, well, much in every way. He says, yes, there's value in these things. He says to begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. And this is Paul's way of saying that the very special and unique relationship that God had with the Jews, with Israel, and has with Israel to this day, is such that it is far from meaningless, even though those things that God gave them cannot save them.

That doesn't mean they're meaningless. That doesn't mean they're of no value. It's still a great honor what God did for the Jewish people. I mean, stop and think about it. It makes me kind of jealous sometimes that I don't have any Jewish DNA.

Good grief. They uniquely, of all the nations of the world, they were chosen to receive the law. Do you guys know that we hear about the Ten Commandments and how God gave the Ten Commandments to the Jews? They heard God speak the Ten Commandments. They heard his voice on Sinai.

It freaked them out. In fact, they begged Moses. They said, tell God, don't talk anymore. They said, we'll die. So you go talk to God, you bring back the message, and that'll be good.

We don't want to hear him talk anymore. It was fearful, you know, terrifying. But they heard the voice of God echoing the Ten Commandments, you know. The very voice of God. They were entrusted with the wisdom of God.

The very presence of God was among them, you know, first in the tabernacle and then in the temple. God said, I will live among you. I will be your God. And obviously, another powerful thing is that the Jews, it is from the Jewish people that the Messiah was ultimately revealed to the world. The Savior of the world is a Jew.

Wow. I mean, you know, you think about all these things, and from the vantage point that Paul is expressing here, he's saying that these things are far from meaningless. There's great honor in every one of these things and more, you know, as it relates to simply having that Jewish heritage. And then Paul goes on in verse 3 to ask, well, what if some were unfaithful? Now, if you have a New King James Bible, your Bible says, what if some did not believe or, you know, what if they were people of unbelief?

By the way, the Greek word here means both. So the way the ESV translates it and the way the New King James translate it, they're both correct because the word means to be faithless through unbelief. And so Paul asked, what if some were unfaithful? And then he asked this question, does their faithlessness or unbelief nullify the faithfulness of God? And then he answers his own question by saying, by no means.

Let God be true and every one were a liar as it is written that you may be justified in your words and prevail when you are judged. So this is an interesting question. It's not probably an argument that, I mean, I don't know that I've ever really come upon this argument from the standpoint of the Jews, but I suppose somebody could argue if they wanted to. I mean, if people want to argue, they can come up with lots of things to argue about. But I suppose someone could argue that God's plan and promises for the nation of Israel had maybe failed.

When you stop and think about the fact that, you know, most of the Jews rejected their own Messiah. And what do we have in the Old Testament, but just this constant unfaithfulness of the people of Israel toward their God. I mean, I'm sure you've read through the book of Judges. It's hard to read. Rising and falling into idolatry and sin over and over and over again.

And I suppose somebody could say, well, maybe God's plan failed, you know. He picked this nation that constantly disobeyed, constantly rebelled against his word, and ultimately rejected his son. So, you know, maybe we chalk that up as a failure for God, right? That's the argument that Paul's kind of presenting here. But Paul is essentially saying that Israel's refusal to walk faithfully before their God doesn't negate God's faithfulness toward them, right?

And nor does it create for us any kind of a commentary of failure on God's part. You know, it's kind of funny, I'm always surprised when I hear people talk about God's involvement in their lives as if somehow God got it wrong. You know, when you hear people talk sometimes about what has happened in their lives, it comes off very much like, I think God messed up, you know. I think he kind of failed, at least he failed me, you know. Because honestly, when life is topsy-turvy, and I trust it's been that way for all of us, it is very difficult, it's a very challenging thing in life to confess that God never gets things wrong, especially when they seem very wrong to us, you know.

I look around at what's happening in my life sometimes and I think, well, there's nothing right going on. And it's very, very challenging at that time to look to the Lord in prayer and say, but Lord, nothing you have done is wrong. It is a very common thing for people to accuse God of wrongdoing because, you see, we've become so accustomed in our lives to trusting our own judgment on a matter in terms of what is right, what is wrong, what is good, what is bad, to the point where we will go so far as to accuse God of

wrongdoing if things don't work out as we think they should work out. You know, because I have expectations and I know you do too. And what happens in life when God doesn't meet our expectations?

