

Romans 3:27–31 "The Way of Boasting or the Way of Gratitude"

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Date: 29 March 2026

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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. Father, we give you thanks and praise that you loved us so much that, Father, you and God, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, you worked in complete and perfect harmony that your Son would be the Savior of the world, that He would come to live a human life and to die upon the cross in our place, to experience all there is to taste of death, to defeat that which causes death, which is our rebellion against you, that He would rise from the dead and ascend into heaven, and that He will come again. Father, we thank and praise you for all of these things. And so, Father, knowing how much you love us, we ask that you do a gentle but powerful work in our hearts, that we might accept when your word describes our true human condition, and that we might trust that when you say no to the things that we long for, it is only because you desire to give us something far better. And we ask these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. I'm conscious that I could end up opening a bit of a can of worms, and you can ask me about it later on if you want to know more about it.

But one of the things that happened while I was in Zimbabwe teaching the different pastors about how to how to preach Bible passages, we came up to some example. I can't remember exactly what it was.

And they asked me a little bit about how especially they were very interested because they thought that Canadians, more so than Zimbabwe, and they thought it was a Zimbabwe problem too, but they thought Canadians in particular would have a harder time accepting when God says no to something they want.

[2 : 58] And this somehow came up because one of the interesting things about being there is we had some interesting conversations about the different cultures that we had to work in, right? And so they, so I said to them, well, what I say is that, and what it's good for you to say too, is that when God says no to something that we really want, it's because he's offering us something better.

And then they threw two examples my way because they said, well, okay, we sort of understand that, but I'm not sure how you would say that on these two particular cases. What if you say no to something, what is the better thing? And they said the first one they gave was, what would you say to a gay man or a lesbian woman? Because the Bible clearly says that that's wrong.

What would you say to them is that if they say no to acting on their desires is the better thing. And the other thing they said, which is, they said is more relevant for Zimbabwe, is for people who, because they're quite poor, decide to really devote their life to trying to get as much money as possible.

What would you say when, but when the Bible says you have to be financially generous, what is the, like, there's a bit of a no there, George, about attaining riches at what's the better thing. So I'm not going to tell you what I said, but it was a very, you know, as I said in some of the videos that I sent, they, they're not, from our point of view, they're not very well educated, but they're very smart and very thoughtful.

[4 : 23] And it was a delight to spend time with them. But we're dealing, we're looking at a text, I don't know if you noticed it when, when, when Andrew read the text that I'm going to be looking at this morning. It's a bit of a confusing text, it goes rapid fire very briefly from, on three different linked ideas, and bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang.

It's really a text that you need to slow down with and, and meditate and contemplate upon the different bits as you come across it. But there's very clearly something in the text that begins with, where the Bible is saying no to something that we really desire, that we really desire is, as Canadians. It, it forbids boasting.

And, uh, I think, I mean, that just seems like a weird way for the text to go. It's not, if you were reading the text along and saw how the argument was going, and then all of a sudden he brings this in, you'd go, wow, where on earth does that come from? Like, it doesn't seem to fit.

And if you think about it for a second, uh, we live in a, a boasting culture. Not, not in a, you know, as Canadians, we often try to hide it and be a bit self-effacing, but we're in an attainment culture.

Our entire culture is based upon attainment and status. We want to attain educational degrees. We want to attain certificates. We want to attain reputations about maybe being really good with, under, you know, with, uh, being a foodie and appreciating good food or appreciating good music, appreciating good literature, having lots of Instagram followers or TikTok, talk followers, uh, uh, and, and on and on and on. We're in an attainment culture. And now this Bible passage seems to say that, you know, implicit to the attainment is a grounds for us to boast over others. And the Bible seems to be saying no to it. So why would it eat? Why would the Bible even bring this up? And, you know, really the average Canadian hearing this text would say this, George, there's enough crap going on in my life, trying to diminish me and make me less.

[6 : 26] Uh, why on earth would I want to take, uh, to become a Christian and it's going to take away all the things in my life that makes life worth living? Like why on earth would I do that?

