

Romans 4:1–8 "Taking Yourself Less Seriously and Grace More Seriously"

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[0:00] Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. And bow your heads in prayer for a moment. Father, Father, we give you thanks and praise that you don't desire your children just to walk by themselves all the time, but that you call us into local churches, and that you call us into local churches, communities where we can read the Bible together and puzzle over difficult texts to get the beauty and the glory and the wonder and the true food which is there. So Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would move deeply amongst us and bring all the truths of Romans 4, such important truths, and bring them home to our heart, Father, that we might rest secure in your love, in union with Christ, to your glory. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated.

So quite a few years ago when I was in my former church, I began to have these troubling heart symptoms, and eventually my wife said I had to go see a doctor, and my doctor said I had to go see a specialist.

[2:21] The specialist diagnosed me with potentially very serious, serious heart conditions, and I eventually saw a better specialist or a more specialized specialist at the Ottawa Heart Institute, and he ended up saying that I didn't have a serious heart condition at all. But I did have a heart condition that would mean that for the rest of my life, if I started to experience those symptoms, it meant that I had accumulated too much stress in my life. At the time I was living in Eganville, and he jokingly said that if that starts to happen to you again, you just have to tell your congregation that you need a month off to go fishing. And just sit and relax and fish and take the month off and let some of that stress go down. But the funny thing about it is I would have said that I wasn't an, I wasn't experiencing stress, and I would have said that I wasn't an anxious person, because stress and anxiety often go together. And that's part of the problem with anxiety and with stress. We can actually be quite bowed down and weighed down with it without being consciously aware of it. We live in an anxious age, like we really do. And in fact social media, and this isn't going to be a tirade against social media. But in some ways social media has taken something which is very common in human, anxiety around performance, and where you fit, and what people think of you. And that's a very common human set of

anxieties. And then social media has made it even harder, because of course people have gotten very good at picking the right picture to make them look like they're having a very wonderful and marvelous life.

And even those of us who say that we're not actually particularly anxious, or doing that type of comparative thing, we just don't realize we are. It comes out if you're with a group of people, and one of them says, oh by the way, you know, I was visiting Sue the other day, and gosh, she has such good style. I don't know anybody who has style like her. And you think, one moment, what about my style?

In fact, you think, I've been to her house. Like I have better style than her. Why isn't she saying I have good style? Or it comes out with a promotion. It comes out all sorts of things. Style, dress, diet, exercise, looks, finances, all sorts of things. We might not realize that we're always doing this bit of a comparative dance that makes us a bit anxious, constantly carrying it, until something like that slips out. And even then, we might still not think it. We just think, no, no, like I'm just correct. Like I really do have more style than her. Meanwhile, for that other person, if they had been praised, if you had been praised rather than them, they're thinking, oh by I've been at her house. Like my house, I have way better style. So we live in an anxious age. We inherently compare ourselves with each other. And most of us would like to move beyond that when we become aware of it. Most of us would like to live, be able to handle stress well. And most of us rather not have anxiety. We would like to have less anxiety in our lives. So the Bible text that we're looking at today, which I, those of you who are just listening to this, not live or watching it live, but listening to it, before I, after it was read by Chris earlier, I said, this is, if you didn't find you could understand the text, you're in good company, because most people have a hard time understanding this text. It does seem incomprehensible.

But if we press through the incomprehensibility and try to comprehend what Paul is talking about, it actually has very helpful message about how it is that Jesus and the gospel helps us deal with this whole drive to comparison and the anxiety and stress that goes along with it. So I'm going to be looking at Romans chapter 4, verses 1 to following. And you might want to turn in your Bibles to that, Romans chapter 4. But before I start to read it, I need to give you a bit of a picture of what's going on behind, why is it that Paul is using this language? And what is it that he's talking about? And what he's talking about is something that if we think about it a little bit, we'll see that he's talking about something that really is a feature of human existence. We just might not always be conscious of it. Because one of the things that's going to come up in the text, and I think it's in verse 3, verse 4, verse 5, verse 6, verse 8, verse 9, verse 10, and verse 11. So in, because I'm going to read up to verse 12. So in 12 verses eight times, the same idea comes up. So that's normally a clue that that word's important, and you have to figure out that word if you're going to understand what's going on. [7:21] That's like a general how to interpret the Bible. If the same word idea shows up eight times, very briefly, you've got to figure out what it is. And in our version, it's the word count. Actually, if you just skip down to verse 3, you'll see it for the first time.