That's a very sad sort of a thing, but it's a very common thing for people to respond to failed expectations by essentially accusing God of wrongdoing. But here, and this is what I love about the Bible, is that this is what I love about this, Paul reminds us that God's faithfulness is not what's in doubt when things are going wrong in your life. Can I just, can I say that again just for impact? When something is really, really going wrong in your life, it's not the faithfulness of God that is in doubt. God remains faithful no matter what, regardless.

So are you ready for the next argument? And this is kind of what Paul is doing here at the beginning of this chapter, verse 5. He says, But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? And then he says here, and parenthetically, I speak in a human way, which is to say, I'm just repeating a human argument.

Paul wants you to know this isn't something he would ever say, but he's repeating something that people have said. And essentially what they're saying is, get this, if my sinfulness just brings out and enhances God's purity, then my sin actually brings him glory. Right? That's what some people were actually saying because my sin, as awful as it is, shows how pure God is, you know. And so therefore, he's wrong to punish me.

He's wrong to bring wrath because yeah, all I'm doing is glorifying him by being a sinner. Now again, this is a human argument. It's kind of like, you know, those laundry detergent commercials that we're all so familiar with, you know, where they show a garment like a shirt or something like that. You know, this shirt was, you know, washed in, you know, our detergent, you know, the one we're selling you. And over here is the shirt that we washed in brand X.

Notice how dingy and dirty this other shirt is compared to ours and so forth. And we look at that and we're like, woo. And by comparison, it helps to, you know, sell us on this one particular laundry detergent because it does a better job. And the reason that advertising agencies do that is because it makes their product look good. And the argument here from a human standpoint is my sin makes God look good because by comparison, he shines in all purity.

And I'm sitting over here as this dirty, rotten sinner and basically I'm just bringing him glory. And Paul doesn't, he's not impressed by this at all because that comparison might work great for laundry detergent, but it frankly doesn't work for God. And that's why Paul says in verse 6, by no means, which is a very

strong, emphatic way of saying that is the dumbest thing I've ever heard. He says, for then how could God judge the world? But if through my lie, God's truth abounds by comparison to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner and why not just go ahead and do evil, he says in verse 8, that good may come of it as some people slanderously charge us with saying.

And so some people were actually telling people that this is one of Paul's arguments that he was going around telling people, hey, just go ahead and live your life in sin because it's just going to, by comparison, make God look really good. And Paul goes on to say their condemnation is just, which is a way of saying they will ultimately be condemned for their slanderous accusations of what we're saying. And when they are condemned, it will be deserved. It will be deserved because we never said anything of the sort and it's a ridiculous argument. So what's the bottom line to all this?

Paul asks in verse 9, so what then? Are the Jews any better off? And then he answers that question by saying, no, not at all. Now this might sound like a contradiction because earlier in this chapter he said, is there any benefit to being a Jew and to having circumcision? He said, yeah, in many ways.

But now here in verse 9 when he says, are the Jews any better off? He says, no, they're not. So did he just contradict himself? No, because you see before when he asked, is there any benefit to being a Jew, he's referring to the honor that God bestowed upon those people and what they received from the Lord. It was a very good thing.

They were the only nation on earth collectively to receive what they did from God. But the point is all that God gave them, all of the honor that he bestowed upon them was not enough to save them for eternity, right? And that's why he's saying now that if we ask if Jews are any better off, we have to say, well, no. Why? Look, we're still in the middle of verse 9.

It says, for we've already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin. So in that sense, right, there's no benefit to being a Jew. If you have Jewish DNA in you, there's no benefit from an eternal standpoint of having it somehow impress God enough to let you into heaven. It's not going to happen because we are all under sin and therefore under the argument of God's wrath. So we saw, you know, all of this in chapter 2.

