

Bad News Given with Great Love

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[0 : 00] Father, we know that if you have hard things to say to us, you do not speak to us because you desire to belittle us, shame us, insult us, diminish us, or denigrate us, but that you do it, Father, because your love is unfailing, that you, Father, are the unfailing God of love.

And so, Father, we know that even your hard words are spoken with love. So we ask, Father, that you help us to trust you as we hear these words. We ask, Father, that you help us to dive deep into these words, knowing that it is you who speaks, you who sent your Son to die upon the cross to redeem us, so that we, by faith in Jesus, can become your child by adoption and grace.

Father, help us to plunge deep into your word and have your word plunge deep into us so that our lives will bear fruit for your glory. And this we ask in Jesus' name, your Son and the only Savior, our Savior.

Amen. Please be seated. Amen. So, you know, sometimes I have to come up with a story to try to get your attention right off the beginning, but how can you beat, no one understands, no one does anything good, no one seeks God.

So, just imagine trying to explain that to your co-workers. Imagine trying to explain that if it came over the loudspeaker at your work.

[1 : 37] George believes that no one does good, no one understands, no one seeks God. Ask George to explain it to you. And probably we would go like this, wondering how on earth it got put on the loudspeaker.

And some of you are saying, George, I'm not even thinking about how I'd explain it to my co-workers. I don't know how I'd explain it to another Christian. It seems pretty hardcore, a hardcore text.

It's one of the advantages, by the way, of preaching through books of the Bible, because I confess to you that in my flesh, I would probably never pick this text, because I'm a Canadian male.

And I'm a Canadian male, and, you know, I like to be liked, and, you know, I naturally try to think of what could encourage, or something like that. I've never picked this text. And so, it's one of the reasons why I preach through books of the Bible, because it's good for us to hear the Bible, and to hear those parts and bits that we wouldn't normally turn to, or that we would quickly skip over.

So, what on earth is going on? Andrew, could you put up Romans 1, 16 to 17 for me, please? Now, remember, I said that everything in the book of Romans is all, these two verses basically summarize everything in the book.

[2 : 48] So, every time you come, if you go back, and if you're in a Bible study, and you're trying to study the book of Romans, and you're trying to figure out what's going on in the text, it's always going to be helpful if you go back and you look at this text, because it's going to help you to maybe at least try to say, okay, this text somehow is fitting into this.

So, could you say this text with me out loud, please? 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 the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. So, the problem we have with this text, Romans 3, 1 and 20, keep in mind that, you'd say, well, George, that's a big jump.

From what that's saying, it seems like it's a very big jump to this. In fact, George, how is it that we can even understand that? Doesn't Romans 3 sort of contradict Romans 1, 16 to 17? It says no one understands, but it sort of implies that we can understand Romans 1, 16 to 17.

And so, it seems like a bit of a contradiction. And here's the thing that if you sort of think about it for a second, that the problem isn't that we think that everybody only tells the truth all the time, or that people only speak, they only speak what's good, they only do good things.

[4 : 16] Like, none of us believe that that happens all of the time. But the problem is that when it seems as if, you know, if the text had said, you know, some of you do good things sometimes and bad things other times, we'd probably be pretty fine with it.

And some of you understand things sometimes, and some of you don't understand things other times. I mean, that's what my wife says to me all the time, and she's correct, you know. Sometimes I just don't understand, don't get it. And so, that's part of the problem with the text.

But as we start to look at, we're going to look at the text, Romans 3, 1 to 20, turn to it in your Bibles. But before we do that, I want to suggest to you something that's important to keep in mind as we go through.

It's very common in educational theory. My guess is that if you go to get a teaching degree at the University of Ottawa, that if you study psychology, if you study sociology, that even many political philosophies, if you listen to many spiritualities, if you go and you were to go to chapters and get books on spirituality, that many, many people in our culture tell us that we essentially are good. That who we are is fundamentally good. Why is it that we don't get as upset with that as we do with Romans 3? Like, why is it that we only get bothered with a text that seems to be extreme in one direction?

[5 : 39] Like, shouldn't we be bothered with people who seem to talk in extreme ways in both directions? Like, why is it that that type of extreme that we're all fundamentally good doesn't bother us as much as Romans 3 bothers us?