For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. And so some versions translate this idea as counted, some translate it as credited, and some translations use reckoned. So what's going on here? Well, what's going on here is Paul is dealing with, I think, the natural human way to think of religion, to think of spirituality, and even to think about yourself being a good person. What is the natural, unconscious, default way that people just, the criteria that they use, that they would just say, well, this is exactly how it works. Like, it's so basic, they're not even conscious of it.

And I think what happens is that most people use a type of accounting model. And they picture that whether it's God, or the force, or karma, or the universe, it's as if as you go through your day, you do a good deed, and it's as if the universe has a big account, Excel spreadsheet. But the Excel spreadsheet basically is divided into things which are in your favor, and then things which go against you. So pluses and minuses. And so you go through your day, and I don't know, you compliment, you compliment the barista on the shade of purple in her hair. Well, that gives you some good points, right? And then you come across somebody else, and you tell your boss how much you like working for them. There you go, a couple of good points there. And then, you know, maybe you're a bit rude, or you ignore somebody, and that's a little bit of a negative. But as you go through every day, and every week, and throughout your entire life, it's as if the universe is

constantly keeping track of the positive things you've done with a number or score, and the bad things you've done with a negative score. And what makes you either to be able to go to the next life, or to merge with God, or to be in heaven, or to be in paradise with Allah, is that when you die, the universe, or the force, or God, opens up the book, and counts up all of the positives, and then looks at all the negatives, and compares the positive to the negative. And if you have more positives and negatives, two thumbs up. If you don't, you're going the other way. And in fact, one of the things which might differ with people is that if you're very, very easygoing, loosey-goosey, very liberal, very tolerant, the score to pass might be very tiny. And if you come and grown up, and you're really judgmental, and really legalistic, the score to pass is going to be really, really high. But you both have this idea that there's some type of score or mark that determines whether you're a good person, whether you're going to go to the afterlife, whether, you know, when you die, and people say to you, you know, they say about, you know, don't be sad about, you know, grandma dying, she's looking down on heaven from you. Well, why is grandma up there? Well, grandma's up there because when the universe counted up her good things and her bad things, she came up with a positive score.

You know, unlike her ex-husband, who's definitely down there, you know, or whatever. You know how this thing goes, right? Because he's a real, I almost said a word I shouldn't say in the church service, you know, but that's why he's down there, and grandma is up there looking down on us. And I'm not being flippant when I'm saying it, I'm just trying to communicate to you. There's an old, a couple of people in the congregation are ancient enough to remember something called evangelism explosion. And evangelism explosion, people would go door to door and they'd ask a question. If tonight, it turned out tonight, you die tonight, and it turns out there really is a heaven, and you appear before God at the gate of heaven, and he says, why should I let you in? What would you say?

Now, most people, including most people who go to church would say, well, I've lived a pretty good life. Well, as soon as you say, well, I've lived a pretty good life, what have you done? You've said, you've kept track, and God just sort of puts all the positives, and he takes the negatives, and my positives outweigh my negatives. And that's why I am going to go to whatever the next thing is.

[12:00] Now, this, I think, is true of all mindsets and throughout all human history. Obviously, in ancient paganism, some of the things that would, like it's, Tim Keller has this really, really funny thing about how cultural changes are, that he was saying that in Manhattan, or he's comparing the ancient Norse people to the, to a young man in ancient Norse culture and young men in Manhattan. And he said, in ancient Norse culture, they think that it's great virtue that you can go on, you can sail ships and cut people's heads off. And it would be a great shame if you slept with another man. In Manhattan, it's a good virtue to sleep with another man. And it's a terrible shame if you cut somebody's head off. But that's just the cultural differences over time, right?