Verse 10, he goes on, as it is written, and then he's going to go on and quote the Psalms in several places, and he's even going to throw in a little bit of Isaiah. He quotes all of this to describe mankind. None is righteous, no, not one. No one understands. No.

one seeks God, you might say, now wait a minute, Pastor, hold the phone here for a second. I sought God. Actually, you didn't. You responded to his grace of drawing you. See, Jesus told us, no one can come to me unless he's drawn by the Father, right?

And so I believe God draws everybody, but only some people respond to that drawing. You can't come to the Lord unless you're drawn. And so there is this grace that is extended to all humankind to be drawn. And that's why he can say here, quoting from the Old Testament, nobody seeks God on their own. Nobody ever, all on their own, simply comes up with the idea, you know what, I'm going to seek God.

I'm going to do my best to find God. Nobody does that. Doesn't even enter their mind, right? So these accusations are universal. Verse 12, all, notice that, have turned aside.

Together, there's another word that's universal. They have become worthless. No one, universal phrase, does good. Not even one. And then he even gets a little graphic.

Their throat is an open grave. Obviously poetic language to speak of our words and how detrimental they can be. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Anybody ever been bit or whatever by an asp?

I haven't. An asp is a very venomous little fuzzy caterpillar and we don't have them up here. But if you go down into the southern states of the US, they have asps there and apparently it's very painful. Anyway, again, a poetic statement to speak of the venom of our language. Verse 14, their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.

Their feet are swift to shed blood in their paths are ruin and misery and the way of peace they have not known. And then this last statement is very interesting. There's no fear of God before their eyes. I want you to think about that statement here just for a moment. But before I enlarge on that, I need you to understand.

These are from the Hebrew Scriptures, all of these quotations, okay? But the Jews didn't think that God was talking about them. The Jews thought all these passages were about Gentiles. They didn't apply them to themselves. They didn't think that God was describing them in any way.

They were the righteous of God, right? These are all descriptions of Gentiles. Whereas Paul now is saying, no, no, no, no. This is universal. This is the universal condition of mankind.

But that last statement that we read there, which is, by the way, from Psalm 36, is a very interesting one where David wrote that psalm and he made the statement, there is no fear of God before their eyes.

And that statement right there is really at the heart of all of the sin and rebellion of mankind when you stop and think about it. You know, man simply has no fear of God. And what is amazing to me when I read through the Old Testament is how many times God showed himself to the Jews in powerful and miraculous ways and they turned around and just spit in his face the next minute. I mean, think about the Jews in the wilderness while they were wandering, you know, before God allowed them into the land of promise.

Every day a cloud guided them and that cloud at night turned into a pillar of fire every day for 40 years and they still rebelled against the Lord. How many things did they see over the course of that 40 year period? Starting, you know, with God opening up the Red Sea and swallowing the Egyptian army just after they walked through that entire body of water on dry land. And it wasn't long after that happened that they're like, we don't have any water, you brought us out here to kill us. And on and on it went and it's amazing to me how God can reveal himself in powerful ways.

And we continue to have no fear of God. I don't mean to put a kink in your prayer requests for people, but if you're praying for somebody that God would reveal himself to that person, that's not a sure thing. I mean, if the Jews teach us anything from the Old Testament, we learn that is not a surefire way of finding someone to ultimately surrender their heart to the Lord. They saw God move powerfully daily and rebelled against God. Wanted to go back to Egypt.

We had it better there. We're tired of this miraculous manna on the ground. You know, we're tired of it. They couldn't even explain where it came from and they were tired of it and they complained about it. So, you know, just because somebody is seeing a miraculous work of God doesn't mean their heart is surrendered to the Lord.

So if you're praying for somebody, pray for their heart. Pray for their heart to be soft and receptive and open, responsive to the work of the Holy Spirit. That's what really needs to happen because when that happens, we begin to have a fear of God. A fear of God. A lot of people misunderstand what we mean by when we say a fear of God.