Like, what does that say about me? What does it say about you? Well, let's read the text. Romans 3, 1 to 20, and we'll begin at the first verse. Then what advantage has the Jew, or what is the value of circumcision?

Just pause here before we go any further. Those of you who were here last week, you might remember that I talked about how to get the full oomph of the text, you need to do something to make the text contemporary.

It's a completely valid move. And so take out the word Jew and put Anglican. And maybe some of you said, yeah, yeah, that's a good thing, because Anglicans, they don't know anything.

They never do good things, and they don't understand. So if that's the case, if you come from a Pentecostal background, put in Pentecostal. If you come from a Baptist background, put in Baptist. If you come from an Associated Gospel background, put in Associated Gospel.

[6 : 45] If you're even saying, no, no, I know there's some Baptists. No, no, then put Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists in everywhere you say this text. Or put in Reformed Presbyterian. Like, put in the denomination that you think is the best.

Okay? And put that in. And every time you see the word circumcision, put in the word baptism. And if you do that, you're going to start to get a little bit of the shock of the text.

So if I was at the Met, I would say, then what advantage has the person who comes to the Met? Whoa. Okay? So I'm going to use Anglican, because it'd be rude for me to pick another denomination.

Then what advantage has the Anglican? Or what is the value of baptism? Much in every way. To begin with, the Anglicans were entrusted with the oracles of God.

Now, we actually always thought that, but that's a separate story. That's where it breaks down. Much in every way, to begin with, the Anglicans were entrusted with the oracles of God.

[7 : 46] I just want to pause here for a second. There's something that you, I could have mentioned this every week. And I could mention it every week in the following weeks, and I will mention it several other times, because it's a really important lesson.

But it's easy for us not to notice it. Andrew, if you could put up the first point. The Bible is the oracles of God. The Bible is the oracles of God.

Some of your translations say the very words of God, and that's a good equivalent, because oracles is a bit, isn't it like a high-tech company or something like that? And, you know, but if you put down the very words of God, because in the ancient world, you would go to an oracle, because the oracle, in a sense, would, you know, whenever you did the proper sacrifices and paid the proper money and do whatever you had to do, I don't know, a thousand push-ups upside down or something like that.

And then you would, the oracle would speak, and it was as if the oracle disappeared, and God, the gods, would use the oracle's mouth to speak. And so when the oracle was speaking, every word

you heard wasn't hers, it was God speaking.

And that's what the Bible has always taught about itself. That's what Jesus teaches as well. So I, what the text is claiming is that right now in my hands, I am holding the very words of God.

[9 : 10] That's what I'm holding. That's what the Bible teaches us about itself. It's not a fundamentalist idea. It's not something that, you know, those who are sort of very emergent saying, you know, that words are a problem and don't we know that there's, you know, issues around words and it's a modernist idea to say things like that.

It's not a modernist idea. It's completely and utterly not a modernist idea. And all the way through the book of Romans, Paul is always saying, it is written, it is written, it is written, it is written. In other words, he's saying, I'm quoting something that comes from God that's authoritative that you've got to understand. Every word is important. The Bible is the oracles of God. Now, some of you, before we get back to reading, some of you say, George, you've actually just made the problem worse.

I know, I'm going to do that. I'm going to make it as hard as I can, okay? But you're actually, George, you're making the problem way, way, way, way worse. Because you see, George, if you just were more nuanced and more enlightened, you could say, well, the Bible isn't the word of God, it contains the word of God.

And that means that some parts of the Bible are just culturally relative. And it just reflects a lack of proper intellectual development and intellectual formation. It just, and it means you can just sort of say, well, you know, you know, back in those days, they just really talked really, really hard.

[10 : 35] And really what Paul is saying, really what the Bible is saying is that sometimes you don't do good things. You know, and so George, by saying what you just said, now you're making it sound as if God, God, is just another one of the long line of people who puts me down.

Now you're saying that God is just as bad as my dad who told me that I was always going to be stupid and that I would never amount to anything. Now you're making God sound like he's just like my elementary teacher or my coach in school or my boss or, you know, that just always putting me down.

And George, you've actually made the matter worse. I don't think I have. But, well, is God just like that?

Is that what God is like? Is God just like another one of a long line of people who tell us that we are a failure that will never amount to anything, that everything about us is deeply flawed, and that eventually people will see through our veneer in our front to realize just how big a failure we really are.

