

# The Cross and Justification

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**Bible Verse:** Romans 3:21-26  
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As you can tell by the table in front of me, it's a Communion Sunday here at Truth Community Church, and for those of you that are new, visiting, never been with us on a Communion Sunday, we like to set, we don't always do it this way, but we, as a general pattern, like to set aside the whole service to focus on Communion and to look at portions of the word of God that would particularly remind us of the significance of what we are doing, remind us of the death of our Lord on our behalf and to contemplate something of the significance of that so that we can take Communion in a worthy manner. Communion should never be practiced in a rote way, a ritual way, a hurried way, just rushing through to check a spiritual box on something that's been done. This is what the Lord has given to the church, set apart to remember him by. It's a visual representation. The Lord did not appoint a lot of drama productions as a means of remembering him. He gave us simple ordinances, the simplicity of Communion, the simplicity of baptism to picture spiritual realities. He said, "To do this until I come in remembrance of me." And so, because we cherish Christ and because we think he is worthy of our praise, when it comes to this time uniquely set apart to remember him, then we want to do so informed by the word of God and our hearts shaped and conditioned so that we remember him in a worthy manner.

And so on this Communion Sunday, I invite you to turn to the book of Romans 3, which will be our Communion text for today. Romans 3. I'm going to read from verses 21 through 26 and this is a highly condensed, highly concentrated redemptive text that we can only barely brush the surface of here this morning and save for another time a more thorough exposition of the text, using this almost as a meditation as opposed to a complete and thorough exposition. Romans 3 beginning in verse 21. We read this,

21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- 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 and are justified by his grace as a gift, 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 God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 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.

And then I'll read verse 27 as well.

27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Now our text this morning really answers this primary and most fundamental question, how can a man be right with God? How can a woman be right with God? And in the cosmic scheme of things, beloved, there is no more important question for you to be able to answer and to know that you are answering it correctly and to know that the answer has been applied to your heart. Scripture says, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and yet to lose his soul?" What good does it do us to maximize worldly profit, worldly pleasure, worldly gain, worldly prominence, what does it profit us to gain those things if we die and go to hell as the punishment for our sins? And so the only way that we can rightly think about life, the only way that we can rightly live life, is to forward project ourselves into what is going to happen to my soul throughout all of eternity, and then, as it were, to use a phrase, to reverse engineer life in response to that. If you've never contemplated eternity, if you've never contemplated your standing before a holy God, you have not begun to live life rightly, and you are in very serious danger and our text here today will help explain why that is true and also help us to know the right way forward.

Now, in the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul basically opens the book after preliminary greetings, he opens the entire letter of Romans with a statement about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Look at chapter 1, verse 16 with me and notice, as we go into this, notice the sequence of the presentation of the gospel, because this is critical to know and understand, and the very sequence with which Paul does things instructs us and refutes so much of what has come to pass for supposed presentations of the gospel in our day and age. In Romans 1:16, the Apostle Paul says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" Now, notice the emphasis, just as a preliminary matter, the emphasis on believing and faith that he makes. In verse 16, it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes; verse 17, it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith for faith, the righteous shall live by faith. Four times the word for belief or faith is used in those two opening verses, and so the gospel is not an instruction to you about what you must do in a righteous way in order for you to be saved. That is not what the gospel is. The gospel is not about what you do for God so that God will receive you. The gospel is good news about what God has done for sinners like you so that you can be delivered from sin and its penalty and its power despite the fact that you do not deserve to receive that gift.

The gospel is extraordinarily humbling. It takes away all of our pride. And just to keep that in mind, turn back to Romans 3:27 and 28 again, just as we use these for bookends for the content of what we want to say here today. In verse 27 of Romans 3, Paul asks the

rhetorical question, "Then what becomes of our boasting?" And he answers the question, "It is excluded." There is nothing about the gospel which caters to the pride of man. There is nothing about true salvation that allows a man to puff himself up or a woman to boast over someone else that is not a Christian. The whole nature of the gospel is that it is about what God has done for sinners, not what sinners do for God, and until that very basic premise is clear in your mind, you have not begun to understand biblical Christianity and you are still lost in your sins. It's that clear, and it is that basic. The gospel is good news about what God has done for sinners just like you, not to congratulate you for your supposed good works.