They're just, you know, so, but, you know, whatever the culture is, you know, you get extra points for doing this. And certain types of things, like sacrificing your children, gives you big bonus points. Other ones, caring for your children, gets you big bonus points. How you, how you fill it in might be different, whether you're Muslim or a Buddhist or a Hindu or an ancient pagan or, you know, a, you know, Roman Catholic or an Anglican. But that same mindset is there in all of it.

And that's the mindset behind the text. That's why the word counted or credited is there so many times in so few verses. And it's because we actually accept that mindset that we find the text incomprehensible.

We accept that text. I mean, I guess Christians, for those of you who are watching or those of you who are here, we're in a sense trying to learn to not think that way. But it's a really hard struggle. And we easily slip back into it. Like, I'll just share with you, one of the constant problems with ministers is this. I can get up and preach salvation by faith in Christ, grace. It's by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, that I am made right with God. But functionally, I can actually think that I'm made right with God by how big my church is.

[14:09] I forget all about that grace stuff. And I'm back into trying to keep score. And for me, maybe the big score is the size of my congregation, or who's in my congregation. It wouldn't matter that we're

small, but we have the right people. None of the bad people, just the right, whatever it is, right? And you could go on and on with all of it. You know, a couple might think, yeah, I believe all of those things. But if their wife is really grumpy with them, all of a sudden, it's as if that determines whether or not they're right with God, or their husband is grumpy with them, or whatever. We constantly are falling back into this natural, human, religious, and spiritual imagination. And that's what Paul is going at here. So let's look at the text. That's been a long introduction. Now let's look at the text, and we'll see how it is that it makes that natural way of accounting makes it difficult to understand the text. So it's Roman chapter 4, verses 1 to 12.

And Paul has just before that talked about how, you know, God makes us right as a matter of grace, that everyone has sinned, we're made right with him by an act of Jesus dying on the cross, that Jesus is dying on the cross is like a ransom being paid. Jesus is dying on the cross is what sets aside the punishment they deserve. And this is this wonderful, profound thing that God has done. And now he's trying to put, not, he's trying to get us to really start to have it, have us realize, we're not just supposed to say, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, okay, I can tick that off my list, let's move on to the next thing. He's going to say, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. You never get away from that.

And I'm going to show you the different ways that we forget it and live as if it's not true and live by some other thing. But here's how we don't understand. Look how it begins. Romans 4, verses 1 to, we'll just, here's how it goes. What then shall we say was gained, or some translations say discovered, by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, that's by lineage. For if Abraham was justified, that is made right with God, by works, I'll just read that again. If Abraham was made right with God by doing good things, he has something to boast about, but not before God. Now, just sort of pause here. This is going to be one of the first things.

If you think about it for a second, maybe think about what you were like before, maybe think about what you're like now, maybe think about other people that you know, that consciously and unconsciously sort of evaluate the world in terms of, I'm adding up these good things, and I'm avoiding these bad things. Oh, I had a bad thing. I was just watching, I was watching The Pit, an interesting TV show, and it just comes up in a very casual way. He wants to find something, so he does a good deed for a person, because he says, I'm not making this up, I need some karmic help to find this thing. So he does a good thing, thinking this will give him some karmic help. Now the universe owes him to find this thing that he wants. It's a very common thing, but here's the feature. There's two features here which Paul already is starting to bring out, and the first one is this, that if you have this mindset of accounting, you almost always have superstars or gurus or examples. You almost always have them.

[17:40] You know, maybe it's Brene Brown, something like that. I can't remember. Like maybe it's a particular, yeah, Brene Brown, maybe it's Brene Brown is really influential. Maybe you got completely captivated by the book Eat, Pray, Love. You know, maybe it's Muhammad. You know, maybe it's the Virgin Mary. Maybe it's Jesus. Maybe it's Krishna. Maybe it's Robbins. But you have some type of person that you look at as being the exemplar of what it is that you'd like to be like, and they're your type of hero. And that's an aspect of this way of accounting. And so what Paul says is he's going right at that. He's revealing that that's how we think. So a lot of people in our culture, if I was to go to, you know, a coffee shop after this and say, we talked about Abraham, they'd say, who on earth would ever talk about Abraham? So it might not be one that makes a lot of sense to our culture. Although, Abraham is the superhero for Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. So it's actually historically not a bad choice. That's over half the population of the planet. But the same principle is going to be there.