Is that what God, is that actually God speaking to us? Well, let's continue at verse 2 and we'll keep reading. Go back to verse 2. Much in every way.

[12 : 02] That's, remember, what vanishes have to be an Anglican? Much in every way. To begin with, the Anglicans were entrusted with the oracles of God, the very words of God. What if some were unfaithful?

That's Anglicans. Hard to believe. I'm just joking. Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means. Let God be true, though everyone were a liar, as it is written, that you may be justified in your words and prevail when you are judged.

That's referring to God. But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us?

I speak in a human way. By no means. For then, how could God judge the world? But if, through my lie, God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned, in other words, found guilty, as a sinner?

And why not do evil that good may come, as some people slanderously charge us with saying, their condemnation, in other words, the verdict, is just. Now just sort of pause here.

[13 : 10] I'm going to, I want to put up a point and then I'll try to go and see how this is actually a very powerful text that's telling us the opposite of what we emotionally feel when we hear it. If you could put up the second point, Andrew, that would be a great help.

The real and living God is unhindered, faithful, righteous, and true, so he speaks and judges truly. The real and living God, not that God's my imaginary friend, okay, the real God, the God who really does exist, who really lives, the real and living God is unhindered.

I couldn't figure out a way to put prevail in there, and then I got this idea of using unhindered. Nothing's going to hinder him, he's going to prevail. He's unhindered, he's faithful, he's righteous, he's true, and so he speaks, he speaks and judges truly.

You know, it's very interesting. Parts of the book of Romans, like a lot of the Bible, so one of the things about the word oracles, by the way, is that often the sayings of the oracles were, some of the sayings of the oracles would be very clear, very obvious, very easy for us to understand, and other parts would be dark.

Not dark in terms of being something evil, but dark in the sense of it's a little bit unclear, you have to really think about it and meditate upon it. And it's the same with the book of Romans. All of a sudden, it's wham!

[14:35] It's like, you know, in next week, for all of sin and fall short of the glory of God, it's like wham! Very, very clear, but still very, very deep. But other parts of the text, it comes at you sort of obliquely and sideways.

And in fact, these first eight verses of the book of Romans of chapter three are coming at us sideways because he does a very, very interesting thing.

Later on in the book of Romans, he's actually going to return to this Q&A; format. He's going to actually give a bit of a longer answer to each of the types of questions that people have. But he uses this Q&A; format to remind us that we're dealing with God and to teach us about God.

So go back. So in verse two, it's telling us that God speaks, that the God who exists speaks. And look back at verse three. What if some were unfaithful?

Does their faithlessness, what? Nullify the faithfulness of God. In other words, okay, who's God? God is faithful. We deal all the time with people, we deal all the time with people who don't keep their word, who don't keep their promises, who, you know, break contracts, break the law, break marriages.

[15:50] You know, we all, all of us maybe have to deal with, I don't know, dads who abandon the family or moms that abandon the family. Like all of the time, we're completely surrounded by people who are faithless.

But God is never faithless. We cannot project our experience of faithlessness outside of ourselves and even the fact that we are often faithless.

We can't project that on God. God is never faithless. God is always faithful. He keeps faith with the human race. Even when the human race turned their back on him and rebelled against him and were faithless, he always was faithful.

He was faithful to human beings. Nothing can stop him from being faithful. And then you keep on reading and well, it goes, well, for by no, you know, so that's what he focuses on is who is God? God is faithful. And then, you know, you go on and you read verse 4 and it says, by no means let God be true, though everyone were a liar, as it is written, that you may be justified in your words and prevail when you are judged.

[16:53] And some of your translations might have different words there and say prevail in judgment. And that's because in the original language, it can either mean prevail when people are judging you, God, or that your judgments will prevail.

And in Greek, it can mean both things at the same time. And so, but in English, you have to put one or the other. But in both cases, what's it telling us about God? It's telling us that God will prevail, that God is true, that God is in and of himself the true, and he only speaks the truth, and that his, he will prevail.

He is unhindered, as I put it, because I couldn't figure out how to put prevail in the sentence. And make it be remotely good grammar. He is unhindered. Nothing will hinder him from prevailing.