Now with that basic statement, the gospel is good news about what God has done for sinners, not in the reverse, let me just point something out. When I was coming of age as a young Christian some 40 years ago, the popular way of presenting the gospel was in four steps, and you were given four principles, and the first principle was that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Maybe you've heard that. Maybe you've shared the gospel on that presentation, on that premise. Maybe you still do. And however you want to think about those things, understand this, that that is not the way that the Apostle Paul presents the gospel at all and our starting points are very, very critical to know and to understand. In the book of Proverbs, for example, the Bible tells us that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. It is the fear of God that is the starting point, not the love of God. It's not until you realize that God exists, that God made you, that God is holy, that he is a judge of sin and you're a sinner, it's not until that principle is established that you're at all prepared to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The starting point matters and the starting point in the book of Romans, after Paul says, "I'm here," Paul says in effect, "I'm here to tell you about the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ," verses 16 and 17 of Romans 1. Then notice what his next statement is. Paul first explains not the love of God, but the wrath of God. He talks about the wrath of God, not the love of God, as the starting point of his presentation of the gospel. Now, if Paul was a modern Christian author taking the book of Romans to a modern Christian so-called publisher, they very well likely would not want to hear what he had to say, and his manuscript would be pushed back across the table to him and say, "This is not the way to reach modern man." There's just no denying that. But Paul, unlike Christian publishers, Paul was under the inspiration of God as he was writing this book, and as God gives the gospel to us in his own word, God establishes the starting point from which we must understand everything else. And what is the starting point in verse 18? Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for everyone who believes. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith." Why is this gospel so important and critical? Verse 18, it's for, because, for this reason you need to know about the gospel. Verse 18, it's because "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

The gospel does not start with a declaration of the love of God. It starts with a declaration of the wrath of God. His wrath is not what we think about in human terms about wrath. If we think about wrath today, we think of somebody that has explosive, uncontrolled anger

at the slightest of provocations. That's not what God's wrath is. God's in perfect control of himself at all times. The wrath of God is his settled opposition and his settled judgment upon all unrighteousness and beginning with all ungodliness of men. It's his settled opposition that cannot change toward the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. That's the starting point, is that God is unhappy, God is wrathful against the sin of men, and it's at precisely this point that, for many of you, all of your presuppositions that you've acquired over the course of time work against you in properly hearing and properly understanding the gospel, properly understanding what it means that God is wrathful against sinners, because you're conditioned to think, "I'm a pretty good person," and you've been told this from childhood. You know, you're special. You know, you can be all that you want to be. You need to just unleash the man that is within you, as Tony Robbins would say, words to that effect. You've just been conditioned, and the pride of your own heart, more importantly, makes you want to think that, "I'm a pretty good person. I'm a respectable citizen of America. And, you know, and I'm a patriot. Blah, blah, blah, blah." And there's just this assumed spirit of self-righteousness about you, that you hear everything that the gospel says through that controlling presupposition, and it never occurs to you that you are actually lost, guilty, and condemned before a holy God, and as a result of that, you never see your desperate need for Christ, and as a result of that, you never truly repent and trust in him, and all we can do is lay open the word of God and let it speak to us so that we, by the power of the Holy Spirit, can have our thinking confronted, convicted, changed, so that as the Spirit gives us new life, that we might freely come to Christ for genuine salvation.

And for those of you that have not been with us on Tuesday nights as we've gone through the Beatitudes, there is a direct parallel in principle between what we're discussing now and what we see in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. The opening principle of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3 is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The second Beatitude, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Those who are in the kingdom of God are those who recognize, freely confess, openly acknowledge that they are spiritually bankrupt and that they have no merit about them. That's the opening principle, and if you do not freely confess that about yourself, you're not a Christian, no matter how many churches you've been into, no matter how many churches you've gone to, after being in one place for a couple of years, you go to another one and just keep looking for something that you can never find. The gospel tells us that we are sinners who have broken God's law and therefore we are guilty before him and under his wrath and facing eternal judgment and no one comes to Christ with the spirit of, "I'm a pretty good person. I'm a conservative Republican." Nobody's been saved on that basis, ever. No one ever will be. And so it is a mistake to mingle your conservative politics with your standing before God because those two things are not related on the front end, anyway, of coming to God.