I had a guy come up to me many years ago after I was teaching on the fear of God through a passage and he kind of brought me up short after the message. He goes, well, I don't think we ought to be fearing God. Yeah, well, he was thinking of it in a different way. He was thinking of being afraid of God in the sense that we never would approach him and like, you know, you're afraid of a bully or something like that. And that's not what the Bible is talking about.

It's talking about the understanding of just realizing who God is. You know, you'll remember that when Jesus was hanging on the cross with two thieves on either side of him, both of those thieves at first hurled insults at him, but then one of them began to think better of it as he watched how Jesus responded during that entire time. Finally, he turned to his companion and here's what came out of his mouth. First thing, don't you fear God? And you know, that's the question of the hour.

Do you fear God? The book of Proverbs reminds us something very important about the fear of God. Let me put it on the screen. It says, The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And what that passage is saying is that wisdom begins, it doesn't end, it begins with the fear of the Lord.

You want to be wise in life? Which by the way, wisdom as you know is the application of knowledge. You want to be wise in life? It begins with the fear of the Lord. Causes us sometimes to wonder what is the lack of the fear of the Lord the beginning of?

Chaos, ridiculousness, stupidity, people claiming that you can be a gender other than male and female. That's what you get out of a lack of the fear of God. You get people making up their own reality, you know, because they've lost the fear of the Lord. By the way, the Jews referred to believing Gentiles, Gentiles who put their faith in the God of Israel, they called them God-fearers. That's how they referred to them.

It's a good thing to fear the Lord in that sense. Now as we get into the next few verses, verses 19 and following, Paul is going to say some incredibly important things. So we need to pay close attention to what's going on here. Verse 19 says, Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God. And this is basically the Apostle Paul's way of reminding you and me that the law was given to spotlight or to accentuate man's sin, but it was never given to remove it.

Did you hear me? The law of God, the Ten Commandments was given to accentuate mankind's sin, but it was not given to remove it. It's like your bathroom scale. Your bathroom scale tells you what's going on, but it doesn't lift a finger to change the number. All it does is tell you where you're at.

That's what the law does to us. And in this sense, it tells us where we're at. We failed. We cannot keep the righteous requirements of God. That's what he's saying here.

All right? And so in this next verse, which should be underlined, I think, or highlighted in your Bible, he says this in verse 20. This is so important. For by works of the law. And by works of the law, Paul means any human attempt to keep it, to keep the law.

No human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law simply just comes knowledge of sin. Okay? Now, this is an important verse, you guys. Paul is saying categorically that by trying or attempting to keep the law, and he's talking about the Mosaic Law, and all that goes with it, no human being will be justified in the sight of God. And that includes anything that is said in the law.

The law is good, and there's nothing wrong with the law itself. But you can't do it, you can't keep it, because you have a sinful nature. And you're never going to be able to keep it in such a way as to earn the justification of the Lord. Okay? That's what Paul is saying here.

And honestly, this single verse, and that's why I'm saying it should be underlined or highlighted in your Bible, this single verse deals a death blow to any kind of legalism, which, you know, is defined as salvation through performance. That's how I define legalism, salvation through performance. You know, a number of years ago, I was talking to a brother, and I think he was a brother, but he was of the Seventh-day Adventist persuasion. And, of course, as a Seventh-day Adventist, you know, he believed what Seventh-day Adventists believe, particularly as it relates to the Sabbath and Sabbath keeping. And, you know, you can't categorize all SDAs the same because, honestly, they're not.

There are some SDA churches that hold very, very strongly to the writings of Ellen White, and they are extremely legalistic and weird. And then you've got SDA churches on the other side of the equation that really kind of see or view Ellen White's writings as really like a commentary, like you and I would consider a commentary, right? But they don't consider it equal with Scripture or binding in the sense of, you know, what she has said. So when you're talking to somebody who comes out of the Adventist church, you have to kind of know what you're dealing with. But this particular guy that I was talking to was a pretty strong Seventh-day Adventist, and we had some very, very productive conversations about legalism.