That's who we're talking about with your objection. And then you keep on reading and you look at verse 5. But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, who's God?

He's always right. He's right in terms of how he deals, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

There's a rightness, a meekness, a fitness about that that's always right, and they do the right thing.

[18:10] And his relationship to the creation, we're always going to see that it's right. It's the right relationship, and he does the right thing, that God is right. And he's always right.

And nothing can hinder him from being right. Nothing can hinder him. And that's who we're talking about. Nothing can hinder him from being right. And then you sort of go down to verse 6, by no means.

For then how could God judge the world? And the God who does exist, he makes moral judgments because he in and of himself is good. And he judges.

He's completely and utterly, forever, unhinderedly opposed to evil. Unhinderedly opposed to evil. We might give up and give in to somebody who's evil. I mean, the West is having a horrible time dealing with Putin from Russia. We're hindered.

[19 : 09] We give up. We say, well, it's just, you know, okay, it's just Syria. Like, let's just, you know, forget about it. It's one of the next things. But God is never like that. He's never hindered. He never stops. Nothing can stop him.

He's always opposed. And so this text, it says that the real and living God is unhindered, faithful, righteous, and true. So he speaks and judges truly.

And why is this so significant with all of these objections? Even though Paul later on will give, you know, in chapter 6 and chapter 8 and chapter 9 and 10 and 11, he'll talk about some of these objections a little bit more.

But why is this so significant for us? Here's an example. Some of you know that we, you know, we were part, at one time, we were part of the Anglican Church of Canada and because we believed that to be faithful to Jesus, to be faithful to the Bible, to be faithful to the gospel, we had to separate. And so we did. And I had a, I was on the committee that was to write the bylaws for our new denomination. I know God has a sense of humor, but I was part of that to help write the bylaws for this new denomination.

[20 : 13] And one of the things that people were always saying, every time we had some type of public meeting to, you know, where the bylaws were, people would always get up and say, we got to write the bylaws in such a way that what happened to the Anglican Church of Canada will never happen again.

And I felt like such a loser because I would always say that what you're asking for is completely and utterly impossible. I mean, the Anglican Church of Canada had good bylaws.

It wasn't that if you could have gone back and tweaked the bylaws, you would have fixed the problem. You know, the problem is that there's human beings in organizations. Like, go figure. In fact, if you have a perfect organization and they let you in, it's no longer a perfect organization. If they let me in, it's no longer a perfect organization. You're seeking for the perfect church? Don't go to it because when you go, you'll make it imperfect. Okay? So just get over it and look for an imperfect church.

You'll be far happier. Not radically imperfect, but, you know, within limits, you know. And so I would tell people over and over, we're going to try to get as wise as bylaws as we possibly can, but if you're expecting us to get a bylaw that will get around the people that you experience who can always find a loophole, who can always sweet talk their way out of a problem so that the bylaws don't apply to them.

[21 : 37] And not only do we all know some of those people, but we are some of those people. Right? You know, we, you know, sweet talk, you know. But here's the thing.

So all of these objections, they're all connected to this. Well, what if this person does this? How's God going to answer this? Or what if we do this? Or what do we do that? Or how's that going to work? That can't possibly work. And all the way through, Paul just goes to say, one second here. We're not just dealing with, like, we're not dealing with bank machines. We're not dealing with computer software, which is supposed to be rational, but that's a separate story. We're not dealing with just a whole process.

We're dealing with God. God is the difference maker in this. And the God that really does exist, he's only good.

And he's unhindered. He will prevail. And he's only true. And he does speak and he does judge. And at the end of the day, at the end of the day, all the sweet talking, all the loop, they don't work because you're dealing with God.

[22 : 43] Our confidence is in God. Not our institution, not our bylaws, not our denomination, not our church, not any human thing.

Our confidence, ultimately, how this is going to work, how can it possibly work out? Because God exists. That's the bottom line.

You know, later on I'm going to give you a few other little things to help make it clear, but the bottom line is it's God. Answered, God. If it was, if it was, the answer is the Anglican Church or the

Associated Gospel or the Pentecost Assemblies of Canada, then you have a problem. But if the answer is God, there's hope. And that's what Paul's setting up. Now some of you might say, okay, that's, that's, you just dealt with the easy part of the text. And you haven't dealt with the hard part of the text. And the hard part of the text, George, is no one, no one is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. [23 : 48] No one sees. That's the hard part of the text, George. And you actually still have almost, you've made it a little bit now. Maybe, maybe you've sort of shown me that God isn't like the, like my father who basically always treated me like I was stupid and basically treated me as if I wouldn't amount to anything and basically thought that I, I was just going to be a failure.