Now Paul works out this argument about all ungodliness and unrighteousness; he goes through and he shows how Jews are sinners and that Gentiles are sinners, and that even those who have never heard the gospel at all, who have never had a Bible in their hands, that even they are still guilty and condemned by God because their own inner man and their own inner conscience rises up and convicts them of sin. Look at chapter 2, verse 14,

and 15, the Jews had the law and didn't keep it. They are guilty. Gentiles have a law within themselves that they don't even keep their own standard, and therefore they're guilty before God on their own standard, is what we see in Romans 2:14 and 15. "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law." They don't have written revelation but they have a law inside them by which they will be judged. And in verse 15, "They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."

So they're guilty based on the fact that they violate their own conscience and Paul continues to work out that argument in meticulous detail unto this end that we see in Romans 3:10, let's say. Romans 3:10. Paul says, "as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.'" Now, beloved, Paul is making a comprehensive statement about all of humanity. He's covered the Jews, he's covered the Gentiles, that's comprehensive in his day as he was writing. And having looked at Jews, looked at Gentiles, he comes to the conclusion that no one is righteous. No one does good. No one seeks for God, not even one.

Now, with that in mind, I have to ask you whether you realize and thoroughly understand and embrace and accept the fact that Scripture is talking about you in particular when it speaks about humanity in general. There are no exceptions. There are no exceptions. All of our righteous deeds are like filthy rags. We have nothing to commend ourselves before God. We have not loved him with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind. We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. That's collectively, that's individually. And that's the standard. That's what God requires. Scripture says you are to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect, and one who knows his heart at all, one who sees the implications of this says then that means there's no hope for anyone, that there is nothing that anyone anywhere can say to protest their own righteousness before God because Scripture stands as a prosecutor, stands as a judge before us and convicts us and declares against us, "Guilty," with no defense that we can make on our own behalf so that in chapter 3, verse 19, we read this, "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. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." Everybody, I don't want to be too crass here, but everybody in the world is told when it comes to speaking about themselves, speaking about their goodness, their righteousness before God, everyone in the world, everyone in this room is told, "Hush, don't speak that way. Be quiet. You have nothing to say on your own behalf." Every mouth must be stopped and the whole world held accountable to God because God has revealed the knowledge of sin to us. No one can boast before God. Every one of us stand guilty and condemned in our own merit and the outcome of these things, Jesus says through his word, Revelation 20, that, you know, there is a lake of fire awaiting those that are condemned to go to the eternal fires with the devil and all of his angels, fallen angels.

You see, beloved, what we need to see here is this, is that what Scripture does is convict us. What Scripture does is to leave us in and of ourselves completely hopeless. Jesus said that he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. And let me just add a word about sin here. In our self-focused, self-preoccupation and all of the psychological junk that's been circulating for so many decades, we're conditioned to think about sin and the way that it affects us, "It makes me feel bad inside," maybe someone says, or "I need to forgive myself," or "I can't get over the past," and it's all just a self-focused, inward look, and sin is defined in terms of how it affects us personally. That's not right, beloved. We're not the center of the universe. That's not the way to think about sin. If you are going to think rightly of sin, you must think about sin in terms of the holiness of God, that he is perfect, that he is elevated, that he is high and righteous and a holy judge, and we must think about sin and the fact that we have violated a holy God with our disobedience and as a result of that, in the language of Isaiah 59:2, your sin has separated you from God. We have not met the standard that God requires. We're lost with nothing to say on our own behalf.