And I challenged him on keeping the Sabbath. Because, you know, if you look at the very strong and legalistic side of Seventh-day Adventism, they believe, because Ellen White taught, that during the Great Tribulation, the mark of the beast will be Sunday worship. Now, there aren't all that many SDAs, I think, that truly hold to that today. I don't know what the percentage is. But that was the original belief, one of the original beliefs of the SDA church.

And so that's a very strong, you know, and so they really believe totally that, you know, during the Great Tribulation, the real true believers of God are going to be set apart by those, and seen by those who keep the Sabbath day as a day of worship. And I challenged him on that. I challenged him on several different points related to it. Particularly, you know, what's really interesting about it, about the whole, and I don't mean to focus exclusively on Seventh-day type stuff, because that's obviously only one aspect of

the Mosaic law. But you know, what's really interesting about the Seventh day Sabbath, is that nowhere did God say on the Seventh day, you had to go to church.

And that's what they hold to, most of all, you know, and they'll confront you if they know you're not an Adventist, they'll say, what day do you go to church? And my response is, what day did God tell us to go to church? He didn't. What he said to do for the Jews, and by the way, this was a sign for the Jews. It was, it was between God and the Jews.

He said, keep the Sabbath by doing no work. That's all he, he didn't say go to church. They did it. They started going to synagogue, because that's just, you know, it's like, well, we got nothing else going on. Might as well, you know, go to church, or go to synagogue on the Sabbath day, because, you know, God never said that that was the day of doing that.

So it's just, it's crazy, the arguments that have developed over the years, you know, that anyway, I guess the point of what I was going to say was, this guy eventually moved away. I forget where he moved, but he wrote me, emailed me a number of years, like 10 years later. And he said, Pastor Paul, I just wanted to let you know, I'm no longer a Seventh-day Adventist. He said, I've been set free. I'm now attending an evangelical church, and I realized that legalism isn't the path to knowing God, and being loved by God, and being accepted by God.

I realized it's by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and His finished work on the cross. And I just about, you know, yeah, it was incredible. It was a wonderful thing. But yeah, no human being, Paul says, will be justified by keeping the law. Every once in a while, I like to read these verses in like the New Living translation.

Let me show you this on the screen. I like this. It says, for no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are. And even though that's a very casual sort of an approach to what Paul is saying, it's correct.

It's correct. That translation correctly communicates what Paul is saying. Verse 21 is equally important. And here's where Paul begins to emphasize the good news. Look at verse 21, so important.

But now, I love that, the righteousness of God has been manifested. I'm going to read all down through verse 26. Apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe, for there is no distinction for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith. This was to show

God's righteousness, because in His divine forbearance, He had passed over former sins. It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

There's so much here, you guys, so much here. First thing I want to bring out is this word propitiation, which is kind of in the middle of this passage. That's not a word that I use every day, do you? Do you ever go around saying that? Propitiation is a word that means to turn aside wrath.

And in context, what Paul is saying here is that Jesus, whom he names at the end of verse 24, he says, whom God put forward or presented as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith. So Jesus is our propitiator. By that we are saying He turned aside the wrath of God. Guys, He turned aside the wrath of God for you and me. There is no wrath of God for you and me.

It's been turned aside. This is where we get to the good news. We've been talking about the bad news for a couple of chapters and even into the first part of this one. It's delightful to start getting into the good news. Jesus is our propitiation.

He has turned aside God's wrath on our behalf. What a beautiful thing. But Paul begins this section in verse 21 by saying, now a righteousness from God has been manifested. And that means it's been made known. It's been revealed.

And this was revealed in the person of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Notice, it was revealed, he says, apart from law. Did you catch that? This is another important verse that really deals a death blow to legalism. The righteousness of God that He has made manifest to you and me has been manifest apart from law, meaning law keeping.

Guys, do you understand you can't be good enough to get to heaven? I trust that everybody in this room knows that. You cannot be good enough, so stop trying. You can't be good enough to get to heaven. The righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, apart from obedience to the law.