He's going to try to show that there's always a guru or an exemplar. And part of our boasting, our confidence is that that's who we're following. Like, why is my life going to get better and better and better? Well, because I'm listening to this Robbins guy or this woman by the name of Brown.

That's who I'm listening to. Or I'm trying to be like Muhammad. You know, we're more like Mary. Or the different versions of this accounting. And the second thing about it is that it always inherently involves boasting. Now, we don't like boasting. Somebody was just telling me about a Christmas celebration they had. And there was somebody who was at it and spent a good part of his time boasting in a loud voice. And nobody likes it. Okay. But that's just because it's our culture.

There's many, many cultures that think it's actually dumb to not let everybody know that you're the best. And the richest and the smartest. It's just our culture. It's a bit of a Christian hang-up still in our culture that you wouldn't want to do it. But you have to, if you think about it for a second, because you see, in fact the reason that I'm going to go to that better place when I die is because I've done more good things than bad. And if you'd say, well, obviously not everybody's going to a better place. Like, Hitler doesn't go.

I.D. Amin doesn't go. Like, Stalin doesn't go. Sorry. Okay. This is a weird thing. I don't understand anybody. There's a communist club at University of Ottawa. I don't understand how anybody who knows anything about history could be part of a communist club. That's a complete aside. I just think that's, really? Killed tens of millions of people? Anyway, sorry, that's, I shouldn't have said that. I've lost you now.

[20:36] But, but the point is, if you've actually accomplished more than others, inherently there's a type of boasting. And yet, on the other hand, we don't like boasting. And on the other hand, some of you might say, really, Brene Brown's your superhero? Like, really? And others are saying, like, really, Trump's your superhero? Really?

Really? See, that's the whole thing about boasting. We realize how foolish it is when we look at others' heroes. Muhammad is your hero? And you, you know, because you're good Canadians, you try not to have the scorn, like, and the incredulity, like, when you hear about it. So there's a, Paul is already showing there's a bit of a problem with it. But he's, he's walking into it. And, and so we might not choose Abraham as the hero that we would use. But Paul wants to show something, because at the end of the day, we're carrying what God has done. And so this is a very convenient thing that way God has set up to reveal a human problem and how we think. So here, here's what it goes on to say. And here's now where it starts to get a bit complicated. And we, we start to realize we have problems with the idea.

Look at verse 3. For what does the scripture say? What does the Bible say? It says that Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. And we go, this doesn't make any sense.

Like, well, first of all, like, who cares what the Bible says? That's what most people in Canada would say. But even if you did, if you're just accepting it, they say, okay, George, you're beginning to get to why Christianity actually doesn't make any sense to me. So you're just saying that you believe God, and you get some special credit? Like, that's what Abraham did? He believed God, and he got some special type of credit? Really? I can't understand how that even works.

Like, just because you have a particular emotion, you, you get right with God right away? Or just because you have certain ideas in your head, you get right with God right away? Like, is it, is like having belief in God, is that like a get out of jail free card in Monopoly? Is it like a superpower? Is, is it, it, and it doesn't even make any sense. I can sort of understand that if you did one unbelievably massively good deed, hugely good deed, that over, outweighs all the bad things you've done, and then you go right to heaven. But gosh, like, just believing, that makes no sense that that would actually get you made right with God. Because, George, you've said before, that's what righteousness means. It, it, it means you're right with God. It means, and, and how could it even be, George? How could it be that Abraham or any Christian could just sort of believe God, have faith in God, and then you know that when you die, you're going to go to be right with him and be with God? That doesn't make any sense. Like, you have all this rest of your life to live. Who knows how many bad things you're going to do, or how many good things you're going to do? That doesn't make any sense to me.