Now, I want to take a moment just to remind you of some familiar Scriptures, maybe some that aren't quite as familiar along these lines, because again, beloved, the problem is that we are so conditioned by everything around us and by our own pride to think that we're okay when we're not, to think that we're cancer-free when actually the spiritual cancer of sin has metastasized in our soul, and it's inoperable, and it's lethal and fatal. And to think that, "Yeah, I hear what you're saying, but inside I'm okay. There are sins that I have not committed and therefore I'm righteous." False logic. "There are sins that I've committed, but I'm not as bad as some of the others. I'm better than most." That's not the standard. And I just live in fear of people having a wrong sense about these things, even as they sit under gospel preaching. It's amazing to contemplate. So just hear me out on this matter of the universality of sin and as it applies to each and every one of us.

Romans 7:18 says, "nothing good dwells in me." Ephesians 2:1 says that we're dead in trespasses and sins. Philippians 3:9, Paul says, "I do not have a righteousness of my own." James 3:2 says, "we all stumble in many ways." 1 John 1:8 says, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Beloved, you can run from these things, but you can't hide. There's, again, forgive the lousy metaphor that I'm about to use here; I acknowledge up front that this is a lousy metaphor. But when it comes to the convicting work of Scripture and the multitude of passages that, and I've just scratched the surface, the multitude of passages which convict us, it's like trying to outrun a pack of dogs that are coming after you and there's nowhere to go and hide. They're coming. These passages come after us and convict us and tell us that we are not what we think we are, that we are not basically good with just a few little flaws, and it is not sufficient, beloved, it is not sufficient to hide behind, to cloak yourself in a false sense of modesty that says, "Well, I know I'm not perfect." That's not it because what's behind that statement of false modesty, "I know that I'm not perfect," what's behind that is, "but I'm not as bad as you say I am. I'm not as bad as Scripture says." But. But. But. But, instead of just saying, "Yeah, not only am I not perfect, I'm a guilty sinner before God that deserves eternal damnation." The one protesting, "I'm not perfect," rarely wants to go that far in his self-testimony.

So the abundant testimony of the word of God is that you and I are not right with him, and to be a Christian then, to be a Christian in light of what we've seen in Romans 1:18, Romans 3, and what we've said so far, beloved, I just really want to make this as clear and basic as possible, a Christian is not someone who is a respectable citizen. Being a respectable citizen does not make you a Christian. Having the right politics, as you define right politics, whether liberal or conservative, doesn't make you a Christian, doesn't make you right with God. Whether you believe in climate change or you don't believe in climate change has nothing to do with the matter of the holiness of God. Being a Christian is not someone who looks at sin and says, "Well, it's not that important, it's not that big of a deal." God thinks it's a big deal and so by definition it's important and something to create a sense of fear and concern in our hearts. To be a Christian is not someone who you're primarily just disappointed with yourself and sad over the way that maybe you've failed and been a victim of others. That has nothing to do with being a Christian, beloved. To be a Christian, starting point is an acknowledgment of spiritual bankruptcy. A Christian is someone who mourns over sin in light of the gospel that we're going to see. A Christian in his heart, rather than protesting his goodness, a Christian is someone who longs for a righteousness that he does not have. Scripture says that, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." So it's the exact opposite of the way that so many condition us to think. It's not that we think about ourselves as primarily good and therefore God must be happy with us. That's not the starting point. It's not that we are good and that God rewards us for our goodness. The message of being a Christian is not that Christ died for our past sins and now it's up to us to do our part to achieve our salvation. The message of being a Christian is not that I made a decision for Christ, shocking as though that may be for some. The message of being a Christian is not even that God rewards us for our faith and obedience and that we present something to him or our faith and repentance and we present something to him and God gives us something back, God gives us salvation in return for what we first present to him.

