

God's Way of Making Us Right with Himself

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[0:00] So we'll be starting at Romans 9 verse 30 and we'll be reading through to chapter 10 verse 13. What shall we say then?

That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith,¹ But that Israel, who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness, did not succeed in reaching that law.

Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone. As it is written, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

For being ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

[1:12] For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, do not say in your heart, who will ascend into heaven, that is to bring Christ down, or who will descend into the abyss, that is to bring Christ up from the dead.

But what does it say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that is the word of faith that we proclaim. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

For the scripture says, Well, good morning everyone.

Will you pray with me as we come to God's word? Now, Father, we always need your spirit to illuminate our minds so that we understand your word, and to believe, to break through any hardness, any remaining hardness in our hearts, to believe it.

I pray, Lord, that as we all sit under your word together now, that our hearts will be singing all the more that we can stand before you in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[3:14] In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Well, the gospel, the label gospel, literally means good news. But I can forget sometimes that the cross of Jesus is also offensive.

I think when we get together each week and we just enjoy praising Jesus together, I forget that it's offensive. I want to do a little thought experiment to get us going this morning of two men who appear before God for judgment.

Now, one man, he never goes to church. He's arrogant. He's just difficult. He's difficult to get on with. He was a drunk.

He did harm to his wife and children. Now, in his old age, he's playing bowls, and this Don McMurray guy comes up and interrupts his lovely afternoon and shares the message of Jesus with him.

He believes with tears. He dies that night, appears before God, and God says, Innocent.

[4:35] Righteous. Come. Come. Come into paradise. Now, another man grows up in the church, strictly observes Sundays as a Sabbath.

He's decent. He's hardworking. He's respected in the community, in church. He even rises to church leadership. He's generous, giving to charity. He dies the same night, and he sees the other bloke go before him and sees God's welcome and delight of him and goes, Oh, well, I'll be a shoo-in then.

And to his horror, he hears the words, Depart from me. I never knew you. Now, if you're not offended by that, I'm not sure we're hearing it properly.

The cross of Jesus offends our deep intuition that there is good people and bad people. That intuition is deep.

Our passage today is saying there's two eternal destinies at the end of our life. We see in chapter 10, verse 10, it's being saved or justified before that heavenly court, God saying, innocent, righteous, saved.

[6:01] Or, verse 11, put to shame. We're each on our way to salvation or shame. C.S. Lewis, he captures this much better than I can.

In the end, that face of God, which is the delight or terror of the universe, must be turned upon each one of us, either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory, inexpressible, or inflicting shame that can never be cured.

It is written, we shall stand before him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. Chapters 9 to 11 of Romans, we're looking at, the Israelites in Paul's time, despite all their privileges, they're still under the wrath of God.

How can that be? So far in Romans, we've looked at it from heaven's perspective, from God's all-powerful, unconditional mercy.

[7:31] Chapter 9, verse 16, so then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy. From heaven's perspective, all people are under sin.

None of us have lived up to the knowledge of God that we know. Some, God hands over to our sinful desires. Others, he freely chooses to have mercy.

This belief in God's sovereign mercy, it's why we can sing, I have no idea why you chose me, but I praise your sovereign mercy.

As Martin rightly urged us, it shouldn't lead to callous, Calvinism. Paul is in anguish here. Again, we see that in chapter 10, verse 1.

My heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. His belief in sovereign mercy is in anguish, and he's not sitting on his hands, he's praying.

[8:43] It's his belief in that sovereign mercy that urges him to pray. I think it actually gives us confidence to share the gospel.

What else is going to break through the hardness of unbelief? God's sovereign mercy can. So we've looked at it from God's, heaven's perspective.

But I think in this passage, Paul is going from earth's perspective. Human responsibility. Scripture always affirms 100% God's sovereignty and human responsibility, 100%.

How those two fit together. You tell me afterwards. I think we'll find out in heaven maybe. But it's always both. Someone in our small group used the quarterwoodism saying they're two sides of the one coin.

Paul is flipping the coin over here. We're now looking at human responsibility. What has Israel done or not done that means they're still lost.

[9:48] They're on their way to shame. So verses 30 to 31 of chapter 9, I think is what my opening thought experiment with the two men was trying to capture.

Gentiles, so non-Jewish people, they did not pursue righteousness, a righteous life. Israel did pursue righteousness by keeping the law.

They're trying to keep the law. And Gentiles are righteous. They've got it. Israel failed to keep the law and they're lost.

Throughout this whole section, there's a comparison of two ways to try and be righteous.

We see there in verse 32. They did not pursue it by faith, but as if it was based on works, on doing.

[10:55] Righteousness is the ability to stand before God fully seen and confident.

He accepts you. He loves you. You're right with him. It's like two friends who've had a falling out and they say, are we right?

Are we good? And God's like, yes, we're good. It's that standing with him. We're good. Now, there's two ways of trying to get that.

Not that to work. Please hear me correctly. There's not two roads to get there, but there's two...

Paul's comparing two ways people try and get there.

There's a false way based on the works that you do and there's a true way, God's way, based on faith and what God has done. And there is a world of difference.

[12:01] It's the difference between boasting to God, look what I've done, or boasting in God, what you have done.

And Paul quotes the law. Okay, you're trying to be righteous by keeping the law. Are you listening to what the law says?