[23:46] Like, how does that even fit in? Is it a, like, it's very wrong-headed. And, and this begins to show us a little bit on some of the big problems. Like, I'll read the text again. What does the Bible say?

Abraham believed God, or had faith in God, and was counted to him, or credited to him, as righteousness. In other words, as a standing that means he's going to go to heaven. But you see,

here's the problem.

What the Bible has done here is made very explicit what is hidden to our own consciousness. You see, because what, what goes on in our own consciousness is this, all sorts of complications with counting the good acts in this. So, just to be completely honest, you know, when I do a kind act, I get a hundred scores. When you do a good act, sorry, that's just one. But for me, it's a hundred. And that's how we unconsciously think. And then, you know, the other things is, oh, I did a bad thing, but I get a mulligan for that. You know what a mulligan is? You know, you hit the ball where it shouldn't be, you hit in the water, and all your friends just say, oh, just, just throw it back on the land, and we'll, we'll count it as if it's good. And, and we all give ourselves mulligans, we count differently. Some of us say, well, actually, you know, in, in Laurie and Andrea's case, God just adds up their good deeds. God multiplies mine, you know, by the way. And so my score is a lot higher than other people. Obviously, we're not so crass, but that's how we end up. See, that's why you can have a situation in a workplace where the person who's the most hated person in the office might say they're the most competent person in the office and the best person in the office. And we all know offices and, and, and, and workplaces where that goes on. Well, why is that? It's because in their, their mind, they're multiplying, they're giving themselves mulligans. Or there's a little bit like snakes and ladders, you know, that old kids games, you know, and, uh, you know, you, you look at other people, and they did that bad thing. Whoa, they go right down to the bottom, right? But somebody else does this good thing, and they, oh, they go right up to the top. They got a ladder, right? And, and that's how we tend to think of it. And, and so when you see that this Christian claim that just believing in God makes you right with God, they think, like, what? But you start to realize that if you're complaining about it, it's actually just making, even though I'm going to say in a moment, you don't understand what the Bible's saying, but it's revealing that when we hear how other people keep the score, we think it's nuts, and it doesn't make any type of sense. And then, of course, we all know that when we're accounting for how we're good and better than others, I mean, for many people, you vote liberal, you get an extra thousand points. And other people are saying, no, no, you vote liberal, you get the 10,000 points deducted. You have to vote for Pierre or Polyev to get extra points.

Or you're in the right race, or you're the right language, or you're the right class, or you have the right social look, or you have the right political views. You have all of these types of things, and, and that's how you keep your points. So it doesn't seem to make any sense, but maybe you think, well, maybe if they go on, they'll clarify it. But actually, the next verse makes it even worse.

[26:51] Look at what it says in verse four. Verse four. He says, now to the one who works, his wages, in other words, by here works, now to the one who does good things, that's what works means, now to the one who does good deeds, his, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due.

And, and this shows you another type of a, of a problem with this whole accounting model. Like, so we don't think that makes any sense. You know, if we say, well, okay, we do, we do think, sorry, that's the one we do think that makes sense. But now you think about it for a second, there's a real problem with this. So I do good things, and that means God is keeping track of my score, and I have all these good things, and not many bad things, so I'm going to be made right with God and go to heaven. But now, you know, you're now living in a universe where there's absolutely no grace and mercy. All there is is obligation. And here's the other problem. Think about it for a second. Why worship a God that can be bought off by doing good things?

Like, why bother? How is he worthy of being praised? I mean, now you'll start to understand why a lot of people in our culture now to say they're nuns. They're actually start to think along this process. And in some ways, what they've done is they've taken steps towards what the gospel reveals, but haven't gone far enough. Because Christians should also be saying, yeah, you need to die to all of that stuff. That's the message that Paul's giving. And now he makes it, now he's going to make it. Oh, and by the way, this whole accounting thing that, you know, so my good things, so what happens to me at the end of my life, it's really not that God's been any grace to me or mercy. It's an obligation. This is a source of so much unhappiness in life. So much happiness in life.