That is not the gospel. That is not true salvation. And in light of all of that, go back again to Romans 3:19 and 20. In light of all of that, we see again, Paul says in verse 18, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." 19, "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. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." Now, beloved, if the Bible had stopped there, the picture would be immensely bleak indeed. But the message of the gospel is that there's good news. The message of the gospel is there's good news, not that you can do something for God in order to gain salvation, but rather that what God has done for sinners so that you may be saved and you see that in the contrast that follows in verse 21. Paul has, like a skilled prosecutor, presented the case in an irrefutable way against every man, woman, and child guilty before God, unable to achieve our own righteousness. Now, verse 21, the door opens up to heaven. Verse 21, "But now. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it." The gospel does this, the gospel declares that by grace God has provided a remedy for us that we could never achieve on

our own. Therefore, we have no boasting to make. It is a remedy we could not have come up with. It's a remedy that we could not achieve on our own. You see, if you are going to be in heaven one day, if you are going to stand before God, and we all will, if you're going to stand before God and be accepted by him, you must have a righteousness that is equivalent to the righteousness of God. You must have a righteousness that God requires, and none of us have that. And if we're going to have it, then we do not have it, we cannot work it up. If we're going to have a righteousness that God accepts, then it must be one that comes from him to us and in verse 21, as we read the righteousness of God, what this phrase righteousness of God is speaking of is it's referring to a righteousness that God bestows on men in Christ. It's a righteousness of God.

Go back to Romans 1:1, at the very start. This is all of God. It comes from God himself so that in Romans 1:1, we read that, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God." The gospel belongs to him. In verse 16 of chapter 1, Paul speaks of the gospel, "it is the power of God." It is the gospel of God. It is the power of God. Chapter 3, verse 21, "it is the righteousness of God." Now, listen, beloved, stay with me, everything about your eternal destiny hinges on the truth of the things that we're seeing in Scripture right now, right today, and we see that it's not about our righteousness, it's something else. When we speak about the gospel of God, the power of God, the righteousness of God, beloved, understand this, that whatever this gospel is, it's something that God planned. God planned it. The gospel is something that God provides. God provides it for us. We do not provide it to him. God prepared it. God offers this gospel freely to sinners. Beloved, the gospel is God's and God's alone. It is his righteousness alone. It is the power of God alone. There is nothing in this to appeal to the pride of man, to the pride of the human heart, because what God requires, we've already seen, is something that we can never meet.

We're not perfect, and yet that's what God requires and so, when Paul says here in Romans 3:21, look at that with me again, please, when Paul says, "But now," having just convicted everyone of sin and said the whole world is guilty and accountable before God, and that's the conclusion in and of ourselves, when Paul says, "But now," he's saying there's something else to think about. There is a contrast. There is a contrast between the law that condemns everyone and the saving gospel which is available to everyone, and that distinction has to be clear in our minds. Beloved, what God has done in his gospel, what God has done in his gospel is he has provided a way to receive a righteousness which he accepts, which he finds acceptable, God provides a way to receive a righteousness that he accepts, and it's something that is apart from what we do, and in this way, God has provided a way for us to be reconciled to him despite our sin.

Look at verse 21 with me again, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law," apart from your obedience, apart from your works, "although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it." What is this righteousness? Where do we get it? How can we be made right with God when we are guilty sinners before him? Verse 22, it's "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." Beloved, you cannot become a Christian until you abandon all hope in your own righteousness and put your hope, your faith, your trust, your confidence in Jesus Christ alone. Until that has



happened, until that change has come into your heart, until you are willing to condemn yourself in agreement with Scripture and openly acknowledge and agree with God, "I'm guilty before him, I have nothing to defend myself," only then, then and only then are you in a position to turn and to come to Christ. And there's a theological word for what we're talking about here, getting a righteousness from God that he accepts, and the theological word that you need to know is justification. Justification. I think it's like five syllables. That's a big word, isn't it?

And, beloved, I realize that for many people, to talk about justification and to talk about these theological issues is something that many people have no interest in. Here's the thing, no one is going to be saved unless they get interested in some theology because it is through these theological truths that God makes the way of the gospel known to us and if someone wants to be saved, he better get interested in theology, better get interested in what Scripture has to say about these things, because apart from these things we still remain in darkness. And so let me give you a definition for the word justification, and we'll kind of repeat this a couple of times, and we'll see how it is. Remember, the fundamental question is, how can a man be right with God? That's the fundamental question, how can a man be right with God? And what we've seen is we can't be right with God in our own selves, because we've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We can't appeal to ourselves and so how can we be saved then? How can God be holy and just and still receive a sinner like you into his presence? This is a colossal conundrum and it's what this passage that we've read earlier answers for us.