So let's look, let's walk towards the question. If you have your Bibles, it's, uh, Romans chapter 3, uh, verses 27 to 31. Just a few short verses, uh, very, uh, packed with stuff. Uh, Romans chapter 3, verses 27 to 31. And, um, actually I'm going to read it verse 26 because if you'll notice here's a bit of a nerdy thing, uh, verse 27 begins with the word then. So it implies that there's an argument and now there's like a consequence or an implication from it. So what, what just went on before it? Uh, it was to show verse 26, that is the gospel, what God has done in the person of Jesus, a person of Jesus and his death upon the cross. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, that God is righteous and just and good, that he might be just. In other words, um, be seen, just understand to be a God of justice and the justifier. In other words, the one who's, uh, both remains just, but also makes us right with him in out compromising his justice and his goodness. It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he, God, might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. And in the original language, it is nullified. It is made null.

It is seen as being useless. By what kind of law? Explain what this means in a moment. By a law of works. Actually, I'll say it right now. By what kind of law? Uh, and here, um, one of the things about reading the book of Romans is it's really designed to be read slowly. Uh, most of us read, if we read it all, we read very quickly, trying to get the point. Uh, most of us read emails. I mean, a very common problem for those in organizations is you send out an email and, you know, a significant number of people don't act on the email correctly. I'm not trying to make any of you feel guilty because most of us just scan it. And because we scan it, we miss like half the things that are said that happen in the email, right? But the book of Romans is designed to be read slowly and, uh, there's lots of nuances. So when it says boasting is excluded or nullified or made, uh, like empty by what kind of law? And here, the word law means what type of, uh, logic, what type of principle, what type of rule? So what is the principle or the logic that would make boasting something which is, uh, useless? And then he says by a law of works. In other words, by a principle or logic of works, which I'll explain in a moment. No, but by the law of faith, the logic or principle or rule of faith in Christ to be the one who makes us right with God.

And then verse 28, for we hold that one is justified by faith, that is made right with God, by faith in Christ, apart from works of the law. So, uh, what's, what's going on here with this whole text? How can we sort of understand it? Well, uh, normally I don't mention the coffee shops that I go to, uh, cause I don't want to, you know, I mean, they don't give me any money for advertising them and, and everything. But I, those of you know that I go to Starbucks a lot. So, uh, one of the things that happened in Starbucks recently is they announced in January or February that they were changing their reward system. Like a lot of, uh, of organizations, they want to create a brand loyalty by if you, if you spend a certain number of dollars, you get extra goodies. So they decided to revamp that and they now have four categories. Uh, you have a category, a null category for people who aren't registered, they just pay. And then they have a low level category. I think it's green. And then they have a higher level, uh, which is gold. And then they have the highest level, which is the reserve status. And you get a, uh, you get the best benefits if you, if you're in that. So, you know, when it was announced,

I was a bit curious as to what I was going to be. Uh, and you can ask me later what I, what I, what I attained. But here's the thing. Most people, when they think of the average person, when they think of getting right with God, they think of it a little bit like the way Starbucks or some other group is actually giving you reward status. It's as if God says, let's go and see, uh, you know, it's time for me to have a few more people that I'm going to allow into heaven, whatever heaven is defined at, you know, whether it's Muslim heaven, Buddhist heaven, Hindu heaven, you know, agnostic heaven, spiritual heaven. You know, it's as if God says periodically, you know what? I haven't done this in a month. I think we should go down and look and see how many people have accumulated enough points to get the highest status. And then you go down and they go and they look and they look at, you know, you and no, no, you're a green card. No, you're, you're gold. No, no. Oh, you're, you're reserved status. You know, you're, you're a nothing.

[11 : 33] And that's sort of how it works. God goes and looks and sees how many points you've accumulated. And that just seems like a natural way to have things work. And usually in terms of religion and spirituality, the points will be different, but the imagination is exactly the same.

So if you're a Muslim, it's, you know, how many times do you, you know, how many days have you prayed five times during the day? And have you done all the appropriate hand washing and, and motions and how often you go to the mosque and have you gone and, you know, made a pilgrimage to Mecca and, you know, whatever it is. And have you done good things and acts of charity and kept Ramadan. And, you know, for Buddhists, there'll be Buddhist types of principles and, you know, for Hindus, Hindu and Christian forms of this abound as well. When the gospel gets lost, it's replaced with religion. And it's usually some combination of, you know, the, the good things you've done get a point, you know, every good thing you've done gets a point. And when you avoid doing a bad thing, oh, you got a point for that too, when you don't do a bad thing, you know. And, and then normally what happens is you add other cultural things in because that are just right and wrong is sort of boring.