Unhappiness in life. Not happiness, but unhappiness. It's, you might think you're happy because you're living a really good life, but other people see that you have that attitude and they think you're stuck up and they don't like you, which causes unhappiness for you. But even for yourself, because

when every life is going to have setbacks and you have setbacks and you say, I don't understand why I've had this setback. And implicit in that is thinking, look at the good things I've done. Look how I've cared for my mother. Look how I've worked hard. Look how I've worked harder than other people and I don't get this promotion. Like there's something wrong with this.

[29:24] Now on one hand, there is something wrong with having accomplishments not recognized. That, there is something. And that's why good management and good leadership is trying to keep good performers and reward people to do it and dealing with not perceiving things correctly. But this is more of an existential issue that people find that makes them unhappy. Like I've done everything right and I didn't get married. I've done everything right and I didn't have children. I've did everything right and I don't own a house. I've done everything right and this. It's a source of a lot of unhappiness.

And that the Bible then, rather than, it's actually going to make it even worse in terms of us understanding things if you look at what it says in verse 5. Look at verse 5. And to the one who does not work, the one who doesn't work, doesn't do good things, but instead believes in or believes into him who justifies, that is, makes you right, him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. And we just go, that makes absolutely no sense. The one who doesn't attempt to make any good things, but believes instead, and believes in God, and God is going to justify the ungodly and count that as righteousness. Like, how on earth does this make any sense? If you do not work, that's not a virtue. I mean, what are the differences between the left and the right? Sorry. The left wing doesn't like welfare bums. Sorry, the right wing doesn't like welfare bums, but they like rent seekers. Those of you know economic terminology, which is just rent seeking is welfare for rich people, where you have some special laws set aside to make sure you can contain your market, right? But generally speaking, you know, we might disagree over what it is, but we don't think that people who don't do any work, unless there's a problem with them, should be rewarded, and not to, to not attempt any virtue whatsoever. It just doesn't make any sense. You need to do good things. Like, you can't not do good things if you're going to make it into heaven. And it's, it's, and it doesn't even sound any fair there. It says he justifies the ungodly. Does that mean that God changes, if I do murder, he turns it into a good thing? If I do something, if I defraud a whole pile of people, he turns that into a good thing? How does that make any sense? Bad stuff has to stay bad, and be marked as bad, and even preferably punished. And, and, and, and you have to be doing good things to stay good. And, and this doesn't make any, any type of sense. And it makes faith look like a, some type of a superpower or ability to hypnotize God so that he won't see the bad things that you've done. But who wants to worship a God like that? Bad things should get you punished. Look at karma and, and, and faith. This, just to say that you just somehow have belief in God, and, and then you don't get punished. That just means there's some type of favoritism, and, and that's not good. And who wants to have a God that's not good? And then you look at verses 6 and 8, and now Paul looks at a second hero. Look how it goes, verse 6 to 8. Just as David, that's King David, also speaks of the blessing of the one whom God counts righteous apart from works. God makes it look like he's right with himself, not even looking at the good things he's done. And then he quotes David from Psalm 32.

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven. God forgives lawless deeds, like just acts of sheer, just sheer willful doing wrong. And then, and whose sins are covered. What God covers up sins. Like, that's why we have newspapers and, and, and investigative journalists and, and everything to find up cover-ups because that's not good. And then to say, blessed is the man or the woman against whom the Lord will not count his sin. Like, none of this seems to make any sense. Now, really, here's the thing.

All of these reactions to the Bible are really showing that on one hand, we believe this idea of the accounting model. On the other hand, we don't actually like it or think it's fair.

[33:51] And we only see this when we think about somebody else, not ourselves. You know, maybe you find out that, you know, you're divorced and, and your, and your ex-husband or your ex-wife and, and they've died and, and, and you know what they were really like, how terrible person they were. That's why you divorce them. And yet at their funeral, everybody sings their praises and talks about how wonderful they are.