Okay? And by the way, this statement would have been so foreign to a Jewish mind, and Paul knew that. The mere idea that God could bestow righteousness on someone by faith alone was frankly just absurd to the Jewish mind. It's like, righteousness by believing? You mean I just have to believe that Jesus died for me on the cross and I'm righteous before God?

Yeah, that's what I'm saying. Forget it. It's ridiculous. And that's one of the reasons why the book of Acts shows the challenges that the early church had. There were people that could not separate righteousness from the law.

And so we get to Acts chapter 15 and so forth and you start realizing that they had to call this whole council together to talk about this. This issue, because some of the Jews were going around telling the Gentiles, hey, what Jesus did on the cross was all good and fine, but you still got to be circumcised and keep the law. And some of these people came into very sharp dispute with Paul and eventually they had to take it back to Jerusalem where they would get the council together, James and Peter and the others and talk it over and say, okay, what's the deal here now? Is it Jesus plus law keeping or is it Jesus alone? And what they concluded was, no, it's Jesus alone.

He saves us. You cannot be saved. And this is what people, excuse me, what Paul is saying right here. So here again, but the Jews would have think this was ridiculous. So here's Paul's response to that in the middle of verse 21.

He says, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it. Now there's a statement that's going to get a Jew to raise his eyebrows, because what Paul did is he made a statement, righteousness is by faith. Oh, and by the way, your scriptures say so. And the Jews coming out of it go, well, now I would take issue with that. My scriptures say that we have to keep the law.

But actually there are a lot of things in the old Testament and that speak of salvation by grace through faith. And what Paul is saying here when he makes the statement, that the law and the prophets bear witness to it, he's saying, guys, this isn't my idea. I didn't come up with this. The Hebrew scriptures corroborate this idea, right? You might remember that Paul made the same claim at the very beginning of this letter.

Let me put this up on the screen. You'll remember this from Romans chapter one, Paul said that he was a servant of Christ Jesus called to be an apostle. Christ Jesus called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God. Look at this, which he, God, promised beforehand through his prophets in his scriptures. Now here's what's interesting.

Paul doesn't take the time to explain right now where those prophecies and scriptures are, but he's going to later on. In fact, he's going to start doing it in the very next chapter. So when we get into chapter four, Paul's going to start talking about where the Old Testament corroborates this idea of faith and so

forth. But he goes on here for the time being to say in verse 22, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. I want to put this up on the screen from the NIV.

I like this. It says, this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. By the way, I had somebody write me the other day, email me and say, whenever you quote the NIV, you always put that 84 there. What's that mean? And all that means is that that quotation is from the 1984 revision of the NIV, which I prefer over the later revisions.

Anyway, that's all it means. But this is such a mind-blowing statement, and it's something that you and I, we've known for a long time. We take kind of for granted. Righteousness from God comes through faith. Righteousness from God comes through faith.

Isn't that fun to say? The righteousness of God comes through faith, right? And there are a lot of people that misunderstand what we mean by faith. And we'll ask them, you know, say, well, are you a Christian? By the way, that's not a good question to ask people, because we've had 2,000 years to make Christian mean something that it really should have never meant.

So if you ask somebody if they're a Christian, nine times out of 10, they're going to say yes, even if they don't believe. So there are much better ways to question someone in terms of, you know, what they believe. And I think that's a good way to do it. And the last thing you want to say is, do you believe in God? Do you believe in God?

And the reason that's not a good question to ask is because James tells us that even the demons believe in God. Did you know that? The demons, they know exactly who God is. And it says they shudder. Do you know that it's not enough to believe in God?

But when you believe in God, it's not enough to believe in God. But when we tell people, hey, the righteousness of God comes through faith, they'll say, well, I have faith. I believe in God. No, no, no, no. When we talk about faith, we got to finish the sentence.

Righteousness for God comes through faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. Okay? The righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus and his finished, finished work on the cross. That's what we mean by faith, right? So Paul is explaining here where righteousness comes from, and he's been explaining in the first two chapters where righteousness doesn't come from.