So you add a few spiritual things or religious things. And then that's a little bit boring too. So usually what happens is you add other types of things. And, and, you know, in Canada at an unconscious level, we'd say, are you good looking or not? Are you rich or not? Do you have well-educated or not? Do you have good people skills or not? Do you have lots of followers on Instagram or not? You know, and there's a variety of cultural things, you know, do you vote for the right party, you know, or not? Are you part of the right group or not? And, and then all of these things add up points. And that's sort of how you're understood to be a good person, a well-adjusted person, the type of person that if you're an agnostic or an atheist, you say, well, if there is a God, these are the types of people that God would accept because they're very good. They have the points, they have the reserve status, the highest status. And, and that's just how the normal imagination works.

And, but how it works with God. That's in a sense, when it says here, if you look at verse 27, that's what, that's what the Bible here is calling the law of works. It's a law of accomplishments. It's the points. But it's saying here that this, and if you think about it for a second, there is implicit in all of that pride and boasting. Well, I'm not like those other people who only have a Algonquin degree, you know, but then some of you have more degrees than me, or I'm not like those other people. Like, I'm not like those people who are consumed with having Instagram followers. I'm above that. I don't have any Instagram followers, you know, or something like that, whatever it is. It's implicitly, there's a type of boasting. There's a claim that you're making against God. And here's the shock of

the gospel. Here's the complete and utter shock of the gospel. What the Bible text here is calling the law of faith or the logic or the rule of faith. Because what the Bible describes is this, just sort of, you know, personifying it. It's God is up in heaven and he says, you know, Peter, you know, Abraham, there's this guy, David down there. And you know, he's a murderer and an adulterer and he oppressed a poor man. I think I'm going to go down and save him.

[14 : 46] Oh, Peter, look, there's this guy, Paul. You know, Paul was a massive hater. He was deeply prejudiced. He manipulated legal systems to send people in jail. I think I'm going to go and save him.

And that's what the gospel describes as happening. That God, the Son of God, sets aside his glory and splendor and divine prerogatives and the adulation and worship of angels and all creation. And one of the neat things in the new heaven and the new earth, we'll get to hear, we'll get to hear how the Rockies praise God.

We'll get to hear how the birds and the wind praise God. We'll get to hear how the oceans praise God. And God, the Son of God, he already heard that. He lived in the midst of it. He was enthroned upon the praises of angels and the created order. And he decides, while remaining fully God, to set aside his glory, his prerogatives, his praise, his divine splendor, but remaining fully God, takes into himself our human nature and he stoops to save us. He stoops. He bows. He comes down from heaven so low that he enters the human race, not as a general, not as an athlete, not as an intellectual, not as a king or an emperor, but as a zygote in the womb of a 15-year-old girl named Mary. A 16-year-old girl named Mary.

And he goes through the normal process of gestation, of birth. He lives a lower working class life, a lower working class Jewish life as an observant Jewish man, man who would have worked cutting stone and hammering things together with his mother and his father. He would have buried his father. He would have seen the death and the grief of his community. He suffered the trials and temptations that you and I suffer only without ever sinning. And then he begins his public ministry and performs miracles and does wonderful transformative teaching. And he's completely and utterly rejected by the ones who should assist him. And at the end of the end of the end, he's with himself other than a few women. And this isn't me being derogatory, but throughout most of human history, until the gospel has taken root in human cultures to extol and exalt the value of women, it has been the case of most human cultures that women are looked down on. And but for a few women at a distance, he is completely and utterly alone and stripped naked. And he dies on a cross. And on the cross, we as Christians understand that he did not die for anything that he had done. And it wasn't the nails that held him there, but a man who can still the storms, and a man who can feed 5,000, and a man who can raise the dead. The only way he could die is if his love is holding him to the cross. As the hymn says, love to the loveless shown that lovely we might be. And as I like to amend it, love to the loveless shown that loved and lovely we may be.