And you just think, no, that, that whole accounting model does not work. It works for me, but not for other people. But no, no, if it, that's not, that, that doesn't make any sense. So most of us when we read this text aren't thinking about it and in effect holding a mirror to how we normally think and revealing that what we think actually isn't very just and we cut ourselves corners and we make ourselves more special and we're legends in our own mind. But that's sort of why we need church to help us understand that that's what's actually happening here in the text. Our criticisms of this text is actually not a criticism of the text as to what Paul is saying. It's a criticism of how we unconsciously think. And by the way, it's a, it's how Christians, when we forget the gospel, start to think.

So what's going on in the text? Very briefly. Remember, first of all, what is the gospel? The gospel is good news from God about what God has done. It's not good advice. It's not a good accounting system. It's not a good multiplier. It's not a good eraser. It's not a good way to hypnotize God. It is good news of something that God has done in and through the person of his son, in the life of his son, the death of his son upon the cross, and the resurrection. It's good news from God about what God has done. It's news. It's news. And secondly, at the center of what God has done is the bloody death of Jesus upon the cross. Those of you who are here, you can't see this, but to my, my right, your left, if you're listening to this as an audio sermon, there's three pictures of Jesus, his birth, his crucifixion, and his resurrection. And it all centers on the bloody death of Jesus upon the cross. And the question is that the claim by God is that God has done something for human beings in this bloody death. And then the question is, how do you get into whatever it is that God has done in the person of his son? How do you get into him? And how do you get him into you? And what God has done for us in the person of his son is such a profound mystery that God uses a variety of words and images and languages. He'll talk about propitiation and ransom and rescue and revelation and expiation and expiation and propitiation, a whole range of different words, all trying to explain at a level that makes sense to us humanly what it is that God has done in the person of his son, in the son's bloody death upon the cross, and in his resurrection. And the question is, how do you get into whatever it is that has been accomplished? And how do you get that which was accomplished into you? And the Bible always says it's faith. But faith is something completely separate from this whole system of counting positive things and negative things. It's completely separate.

You see, if you look, it's faith into Jesus. It's talking about union with Jesus. It's saying that it's a normal part of human beings that if you trust and love another person and they open themselves to you and you open yourself to them and there's in a sense, a real sense that you begin to enter into their life and their life enters into you, which is why a couple who is deeply in love when their loved one dies. They often describe it as if there is a big hole in the center of them that didn't used to be there before, as if something has been yanked out of them. People will talk as if their life has left them because that's the nature of faith, trust, a personal relationship of entering into another person and that person entering into you. And it's this very human capability that is at the heart of what [38:34] Jesus accomplishes for us on the cross and what this text is talking about. And here's where I hope the analogy will be helpful. Imagine there is a woman and her and her husband, her husband gets very sick and this is in an age where there's no Medicaid and you have to pay for all of your medical treatment.

And because of the husband and the husband's sickness, the couple can't work. Their business starts to get into more and more and more trouble. They're accumulating debts that they cannot pay.

Every one of their medical treatments costs them lots and lots of money and they're very, very committed to trying to get well. And they go to doctor after doctor. Their business goes downhill and they accumulate a massive medical debt and then the husband dies anyway. But at the same time that this is all going on, they've never paid off all of the university debts. And then maybe if in a country like Canada, you say something wrong, like you say something like dead name a person and before you know it, there's this huge other legal penalty against you and on and on and on. And then the man dies and the wife was left with just humongous debts. Humongous, humongous, humongous debts.

And no possible way that she could ever repay it. But she meets a fellow and he's quiet and unassuming and there's nothing in his appearance that would make you think that he's anything special. And she falls in love with him. And she's terrified to tell him about the fact that she has this

millions and millions and millions of dollars of debt and she's living under tension of the creditors that are after her. And then he asked her to marry him and she says, yes. Before that, she tells him about all the debts. And he said not to worry about it. Will you marry me?

And she says, yes. She can't believe that somebody would marry someone like her with so much debt. And then she discovers he's a billionaire. A billionaire. Her million dollars, two million dollars of debt debt is a rounding error for his wealth.