So maybe you've convinced me that that's not what God is like, but it still doesn't, is that what you've just painted about God? Amen to that, this text? I don't know, George. Pretty, pretty, pretty hard. And in fact, some of you might say, George, not only that, but I can easily prove that the Bible is wrong. Because two plus two equals four. I understand that. Must be wrong. Well, let's look. Verse nine. What then? Are we Anglicans any better off?

Remember, the same question earlier, what advantage? A very similar question. He said they have all the advantages in the world. I mean, you know, even the worst Anglican church in the world, they read the Bible.

[25 : 01] Sunday in, Sunday out. Might not be all the Bible, might leave some of the tricky parts up, but they can't get rid of all the tricky parts. They read the Bible. What then? Are we Anglicans any better off?

No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Anglicans and the rest of the world are under sin. As it is written, notice that phrase again, as it is written, it is written. None is righteous, no, not one. No one understands, no one seeks for God. And by the way, as we're going through this, you know how sometimes I say this is a perfectly good translation, but you know, in the English, there's this, the original language is other nuance. There are no other nuances here. This is a really, really, really good translation of the original language. I'm not going to give you some little loophole.

I'm not going to give myself a loophole. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave. Just pause here. In my, the church I was at before this, I think it was the first funeral that I did.

[26 : 11] I was going to go to this little tiny, I did a funeral, and then we had to do the burial about 20 kilometers, 25 kilometers away, and so I didn't want to drive as part of the funeral procession, so I drove ahead of the funeral procession to get there, and I was there like, you know, 10 or 15 minutes, you know, before the rest of the procession, and I walked up to have a look at the grave, and I discovered that the reason they put that artificial grass over it is that sometimes the hole is bigger than it looks, and to my horror, I fell into the grave.

I fell right into the grave, and there was no casket at the bottom either, which in that case would have been a bit gross, but at least it would have helped me get out of the grave, because I discovered that the soil was sandy, so it couldn't go down straight like this. It sort of was angled with sandy soil like this, and they had a big long part of green grass to cover it. Now I understood why the funeral, if you've ever been a pallbearer, they say, make sure you walk on the planks, because you don't actually know where the edge of the grave is, and I was horrified that they would come and find me in the grave.

So I crawled out, full of brown dust all over my black clericals.

I went off into the bush and was able to get most of it off. Whether I got all of it off, they were far too polite to say anything. I pulled the green grass over it and tugged it a little bit further, because I'd made it even farther.

[27 : 43] The point of all this is when it says here, your throat is an open grave, it means that you've thrown a dead body in there, lots of dead bodies, and not covered it up.

In other words, it's a really harsh saying. It's not an empty hole to put a body in, it's a hole that have dead bodies in, that are now doing what happens to dead bodies naturally.

Continue reading. They use their tongues, their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps, it's a poisonous snake, is under their lips.

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. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Then he stops quoting the Bible, and he says, now we know that whatever the law, the Bible says, it speaks to those who are under the Bible, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

[28 : 48] For by doing, for by the works of the Bible, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the Bible comes knowledge of sin. So, it's a hard text.

And you know one of the things that makes the text even harder? this isn't a text written to all those really, really bad people who, over the last week, all they've done is tried to figure out how to, how to maybe engage in human trafficking and sell drugs and sell guns, and when they're not figuring out how to make a lot of money from this, they're just drinking and cheating on their wives and doing drugs and, and that's all they're doing.

The Bible text isn't speaking to them because they don't give a hoot what the Bible says. Speaking to people who come to an associated gospel church or a Pentecostal church or an Anglican church. Speaking to good people. Speaking to the sort of people that you hope move in next door as your neighbor because they won't be playing loud, heavy metal music at three in the morning.

But they'll water your plants. You'll feel safe giving them your key. That's who this text is primarily talking to. And on one hand, it addresses those other people that I first described, you know, the gun running and the human trafficking.