And he dies, and he takes all there is to taste of death. And three days in the grave, he takes all there is to taste of death. And then he rises from the dead. And in rising from the dead, he has dealt with all that separates us from God. He has dealt with the sin and the evil which separates us from God and causes death. And he's vindicated as God the Savior. And he has come entirely because he saw adulterers and murderers like David. And he saw haters like Paul. And he saw you and me. And that is why he came to die.

[18 : 27] The biggest difference between those who have accepted beginning to be formed by the gospel and those that are not is how we view our accomplishments and good works. And by the logic of what Christ has done for us in the cross, boasting is gone.

I mean, it's still there, by the way. I'm not saying I never boast. I'm not saying I'm never proud. But I understand it as being, I'm coming to understand it in light of the gospel as vain.

And I come to understand it in the gospel that it's not stripping away everything that makes life worth living. If you could put up our first point, Claire, that would be very helpful. The law of works grows unstable and transitory pride. The law of faith grows fruitful gratitude.

The law of works grows unstable and transitory pride. The law of faith grows fruitful gratitude. Pride is inherently unstable. We are threatened by others who are better than us.

The more we are concerned and consumed with pride, it might be that we're very used to going.

And I was at a gathering once of some missionaries and they, there were some missionaries and others, and they said, you know, who's been to the most countries? You know, they had actually there long enough to have their passport stamped. You know, this guy said twin, you know, 10,

another 20, another 30.

[20 : 06] And then this, this young working class guy, I think his number was 87 or something like that, because he, he'd driven some hiluxes from Britain to, to, to, to, to quite deep into Africa. And he'd gone through a whole pile of countries and other type of stuff. So those people who are putting their pride and their sense of self worth on having traveled to more countries, all of a sudden, it's completely and utterly undercut. They didn't even know they should worry about it. They just assumed that working class guy is just obviously a bit of a loser compared to them. And there he is, he's beat them on that. And it's pride is always unstable. You don't get the, the promotion that you think you should have, where, where it finally comes time for you to retire and nobody remembers you within a year of your retiring at where your, your, your finances start to collapse or all sorts of types of things. The things that were just even for a moment, I know for you young people, it's hard to imagine, but for those of us who are over 30, just think of the things that we were proud of when we were 16. And how many of them are we still proud of? In fact, the matter is, how many of you would even like others to see how you looked when you were 16? And maybe you were filled with how good looking you were at 16, the coolest person in school. And now if they see a picture of you, people are smirking and laughing. Pride is inherently unstable and inherently transitory.

And the Bible, if the, if God was saying that there's the things that you boast on, that you can sort of boast before God as to why you have confidence in this in the face of God, all the points you've accomplished, and, and the Bible is saying God takes them all away. Well, if God says these are all worthless, that would be one thing if he's a bully. But the gospel is this God of profound love. You know, and, and, and he's actually really saying, George, George, you know, you're holding on to all these points, you know. But George, they're actually like chains that bind you to one spot.

George, I've saved you from that. I want to cut those chains. And I want you to look and there's a whole world to be fruitful in. And I, you know, and, and George is, as the gospel of what Christ has done for you becomes more and more clear to you that you just receive a gift that you don't deserve, then what you can begin to be living your life based on is gratitude. And gratitude is fruitful. Gratitude is vastly more fruit producing than pride. Gratitude means you can work with others without being threatened. Gratitude means you can see the beauty of others. Gratitude is vastly more fruitful than pride. Now, um, one of the things that was, uh, that came up while we were there in Zimbabwe, it came up with Steve and me.

So Steve and I are white. They're all Shona, you know, people who are African, so they're, they're black. And, uh, one of the things that, uh, that came up there was that, uh, Steve and I said while we were talking that race isn't a biblical category. I don't know if you knew that. Race is not a biblical category.