Here's a definition of justification from the Shorter Catechism, question number 33. What is justification? Here's the answer, justification is an act of God's free grace wherein he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. Let me just highlight four things out of that real quick. Justification, number 1, God pardons all of our sins. He forgives them freely. Until your sins are pardoned, you cannot be right with God. And so in justification, we find the pardon for our sins. Secondly, God accepts us as righteous. Justification is not simply having your sins forgiven, it's being declared righteous in the sight of God; not merely not guilty, but God declaring us righteous in his sight. Our sins are pardoned, he accepts us as righteous in his sight, and it's on the basis of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, counted to our benefit, you could say, imputation, Christ, the righteousness of Christ, counted to your benefit, and that is received by faith alone. Pardoned of sin, accepted as righteous, on the basis of the righteousness of Christ, received by faith alone.

There are two things going on with justification, your sins are pardoned and God declares you righteous. That's what God requires. That's how we are accepted in his sight, even when we are sinners, and so now I want to just walk you through three basic principles of justification that come from this text, all right? And it is only those that are justified that are welcome at the Table by Christ. We must be right with God in order to partake of the Communion elements and so an adequate exposition of the text that I read would require many, many messages, and I'm going to try to deal with it in 15 or 20 minutes here before we take the elements, and so I acknowledge up front the limitations of what I'm about to

do but these three basic principles will help you, in light of the definition of justification, to be able to examine your heart and see if you are in Christ or not.

1. Justification comes apart from the law. Justification comes apart from the law. God's way of righteousness, God's way of reconciliation to himself, beloved, the gospel of God that he has planned, that he has prepared, that he announces in his word, that way of righteousness is not presented to you in a way that leaves it to you to satisfy the requirements, to satisfy what it requires. Look at verses 21 and 22 again. "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law." This is something that is separate from human obedience, separate from human works. The gospel is something that is made available on the understanding, on the condition that you know that you cannot work for it. You cannot obey enough to earn it. It's apart from the law that way. Verse 22, it's "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." If you are going to be right with God, it starts with recognizing, "I've sinned and broken his law, and I can't make up for that. I have no power to obey within me. I need," here it is, beloved, this is the million-dollar point, "I need something from outside of me, outside of my resources, outside of my ability, if I'm going to be right with God."

You are not saved through obeying the law. You are not saved through being a good person. You are not saved by being a good citizen or any of that other junk. In fact, let me just reinforce this point. Turn to the book of Philippians 3. When it came to being a good Jew, the Apostle Paul, before his conversion, was at the head of the class. He was the valedictorian of Jewish righteousness. He said in verse 4 of Philippians 3, "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh," that is, on human merit, human attainment, "I have more. He says, I was "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless." He said, "I was an exemplary Jew," and he says elsewhere in Scripture, that his fellow citizens, his fellow countrymen could testify to that fact of the manner of righteousness, according to human terms, according to the law, that he had lived out before he was a Christian.

What's Paul's conclusion about that in verse 7? He says, "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ." Verse 8 he says, "I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ." He says, "My righteousness was as dung. My righteousness that I thought was so good before I was a Christian, I now realize that there was nothing good about it in the sight of God. All of my righteousness was as refuse, as dung to be cast into the latrine." The language is that stark in the original.

And so, whatever this righteousness is, it's not something that comes from us. We've got to have something from outside us. We need a righteousness given to us that we did not earn. We need the righteousness of someone else, and so, going back to Romans 3 here, when Paul says the righteousness of God, the righteousness God requires has been manifested apart from the law, he's telling us you cannot be saved by obeying the law, by being good enough. Instead, it's a righteousness through faith in Christ. It's a righteousness that Christ rendered. Christ obeyed the law in the way that God requires,

and he did it on behalf of everyone who would ever believe in him. So Christ perfectly obeyed the law, gave his life on the cross as a sacrifice to appease the wrath of God, and it is in Christ, God holds forth Christ and says, "Put your faith in him, believe in Christ, receive him." He is the only way that you can be properly reconciled to God and in that way, Christ gets the glory, Christ rendered the obedience God requires, and we are, as it were, receivers, not doers, before a holy God. We put our faith in Christ, not in self, Christ, not our works, to satisfy what God requires.