[40:59] So her saying yes to him and him to her, that's not all part of the counting and making additions and all to good life and bad life. This is something completely different. She enters into union with him. And once she enters into union with him, all of her debts can be paid out of his wealth.

And not only is all of her debt paid, but she now has his wealth. Because he doesn't sign a nuptial agreement with her.

That's what faith is. Faith is into Christ and what he has accomplished. That's what it is, into what he has accomplished.

And in that sense, all of the debt is paid. All of the sin is forgiven. All of the punishment is dealt with. All of those images are completely and utterly dealt with by God, the Son of God, his perfect life and his death upon the cross. And you now have his standing before God as you're standing. That's what this is talking about. It's saying, you know what, trying to just live your life and all of that, trying to deal with, you know, all of these accomplishments. It's just, you know, it's a yoke that just keeps crushing you. You've got to realize that God is doing something completely and utterly different for you to make you right with him.

And so it creates this, as the gospel becomes more real to you, it starts to create these odd psychological things within you. I met, last Sunday, there was a chocolate Easter egg hunt for the children after the church service. And if one of the kids came up and said, obviously, I'm the best because, look, I got more eggs than anybody else. Now, like, my parents are going to really love me. The church is going to really love me because, actually, look how many eggs I got. They'd say, well, first of all, the church provided the eggs. And the church providing the eggs is a sign that they love you.

[43:16] It's out of their love for you that you have the eggs. The eggs don't make you more lovable to them. God has provided his son. And that's why this, see, on one hand, it strips you, as this truth becomes more and more real to you, your requirement and need to accomplish and compete with other people, on one hand, it completely and utterly goes away. But it doesn't go away in the sense that when you live with an accounting model, to have all of your accomplishments go away means that you're naked and pitiable and poor and blind. But no, what this model does is to get rid of your accomplishments.

It's not to just get rid of your accomplishments and make you naked. It's all of these supposed accomplishments are gone, and it's, but I'm loved. It's love that takes it away.

You have this odd dynamic as the gospel becomes more real to you, that as it becomes more real to you, you realize you are loved by God vastly more than you can ever possibly imagine. And when he declares that you now, all of your debts, even the ones in the future, have all been paid in Christ, it means on one hand that the need to accomplish to prove your worth is gone.

But not because of arrogance, but because it becomes more and more real to you just how much God actually loves you, how valuable and precious you actually are to him.

And so you can start to take yourself less seriously, because you're taking grace seriously. You can start to laugh, and not laugh at the expense of others, but just because there's so many things in this universe that are just funny and beautiful and delightful and should make you chuckle. You can live out of gratitude, not out of accomplishment. You can live knowing that there's never going to be a secret revealed about you that will make God turn his face away, because he knows everything on that accounting list, and he covered it in his Son. And when you have faith into him, all of it's taken away, and all of his favor is now on you. I invite you to stand.

[45:54] Father, we give you thanks and praise that Jesus isn't our superhero. He's our Savior. He isn't the one that we sort of have to live up to and be as kind as he is, or you're not going to like us, or as

forgiving as he is, or you're not going to like us. He's the one who sees us perfectly as we are, knows all the bad things that we've done, and he died for us and paid all that had to be paid, that that is now dealt with in him. Father, we give you thanks and praise that you desire us to be light, to not be weighed down by taking ourselves so seriously, but to be light as we take your great love that you are our Father in heaven, to take grace more seriously, that we can be light, that we can live and accomplish things, not, Father, out of some attempt to show others that we really are good or we really have value, but that we can live out of gratitude, Father, rather than insecurities. We give you thanks and praise, Father, for all of these benefits that come from knowing Jesus and knowing the gospel. And so, Father, we ask that you help to have the gospel be more and more real to our hearts, and that when we slip into a performance mindset and an accomplishment mindset and white-knuckling it and all of that type of stuff, Father, that time and time again, your word would call us back to the gospel, that we might know the lightness and the freedom, but the profound depth and dignity that are given to us when we put our faith and trust in Jesus.

And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your only Son and the only Savior, and we all say, Amen. Amen.