[23 : 40] Race is completely and utterly irrelevant as far as the Bible is concerned. There's just human beings. There's just humans. And interestingly enough, while the Bible does, so when the Bible says, you know, go into all the nations, go into all the world, it doesn't say go to all the races, because the Bible doesn't in a sense acknowledge that race is a category that matters for anything. It says go to all the people groups, because culture matters. On one hand though, the Bible is profoundly flexible with culture. I mean, obviously in every single human culture, there's things that aren't good about that culture. But apart from that, the fact that there's different people groups with different cultures and different languages, there's nothing better or worse. One of the things I had to say to the fellows, so we, one of the things, they have like next to no money and no resources. So one of the things that we did going there is we bought them two books. One of them is a concise theology by J.I. Packer, that if you don't have it, it's well worth buying, a concise theology by J.I. Packer.

The other thing is we bought them an ESV study Bible. And I told them that it's one of the best two Bible translations with a really good, very good academics have written the notes. And then I said to them, by the way, there's nothing special about English. It just happens to be that at this point in time in human history, there's a lot of godly English-speaking scholars who've come up with a good translation, good notes. I said, I pray for the day that in 20 years' time, the whole world says, if you want the best translation and the best study Bible, you've got to learn Shona, which is what they spoke. Because there's nothing special about English. And then one of the things in that culture is, I discovered this after a while, it would become one of those call and response things.

I say, Amen. They all, no, I say, Alleluia. They all respond, Amen. And in that culture, you go, Alleluia. Amen. Alleluia. Amen. Alleluia. Amen. You can do it several times. So he said, I'm praying

for the day when in 20 years, 25 years, the best translation of the Bible, the best study Bible ever written is in Shona.

Alleluia. They all yelled, Amen. There's nothing special about English, per se. There's just culture. And there's things that are good in culture and things that are just neutral. And that's the next thing, which is said.

Look what happened. Look, this is, so you see, one of the things that people will complain is, George, if everything is all about Jesus, that seems very, very narrow. If Jesus is the only way to be made right with God, that seems very, very narrow. But what Paul is going to say is, actually, no, no, no, the logic of faith actually is not narrow. On one level, it's very, very narrow, but it's narrow only so that every single human being can hear about it and have the choice to respond.

[26 : 29] Look what, look what's, that's what's going on next in verses 29 to 30. Or is God the God of Jewish people only? Is he not the God of pagans or Gentiles as well? Yes, of Gentiles, of pagans also. Since God is one, that means there's not only, there's two things. He's only one God, there's only one God, but also that there's this unity. Really important. It means that when Jesus comes to die on the cross, the Father wills it, the Son wills it, the Holy Spirit wills it. It's a, there's a, a, a one will, a unity within the Godhead, who will justify the circumcised, that's Jewish people, by faith, and the uncircumcised through faith.

Faith. You see, the law of, the law of, of works is proud, inherently proud, and pride diminishes and divides.

I got to do things actively to make sure others stay beneath me. Pride inherently means that you look down your nose at others. And one of the reasons that pride is such a deadly sin for Christians, some of you have heard me say this before, I can't remember where I heard it from, it's not my own line. You cannot look up to God if you're looking down your nose at others. It's completely impossible to look up to God when you're looking down your nose at other people.

And if you are looking up to God, you aren't looking down your nose at other people. If everything is a gift that I have, my salvation, everything, my, my educational attainment, my marriage, my family, whatever intellectual abilities, if it's all a gift, then I can't look down my nose at others.

You see, what Paul is saying here, if you could put up the second point, that would be very helpful, Claire. The law of work, the law of works diminishes and divides people. But the law of create, of faith, creates new neighbors, good neighbors, across all human divides and all human history. The law of works, pride and accomplishment and attainment and boasting in those things, diminishes and divides people.

[28 : 55] The law of faith creates new neighbors, good neighbors, across all human divides and human history. One of the great privileges that I had in going to Zimbabwe is I had a non-tourist experience of Zimbabwe.

On the Sunday morning, two Sunday mornings when I preached at a church, I went to a part of Zimbabwe, which no tourist would go to. It was really poor. Like it was really, really, really, really, really poor.

Add a few more reallys. And on one hand, I wanted to take a picture of it to show you, but on the other hand, I knew that it would be dehumanizing to them for me to take their pictures. So I didn't. But it was poor, really.

And, but I get to be there in their church. I was the first white person in the history of that congregation to ever speak there. On one hand, I had a disadvantage. I couldn't relate the Bible to them across the culture very well, because I don't know their culture. On the other hand, I had laser-focused attention because of my color.