Justification is apart from the law. Now, secondly, justification is needed by all. Justification is needed by all and this is, look, it's like there's a 300-foot-wide bulldozer that is rolling through the room right now with the purpose of utterly crushing and leveling human pride so that there is no boasting left when you walk out of this room here today. Jews and Gentiles all face the same problem. Men and women face the same problem. Black and white, Asian and Hispanic, everybody faces the same problem. Young and old, we all have the same problem. There is a common thread. The unifying factor of humanity is found in this, is that we have all failed. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Look at verse 23 of Romans 3. Paul, actually at the end of verse 22, we should start there, he says, it's a "righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction," there is no distinction, one is not better than another in this realm, "for," verse 23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Here's what we have in common, beloved, you and me, all of us together, all of humanity, we all have this in common: we inherited sin and condemnation from our first father, Adam. And as long as we are in Adam, we share in his failure and in his condemnation. Not only that, you and I, we all sin. We've all committed our own sins. We all have a sinful nature of our own. We've inherited guilt. We have committed guilty things in our sin. And as a result of that, beloved, we are not qualified to enter into the holiness of God. We are not entitled. Oh, I'd love to do a whole sermon just on that word and address the whole sense of the entitlement mentality of our entire world in which we live. We're not entitled to go to heaven. We're not entitled to see the glory of Christ. We're not entitled to any blessing from God. We forfeited it all. We were on a ship and we threw all that cargo overboard. We have no entitlement. We cannot stand in his presence. We have lost all glory because we've all sinned and fallen short of his holiness and so the question that Scripture asks in the book of Job is the question for all of us in our day. How can a man be right before God? Job 9.2. How can we be right with God? How can we be reconciled to him when we're like that, when we share in the clay of fallen humanity, we're guilty, defiant, indifferent in our own lives? Beloved, what's going to happen to us? What's going to happen to you on the day of judgment if you're like that? How can you be released from that prison? Where is the key that unlocks the gates out of this dungeon of condemnation?

3. Justification is a gift of grace. Justification is a gift of grace. The verdict of righteousness cannot come because we deserve it, it must come as a gift. Now, God would be perfectly just to require an eternal penalty to be paid by all, and we cannot argue our merit to mitigate or lessen the penalty, let alone avoid it altogether, and as a

result of that, beloved, if you are to be saved, your salvation must be something that comes apart from your deserving. We've already seen God, wrath of God, all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. No one righteous, no not one. No one seeks for God. All the world held accountable. Every mouth stopped. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It's sweeping, it's comprehensive. There's nothing that we can say in defense of ourselves. And so because of that, salvation must be by something other than our merit. Justification must come some other way.

Verse 24, Romans 3, look at it with me. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified, remember, justified meaning our sins are pardoned and we're accepted as righteous in the sight of God. Justified how? "By his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." It's a gift. It is something that is by grace. When God justifies sinners, he declares them righteous, and he does this by grace. He grants, beloved, he grants undeserved favor, something that you don't deserve in place of what you do deserve. You do deserve condemnation. What's offered to you in the glorious gospel of God is an acceptance, a righteousness that you don't deserve. You deserve condemnation, you do not deserve this gift, and in the gospel, God gives the gift and relieves the condemnation. Instead of the wrath of God in the gospel, we find his generosity, we find his kindness. We don't earn salvation as a worker earns his wages and can demand his paycheck. "Hey, I put in my eight hours. You owe me my paycheck." That is the exact opposite, the exact opposite of what the gospel is. In the gospel, we come to God and say, "What I deserve is condemnation. I'm not asking for what I deserve. I'm not asking for justice. I'm asking for grace. I'm asking for a gift." And God grants salvation as a gift to unworthy, unfit sinners.