And he went through and he talked about the fact that, you know, righteousness doesn't come through moral awareness. Righteousness doesn't come through religious observance and stuff like that. It does

come through Jesus Christ, faith in his work on the cross. But just to make sure he's made his point, Paul repeats it. You'll notice we're at the very end of verse 22 here now. He says, For there is no distinction for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

That's the bad news. Verse 24, And are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus and so forth. And so, Paul is saying, we're not going to be able to do that. We're not going to be able to do that. We're not going to be able to do that.

We're not going to be able to do that. A couple of words here in verse 24 that we need to emphasize and that they are grace and gift. Grace and gift. Those should be underlined, highlighted in your Bible because salvation has come by God's grace. The word grace means favor that cannot be earned.

God's favor that cannot be earned. That's grace. And whenever you hear the word grace, you know that God is speaking of his love and attention toward you that you don't deserve, but simply comes because of his character. God's grace. Not fully deserve, but simply comes because of his character.

God's grace by God's grace. I am what I am. That's what Paul said in First Corinthians, by God's grace I am what I am. I didn't deserve it. He made me who and what I am, he gave me the power to do what I do.

That's all God's grace. I didn't deserve any of it. That's what grace means. I didn't deserve it, he gave it anyway. It's not based on my performance.

It's just based on who he is. God's grace. So if you ask somebody, hey, how you doing today? And they go, hey, by the grace of God, I'm doing good. You know what they're saying.

I don't deserve it, but I'm doing good. The other important word in verse 24 is the word gift. And of course, the Greek word means just what it means in English. It means something given freely. And like grace, the word gift underscores that you didn't earn or deserve what you got.

Now I know we do give gifts to people when they've achieved things. You know, like if somebody graduates from high school, we'll give them a gift. And in that sense, that's really, honestly, not the definition of a gift. Because a gift means undeserved. And that's how Paul is using it.

By grace, you've received this gift. And you know, Paul talks about, he uses the very same word in Ephesians chapter 2. And he says, it's by grace you've been saved through God, this not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. Right?

Not by works, lest anyone should boast, and so forth. Paul goes on to explain something that a lot of people misunderstand. We're in the middle of verse 25. He says, and this is important, guys, this was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins. What?

God passed over former sins? What does that mean? You see, this is something people don't understand, I think. But I think, honestly, the NIV makes this clearer. Let me show you on the screen.

Here's the NIV's rendering of this. He says, he did this to demonstrate his justice because in his forbearance, he had left the sins committed beforehand. That means before Jesus suffered on the cross for your sins and my sins, he Left those unpunished. All right, I want you to stay with me on this while I explain this. What Paul is telling you and me here is that under the old covenant, even though God forgave sins, he didn't punish them.

Do you hear me? That's what Paul's saying. And this might tweak your theology a little bit, but he is telling you and me that under the old covenant, God forgave sins. When? When people confessed.

And, you know, he gave them pictures to help them understand forgiveness through the sacrificial system. But he forgave the people. Yes, they were truly forgiven, but he didn't punish their sin. God purposely allowed the sins of mankind to go unpunished, knowing that his son would one day arrive on the scene and pay the price. Past, present, and future, he would pay the penalty.

That doesn't mean in the Old Testament sins didn't have consequences, they did. But the penalty was not paid. But Paul is saying this to show us that God is just. He is just in the sense that he didn't allow sins to remain unpunished because God can't do that. You and I can sweep things under the rug, God can't.

Here's the thing you need to understand about God's just nature, he is just. What that means is he must punish sin. See, you and I, or frankly even a judge sitting on a case, he can ignore what someone has done and he can let them off scot-free even though they're guilty. Sometimes they get let off because of a technicality. Is that justice?

No. You see, God can't do that. He can't let somebody off on a technicality. God always punishes sin, period, exclamation point. Okay?