I mean, they listened to every word. I mean, one of the experiences if you go to Zimbabwe is you basically never see anybody who's not black. Like virtually never, maybe in parts of downtown Harare. But if you get out of that, you only see, you know, other Zimbabweans. And I got to have lunch at somebody's home. And when I was teaching at the training center, it was a Zimbabwe training center, not where tourists would go, where Westerners would usually go. And I ate meals with them, how they would normally eat, the meals cooked over a fire.

[30 : 43] Right? They have a well, but they have to have a generator for power. And, you know, but I am accepted. I am their neighbor, and they treat me in a neighborly way. And they are our neighbors too.

And you have language difficulties to navigate and cultural differences. You know, one of the things they did there, I'm not saying you should do this. This is their culture. When I came into the church,

first of all, it was insistent that the usher had to carry my Bible and my bag and my water to my seat. And then when I sat down, I am not making this up, she got down on her knees with a cloth and cleaned my shoes. And then they sang a special welcome song where everybody in the congregation came up and shook my hand or gave me a hug. And when I went to preach, the usher carried my Bible and my water to the pulpit.

And then when I was leaving it, they carried it back. And when I was leaving, I tried to pick up my no, no, no, no, no, no. And it would insult. That's their culture, by the way. Right? Just their culture. And there's things about their culture that are very, very, very wonderful. But here's right. Here's the point. The law of works diminishes and divides people, but the law of faith creates new neighbors across human divides and human history. Calvin is your neighbor. Augustine is your neighbor. St. John Chrysostom is your neighbor. Fanny Crosby is your neighbor. They're your neighbors.

That's the logic of receiving a relationship with God, which is completely and utterly a gift. And then when you belong to God, you're not just like this isolated soul relating individually to God. He forms you in his kingdom. And his kingdom is in, his goal is to be every people group and every language and every culture. And that each culture, the Shona culture is to be transformed by the gospel, the things within it which are not good. And the Canadian culture and our culture is to be transformed by the gospel and the things that are not, that are not good. But there's ultimately just neighbors.

[33 : 02] It's beautiful. It is what our modern DEI is trying to accomplish with no spiritual roots and ultimately in many cases causing problems and heartache. And it's all there in the gospel, what is really being longed for in our culture. But there's another problem. A few years ago, I was sharing with somebody about how in the gospel that God doesn't look at your accomplishments, just like what I described, that, you know, in a sense, it's not that God says, I'm going to go down and look for some good people so I can have them as part of my kingdom. But it's instead like God said, look at that David guy, you know, he murdered, he murdered a guy.

He caused all sorts of trouble for his nation. He's an adulterer. I'm going to go save him. And when I explained all of that to her, her response was, why on earth would anybody who's a Christian ever do anything good? If God doesn't weigh your merits but pardon your offenses, why on earth would you do anything good or just? And that's a good question. Look what Paul says next in verse 31. Do we then overthrow the law? And here law means the moral law. Do we overthrow the moral law by this faith? By no means, on the contrary, we uphold the law. Now that, why is it that Paul says that? If you could put up the point now, Claire, that would be very helpful. The law of works undermines true goodness and justice. The law of faith upholds and illuminates the beauty of goodness and justice.

The law of works undermines true goodness and justice. The law of faith upholds and illuminates the beauty of goodness and justice. Why do I say this? Well, how do my accomplishments work? Some of you who've grown up in very, very fundamentalist type churches, I don't want to dump on them, but I want to use a Christian example. You'll know that very quickly, many of those churches become very, very legalistic and they become very, very legalistic over frankly stuff that doesn't matter and God doesn't give a hoot about. And they get very legalistic about how big the Bible is, whether it's black or not, whether it's the right translation, how you walk, whether you avoid doing certain things, whether you accomplish certain things. And ironically, in churches that preach grace, they often end up becoming very, very, very rule-based. And what usually happens in churches like that, if people are honest, they're very good at keeping things on the surface while inside things can be completely and utterly chaotic and bad. And one of the things that happens is that in those types of situations, and this is true of all works in every type of culture, you end up inevitably knowing that there's certain things you're not very good at keeping, certain good things you're not good at keeping. So in the sense of the truth, inevitably, those things about goodness, you start to diminish them.