[30 : 19] It's addressing them as well, but it's, in a sense, it's the spotlight is on you and me, people who we hope were pretty good neighbors. And the gun runners and the human traffickers, we're hearing it as we look on, as God speaks to people who go to the Anglican church.

As a way to get into the story, I'll tell you, I'm going to adapt the story that I heard. It's a famous story that Charles Spurgeon, a famous 19th century preacher told. Sort of a different context, but it works in this context.

You know, there used to be a king and he was a very, very wise and just king and about once a week he would go down this road and sometimes when he went along the road he would go with his sons and daughters, sometimes with his wife and sons and daughters, often with his nobles. And there was this old couple that were farmers. They had a tiny little plot of land right along where the road would go. And this old farm woman who worked there, when she'd see the king going by about once a week, she'd start to look forward to it because she thought, you know, he is such a good king.

He is such a great king. She just so admired the way that he dealt with his sons and dealt with his daughters and the way he talked to his wife and the way he was dressed and just the way he wrote and the way he was polite to her and the way he was with his nobles and what she heard about how he was running the country.

[31 : 49] And she was just really, really, her heart went out to him. She just was so glad that he was the king. And one day, off in the distance, she could hear the thump of the horses that he was coming and she was harvesting her carrots.

And she got this really, this bunch of carrots and they were really spectacular carrots, really good. And she thought, you know what, I'm going to give them to the king. I bet he's the sort of king that would accept the gift of carrots from somebody like me.

So she totters out into the center of the road and sure enough, as the king is coming along, he doesn't get all angry and mad and say, what on earth are you doing getting in my way? Don't you know I have important business to do? Don't you know I have important people to see and you're none of those things?

No, he stops and she just says, you know, I just so admire you. I just so, I just, I just, I know it's not much, but these carrots are really nice. Would you take them from me as a gift?

And the king is touched and he sends his son down to get the carrots and bring them back and he's touched and he said, you know, that's your little plot land right there.

[32 : 52] I've noticed you that, you know. I'd like to help you. I'm going to give you a hundred acres. I happen to own the land behind that. I'm giving it to you. You and your husband, an extra hundred acres. It's yours. Thank you so much for these carrots.

One of the nobles is riding behind. He thinks, a hundred acres for a bunch of dirty carrots? What will the king give me if I give him a really good horse?

The king loves horses. He knows horses really well and I have this spectacular horse. What will the king give me if I give him a horse? So the next day the king is out amongst his stables and the nobleman comes, the knight comes, bringing this spectacular horse and the noble says, you know, I've always just admired you as my king.

I'm so glad I can be your knight and I would just love to give you this horse as a gift. And the king takes the horse and walks away and he doesn't offer the noble anything, nothing at all.

And the king pauses before he leaves just like Columbo used to do and he pauses before he leaves and he says, the woman gave me the carrot so I gave her a reward but you were giving yourself the horse.

[34 : 07] You were giving yourself the horse. In other words, you gave that horse not because you wanted to give anything to me but you hoped that I would give you a lot more than a hundred acres.

You were giving yourself the gift. So let's be honest for a moment when we look at this text. The fact of the matter is that there's nothing that we do that does not involve some tinge, some smallest hint of self-interest, self-validation, self-justification, self-righteousness, or self-glorification.

There is nothing that we do that doesn't have even just the teensiest, weensiest, tiniest bit of self-interest connected to it. Nothing.

And we don't really notice that most of the time. I mean, some people it's just really, really obvious, you know, that they're just, that's all about self-justification, self-glorification, and it's all about them getting that promotion and turns us off.

But the fact of the matter is, is that every single thing that we do, there's always the tiniest hint of something about self-glorification, self-justification, self-righteousness. And that tiny little bit doesn't sort of matter that much in most of our human interactions, but the fact of the matter is, is that God's playing the long game and God's a far way off and tiny, tiny, tiny little differences, when the distance gets a bit long, it does make a difference.

[35 : 38] If you were to program a plane, and you're going to fly a plane from Los Angeles to San Francisco, it's not that far, but if you were to get your calculation just one-tenth of one percent off to the left, the plane would land in the Pacific Ocean.

It wouldn't even hit San Francisco. That's just one-tenth of one percent. And if you were even one-thousandth of one percent off, you still wouldn't hit the runway, but you'd land outside of the runway and you'd die.