He cannot do otherwise. It would violate his character. He cannot do otherwise. It would violate his character. Here's the good news, God punished your sin and my sin in the person of his son so that we might experience true forgiveness and freedom from condemnation and wrath.

And if we understood the depth of what that means you wouldn't be able to stay seated right now. You'd be jumping up like your favorite NFL team just scored a last minute touchdown and won the game, the Super Bowl. But the fact that we're still seated shows that, you know, it's like, well, I hear it but I don't really understand the depth of it. It's very cool. Paul explains it this way, verse 26, it was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

In other words, what Paul is saying here is it's God who condemns our sin but it's God who takes our condemnation. Did you guys hear that? It is God who condemns our sin and takes our condemnation, bears our condemnation in the person of his son. So here's Paul's summary. Then what becomes of our boasting?

He says, well, we can't do it. It's excluded. You can't boast. What can I boast in? That he did it for me?

He says it's excluded by what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only?

Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yeah, of Gentiles also since God is one who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised, how? Through faith. And what he's saying is Jew or Gentile, there's only one way to be saved. Now the final question, and this is critical.

Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? Paul answers it, by no means. On the contrary, we uphold the law. I wish I had time to talk to you tonight about the far reaching implications of what Paul just said in verse 31. I really do.

It's a verse that I could teach on for a month of Sundays. Let me just say that this verse is one that no legalist can hope to grasp as long as they're embracing legalism. If a legalist did understand this verse, he would no longer be a legalist because Paul says, do we overthrow this law that God has given? Does our faith overthrow the law? I think Paul was being accused of that.

Paul, you preach a message that overthrows the law and that's what they accused him of. They accused him of teaching against the law of Moses. And Paul says, no, we're not overthrowing the law. Please understand, by faith we're upholding the law. We're not teaching against the law.

We're not teaching against the law. We're not teaching against the law. Please understand, by faith we're upholding the law. See, this is what the Seventh-day Adventists can't understand. They really truly believe that by going to church and resting on the seventh day as God told the Jews to do, that they are upholding the law in a way that you're not.

Paul is telling you and me here that by faith we uphold the law. So you see, if somebody ever says to you, do you keep the Sabbath? You can say, absolutely. Along with the rest of the law, well, how can you do that by faith? They don't get that.

They can't get that until they turn and really see what the Word of God has to say. When people hear me saying things like Christians are not under the law but under grace, the typical response I get is they'll say, so you're telling me that we can just ignore the Ten Commandments, huh? That's what they say every time. I tell them, you know, as Christians you're not under the law but under grace. Oh, so we can just ignore the law and just go around killing people and commit adultery and all this other thing?

Oh, I've heard that so many times. The answer is right here in verse 31. We don't overthrow the law by this faith. We uphold it. You know why?

You know how? The lawgiver has come into our hearts through the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit. You say you've got the law on stone tablets? He lives in me. The lawgiver lives inside of me and in you if your faith is in Jesus Christ.

And now by faith he communicates his righteousness to us and we uphold the law through faith. We uphold the law. We're not law breakers. We're law keepers in the very real sense of the word. It's just by faith.

And that's so hard for a legalist to understand. It's just so difficult. But that's the reality. This is what Romans teaches and it's important that we lay hold of it. I'm going to ask our worship team to come back.

They're going to close us out with a song this evening. Well let's take a moment please and let's just pray about this shall we? Oh Lord I'm so thankful. I'm so thankful for the good news. I'm so thankful.

I'm so thankful for Jesus. He who has turned aside the wrath of God on our behalf by bearing our penalty, by bearing our punishment, by removing the curse of sin and we know that the curse of sin is death and that has been removed. And we are so grateful and we are so thankful that God has saved us. And we are so thankful and we desire Lord God just to praise you and worship you and rejoice in what you have done. You did Lord what we could not do.

You saved us. Not by works of the flesh that we earn but by the work of Jesus Christ on the cross bearing our sin and shame. We are so thankful and we praise you our King and our Lord through Jesus Christ our Savior. and all God's people said together, Amen.