So for instance, in our political discourse right now, one of the problems going on in our political discourse is there's a huge part of our country that think, if you don't think like me, you're a communist. And there's a whole other side of the congregation, the culture that says, if you don't think like me, you're really part of the Ku Klux Klan. And you can't even have a conversation. And so what happens in those types of things, feeling very, very righteous, they take their type of identity from these types of things. And it means you can bad mouth and lie and slander and do all sorts of evil things against the other side and feel completely and utterly self-righteous about it. And a law of accomplishments and attainments ends up meaning you can say all sorts of things that are right

and wrong, aren't right or wrong, or don't apply to you, or you're very good at multiplying things or thinking certain things are really, really important. Like what really, really matters is how slim I am or how fit I am or how much money I have and not worry at all about whether you're the type of person who tells lies or can't keep confidences or has no generosity or no compassion. Because we do things when we're on the attainment model. Before we know it, we're giving ourselves a pass, we're giving ourselves mulligans, do-overs. We're saying those things don't really matter. We're working on image attainment and all of that type of stuff. And when you're working on image management, that means you're terrified that somebody would press through your force field and see you as you really are, which means that intimacy gets harder and harder and harder and harder. But the law of faith says, God looked down from heaven and said, look at that Paul. He's a hater. And he's a guy who manipulates the law. And he's deeply prejudiced.

[37 : 39] And he helped have certain people killed. And he had innocent people thrown in jail. I think I will go and save him. When you know that you've been saved by grace alone, as a gift, by faith alone, in Christ alone, to God's glory alone, and as that becomes more real to your heart, and you realize that he did not weigh your merits but pardoned your offenses, you all of a sudden have a very secure place, emotionally and intellectually and aesthetically, to look at the crap in your life and say, that was wrong. And realize you don't have to bend the moral rule.

To be convicted when you lack compassion. And to realize for the first time that when you receive everything from God as grace, you can begin to look at the moral law and the law of justice as beautiful.

Because you can confess your sins and desire to press on to be more like Christ. Just one thing in closing. If you could put up our final point.

When you bow to what you boast in, you become smaller. Most of the time what we really boast in is ourselves.

We're the idols that we think will help us be bigger. You bow to yourself. How on earth does that do? All you do is twist yourself up into knots and end up being smaller. When you bow to what you boast in, you become smaller. But you grow taller when you bow to Jesus in grateful faith.

[39 : 37] You become taller when you bow to him. I love the line. I can't remember who said it. It was about the solidarity workers in Poland who began to bring down the communist regime of the USSR. And it was also used of Martin Luther King and those who helped to bring down the racist laws in the south.

On their knees before God. So they could stand in the face of tyrants. When you bow to Christ, you were taller. And part of becoming a Christian and being a Christian is I learned to bow my mind, my sexuality, my money, my imagination, my marriage, my family, my time are bowed to Jesus. And the deeper I bow to Jesus, the taller I am in him.

I invite you to stand. And let us bow our heads to our Heavenly Father.

Father, we give you thanks once and praise once again as your word has called us to think about what Jesus did for us in his coming to earth, and his being born, his life, and culminating in his violent death upon the cross, his shameful death upon the cross, and what he accomplished for us when he tasted all there is to taste in death, and in his mighty resurrection for us.

We thank and praise you, Father, that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We give you thanks and praise that in him we are forgiven. In him, all angry claims of justice have been paid and stilled, and we can stand in him free as a complete and utter gift of grace from you to us.

[41 : 56] And we thank you for that, Father, and we ask that you would help the gospel to become more and more real to our hearts, that we might have a secure place to stand, to become unbent and untwisted, to once again see the beauty of others and the new neighbors you give us across cultural divides and across history, and that you will give us new eyes to see the beauty, illuminate the beauty of goodness and justice, that we might stand, as we bow to you, that we might stand and live free in our country, in our city, for the good of this city, and for your great glory, and for the salvation of many.

So, Father, please help us to bow to Jesus in everything that makes us us, knowing, Father, that you are a good God, who longs for us to be with you forever.

And we ask all these things in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior, and all God's people said, Amen. Amen.