One-thousandth of one percent. And from that distance, you're not hitting God.

Because you see, the whole thing here in this text, it's all connected to our relationship with God. That's the fundamental context within which Paul is writing. And that's what, but it's actually saying something even harder for us to hear and understand.

That compared to the whole trajectory of our life, that's why the text is saying what it says. If you go back to verse 9 and 10, there's something really significant in 9 and 10 that we skip over and we don't really, and I have to confess, when I first read this text, it didn't jump out at me.

[37 : 02] Look at 9 and 10. What then? Are we Anglicans any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.

As it is written, none is righteous, no, not one. And this idea that no one is righteous and under sin is the same type of idea. And under sin is a perfectly good way to translate it, but it has a political connotation.

It has a jurisdictional understanding. That in a sense that we're under something, just like in a sense we're in Canada, we're under Canadian jurisdiction, that this is sort of how, you know, we learn the customs of Canada, we're in Canada under Canadian government jurisdiction authority, and in the same way it's saying that we're under sin, that we're in sin in the same type of way.

And this not being righteous, righteous is a place word. It means in terms of in the right relationship, in the right place, in the right connection. And it means that we're not in the right connection with God, the right place with God.

And that's what the text means. And so here's the analogy. Andrew, if you could put up the third point. It does not, I'm adapting something that Dietrich Bonhoeffer said in a completely different context, but it's relevant here.

[38 : 22] It does not matter if I am walking in the right direction, if the train I am on is heading in the wrong direction. That's what it means by under something.

I'm on a train. I'm on a train. And it does not matter if I'm walking in the right direction, if the train I am on is heading in the wrong direction. So if I'm on, you know, in Europe they have these trains that go hundreds and hundreds of kilometers an hour and if the train's going hundreds and hundreds of kilometers an hour this way, there's a long train.

It doesn't matter if I'm walking in the right way on a train and I'm walking maybe like this with my goodness in the right direction but the train is taking me away from the cross and away from God at hundreds of kilometers now.

That's what this text, that's how the text begins. George, you shouldn't be thinking about this as if, you know, you're a really good swimmer, you're a really good walker, you're really good at getting places because what you don't understand, George, is you're on a train going in the wrong, you're born, every human being is born on a train going the wrong direction at hundreds of kilometers an hour.

Everybody's born on that train. It doesn't matter if you're a soccer mom in Canada, it doesn't matter if you're a bishop in the Anglican Church of Canada, it doesn't matter if you're the Pope, it doesn't matter if you are the guy or the gal who's involved in human trafficking and gun running and meth production.

[39 : 51] Every human being is born on a train going the wrong direction. No one's born on any other train. And one of the, that's one of the things actually you see that's humanly in fact the case is that it's often the case that people who are really involved in bad things, messed up things, like it's often people who become really severe alcoholics that they come to a point in time when they realize their life is completely and utterly unmanageable and they've got to call out for a higher power.

And it's often our goodness that keeps us from God. Because if we're focusing on how good we can jog along that train in the right direction, we don't notice that the train's going hundreds of kilometers an hour in the wrong direction.

Can you put up the fourth point, Andrew, the final, well, almost the final point.

The last idol in my heart is self-righteousness. No good thing that I have or do has a hold on God.

None. You know that, if you were here early enough to hear Joey's second hymn, you know that, all that old evangelical hymnody about our righteous acts are like filthy rags.

[41 : 30] That's where this is coming from. That's what they understand. That's what some of those old, and not all old hymns, because lots of old hymns are crap. He did not walk in England's verdant lands, that favorite Anglican hymn.

No, that wasn't him in 18th century England. He's Jewish, okay? But some of those old hymns, they got it. They got it that our goodness is the final barrier that keeps us from God, because the fact of the matter is I know watching pornography is wrong.

I know cheating on my taxes is wrong. I know driving 50 kilometers an hour over the speed limit is wrong. I know that all these things are wrong. And the irony is that even as I start to get rid of those bad things in my life, inwardly I think, boy, I'm doing a good job at getting rid of those things, you know?

And this whole idea that not a single good thing that I have matters is profoundly unsettling to me. It makes me feel profoundly naked and exposed.