On what basis? Look at verse 24 again, we're justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Redemption, I told you this is highly concentrated truth, highly concentrated theology here, there's no getting around that. Salvation is a gift from God which Jesus Christ paid the price to secure. Redemption refers to a slave market purchase. In the old days, they would go, slaves would be out on the market for sale, someone would pay the price and that slave would belong to them. A ransom price was paid to deliver a slave from captivity. What Scripture is telling us here is that by his shed blood, Jesus Christ paid the price necessary to secure our release. In a way that we did not deserve, out of his own goodness, Jesus Christ acted graciously to help us. We were in chains to sin. We were under the bondage of the devil. We even liked it that way. It's what we wanted and preferred, even though it was unto our eternal condemnation. And Christ, in grace, without prompting from us by the prompting of his own goodwill, says, "I'll go to earth. I'll live a perfect life. I'll lay my life down so that they can be forgiven."

Look at verse 25, speaking of Christ, "whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood," propitiation, a word meaning a sacrifice that satisfies wrath. Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins. It took an innocent victim. It took a perfect victim. And only Christ was enough so that Christ stood in our place at the cross, took the wrath of God on himself, and beloved, beloved, we, as it were, we stood by passively and watched as Christ did that for us and did that on our behalf. We did not contribute to the

redemption that he achieved by shedding his blood on the cross. We had no part in that. He paid it all by himself. We did not contribute righteousness. He did that all by himself. And what God does in the gospel is he sets forth Christ. He says, "Here is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Here is the one who is perfect. Here is the one who has shed the blood necessary for the forgiveness of sin. Look unto him and be saved. Give yourself to this one and be saved. Leave yourself, leave your so-called righteousness behind and come alone to Christ and cling to him alone for your salvation." Salvation, beloved, you can have a sense if you understand the reality of salvation by asking this question, does the gospel of God humble my heart? Does it make it so I do not feel like I can be proud of anything about my personal righteousness? Salvation is humbling, and the reason that that's a diagnostic question is this, is because in true salvation, we find our righteousness in someone else, not in our own being.

Look at Romans 3:22, 24 and 26, "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ"; verse 24, "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"; verse 26, God is "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." It is in Jesus Christ. It is in Christ. It is in Jesus alone that this salvation is found and so a Christian rests entirely on Christ and not in any way in himself. You cannot earn salvation. You must receive it by faith alone. Beloved, let me say it another way, salvation is not a joint enterprise between you and Christ where he did his part, you do your part, and together it comes together synergistically, and you know, together, Jesus and I saved my soul. That's not it. Faith alone. Justification apart from works of the law. And so saving faith no longer looks to self to satisfy the law of God. Saving faith looks entirely and exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ and his finished work. It rests on Christ alone. And it is therefore in Christ that God can be just and uphold the law. What the law requires, all fulfilled in Christ. And yet God can justify sinners who put their faith in Christ. Your sin laid on Christ and punished at the cross. The perfect obedience of Christ lived out in his life credited to your account, a double exchange, your sin on Christ, his righteousness on you, and in that, is found justification and salvation. God supplies everything to cover and forgive our guilt. We come humbly and receive Christ and rely on him alone, realizing we forfeited all boasting and we glory in the cross alone.

Let's pray together. As the men come forward to serve us the elements, let me just say a few words about Communion here with your heads bowed. Communion is for those who have denied themselves and trusted in Christ alone. We who know Christ have been saved by him, we have an opportunity to partake of these elements. Christ established Communion as a way for his people to remember him by faith. It's a memorial, not a sacrifice. What these elements represent is that in the bread, the body of Christ, in the juice, the blood of Christ, they picture for us the price of our redemption, that Jesus, in a real human body, in real history, in real time, some 2,000 years ago, in love, laid down his life to save us from our sin, and in this ordinance that he appointed, we gratefully remember the one who went to the slave market and bought us and brought us out. Beloved, if you are a true Christian, we invite you to join us in this Table, but if you're not a Christian, if you are living in sin of which you are unwilling to repent, we ask you to simply pass the elements. Don't pretend to share in Christ if you are disobedient and distrusting of him.

*Father, we pray that you would shape our hearts, even in this moment, to take of these elements in a worthy way. Amen.*

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