Surely, God, you'll let me hold on to these couple of good things as I come to you. Surely, these things matter to you, God. Surely, these things are what's making my life manageable. The last idol, the last idol in my heart isn't pornography or alcohol or lying or the last idol, the one that will never give up but for grace is self-righteousness.

[43 : 08] No good thing that I have or do has a hold on God none. Good works, good doctrine can keep us from God. And that's, by the way, remember I said earlier why is it that when we hear extreme talk that we're all basically good, you may roll our eyes, but it doesn't have that visceral upsetness with it as it does when we read Romans 3 and there's this visceral upset because the last idol that we will let go of is self-righteousness.

Andrew, could you put up the true final point which is Romans 1, 16 to 17? Could you put that up and friends, could you say this with me out loud? 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 the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written the righteous shall live by faith. My problem isn't that I do too many bad things and not enough good things, my problem is I'm on the wrong train and I can't get off that wrong train.

And the Bible wants us to say stop walking the right direction on the train going the wrong direction and you have to come to that point where you say God, only you can get me off this train.

Only you can put me on your train. Only you can do it. And if you don't do it, I'm only going to end up in the wrong direction.

[44 : 47] I'm only going to end up in the wrong place. Only you. Only you. What is it? I need God, the power of God. I need God to act with power to take me off the wrong train and put me on the right train.

And when I'm on the right train, I'm right with God. And how do I get that? All I can do is it's from faith to faith. It means that everything, it all is about me coming to that moment.

When I was thinking about this, my little grandson, Ruben, when he was only about two or three, when he wanted his Nana to pick him up, he'd put his arms way up like this and his face way up and he'd arch his little back and his whole being was just calling for his Nana to pick him up.

And that's the image I have when I think of this text. That's the beginning and ending of faith, faith to faith to faith as you just arch your back and you call out to God, only God, only you can save me from my good things.

Only you can save me from my bad things. Only you can take me from the wrong train to the right train. And as Paul's going to show in Romans 12, how you even live a good life completely and utterly changes.

[46 : 00] Right? Because, you know, when you get on the right train and all of a sudden you realize that as you realize you're in this right relationship with God that these bad things you do, they just don't fit.

And that you realize that you just, out of this gratitude that God is taking you from the wrong train and putting you on the right train, that as the gospel grips you, there's a whole different context to understand why it is that you do things that fit with the train you're on and the direction you're going. The whole psychology of doing good doesn't change right away and it's never a perfect change, but it starts to change as the gospel grips us.

But first, you've got to get God's effective power in your life. Please stand. If there are some of you here and there's this pressure in you that your good works in fact have been what you've been relying upon and you've never realized that you've been on the wrong train and that only God can get you to the right train, there's no better time than right now to call out to him in prayer.

And I'm not going to tell you the sinner's prayer because I don't want you to think there's some magic formula. I just want you to look. Andrew, if you could put Romans 1, 16 to 17 back up on the screen, please. I just want, just call out to God and say, God, that to me.

[47 : 26] Wrong train to right train, please, Jesus, only you. Only you. Take me from the wrong train to the right train. That text, the mystery and the depth of that text, Father, I want that.

I don't understand, I want that. Only you can have that come into me and me into you. Whatever your words are, there's no better time than today to call out to God. And for those of us who somehow think that if I just preach a better sermon that God will love me more, that's not true.

God will not love me more if I preach a good sermon. He won't love me more if, he won't love Joey more if Joey does a spectacular job on the next song. Yeah, hallelujah. And me preaching a good sermon or Joey doing a good job, it's to emerge out of being gripped by the gospel.

Let's just bow our heads in prayer. Father, thank you that you are the faithful God, that you are true, that you are right, that you are unhindered and will prevail, that not only do you speak truly and judge truly, but you speak truly to reveal how you will redeem us, how only you can redeem us.

Father, bring us to that point that we know that we need to call out to you and say, only God, only you, only you can take us from the wrong train to the right train.

[48 : 55] Only you. Father, for those who may be making that prayer for the first time, pour out your Holy Spirit with deep power upon them. For all of us, Father, you know how powerful the idol of self-righteousness, self-glorification, self-justification is, Father, in your mercy, humble us by what you have done for us on the cross and make us to live as disciples of Jesus gripped by the gospel who are learning to live for your glory.

And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.