He quotes from the Old Testament and throughout this passage, he just kind of, it's like a medley of a song. He just jams all these quotations together. We don't have time, I don't have time to go into all of them, but he's just, he's jamming all these quotations together going, are you listening to the law?

Because God's always said, it's by faith. And I'm going to lay a stone, I'm going to do something, I'm going to lay a stone, I'm going to lay a foundation stone, the Lord Jesus.

And some who are trying to be good and do good, they're going to stumble over him and fall.

Others, that's going to be the foundation. And then, chapter 10, verse 2 to 4, Paul further explains why trying to be righteous by doing, by works, is not the correct way.

[13:20] Verse 2, speaking of the Israelites, I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. I think it's common to hear outside the church that if people were just sincere in their religion, surely whatever God is up there will be okay with that.

They're sincere, they're trying. Surely being sincere is enough, but no, it's not. It's not enough. In all spheres of life, we all know that.

Just to be enthusiastic isn't enough. You've got to actually know what's right. I think Paul's life is a testimony to what he's saying here.

His own conversion. He knew the Old Testament back to front. It's not head knowledge. That wasn't his problem. He probably knew the Old Testament better than any of us in this room. It wasn't head knowledge.

That's not the problem. He believed in Yahweh, the God of the Bible, not pagan gods. He was so passionate for God, he went house to house putting Christians in prison.

[14:42] The first Christian martyr, Stephen, he's approving of his death. He's that passionate for God and temple and law. But how devastating it was for him when the Lord Jesus revealed his glory and said, why are you persecuting me?

Paul was like this high-speed train, very zealous for God, heading in the complete opposite direction. Sincerity is not enough.

It's even dangerous if you're headed in the wrong direction. Someone today can have grown up in the church, even right now, assume they've heard this a thousand times.

They think they know it. They're involved. They're committed. Some people even go to the mission field. If you're headed in the wrong direction without knowledge, it's dangerous.

Verse 3 and 4 explain what they should have known. Verse 3, for being ignorant of the righteousness of God.

[16:11] We're going to have to come back to that phrase. Righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own. They did not submit to God's righteousness.

So there's a contrast here. God's or yours. He's already talked about the righteousness of God in chapter 3. But if we think about what a Jew would have already known about righteousness, righteousness of God here can't mean God's character.

God's character is righteous. A Jew knows that. A Jew is very aware that God is right in all he does. He is good. So it's not God's character here.

Is it the righteous demands that God requires? Jews know that. They've got the law. They've got the Ten Commandments. They know the righteous demands that God requires. What goodness looks like.

The righteousness of God, it is at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. It is at the heart of true saving faith. Martin Luther, he puzzled over this phrase, the righteousness of God.

[17:25] He was a monk. He had a conscience before a holy God. And he knew his prayers. He knew his confessions of sin. He knew his devotion, his religious devotion wasn't enough.

And he said, I hated the righteousness of God. That phrase. I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience because he thought it meant God's righteous demands.

He could never live up to it. Eventually, he realized this righteousness is something God gives.

And he says, the passive righteousness with which the merciful God justifies, saves us by faith. And here I felt that I was altogether born again and the very gates of paradise opened up before me.

The righteousness of God is not that he instantaneously zaps you with a righteous character.
[18:30] If you follow me around for one hour after church, I'll give you some evidence of that. But this is a righteous status before God.

We're right with God. We're good. We're more than good. We're family.

It's a status. So Israel, being passionate for God, were ignorant of this gift of being right with God. They wanted to establish their own merit, to stand before God. So I don't want to submit to what you give. And it's going complete opposite direction to what God has done.

Now we'll come back to verse 4, but just verse 5 for a second. What's so wrong with trying to establish your own righteousness by doing good? He quotes Leviticus 19.5 here.

[19:54] The person who does the commandments shall live by them. If you sincerely try to keep the law of God, there's nothing wrong with the law of God.

It's good. Nothing wrong at all. But it's too difficult. Not because God set the bar too high, but because sin is so strong.

If you try and have a righteousness of your own, you almost always have to do this. You've got to reduce the law of God to external performance.

When the law of God was always about your inner attitudes of the heart as well. love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your mind and all your strength.

Paul illustrates this back in chapter 7, one of the Ten Commandments, do not covet. That's an inner thing. Do not desire to possess something for yourself that's not yours, like your neighbour's house, your neighbour's wife.

[21:07] love the inner desire, it crushed him because as soon as he took that law seriously, if you take that law seriously, you see coveting in your mind, I don't know, I see it in my mind and heart all the time.

I love that neighbour's deck, their porch, I want that. I love that new car, I wish that was mine. Even clothing, I'm covered in clothing, I covet people's soccer skills and speaking skills and personality strengths and it's everywhere.

You take the law of God seriously, if you're trying to establish righteousness by the law, you've got to reduce it to just external. If you take the internal seriously, you'll be crushed.

sin is too strong. No one lives up to the law.

Now, coming back to verse four, all Israel should have been the first in line to welcome Christ with open arms and see him and appreciate him because Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

[22:50] This is God giving us righteousness through what Christ has done. Paul says back in chapter 8 verse 3, for God has done, done, what the law weakened by the flesh, the sinful flesh, could not do by sending his own son.

It's a great phrase, Christ is the end of the law. Now, what does it mean, end? There's three main options and I'm happy to talk about it over morning tea.

End as in Christ has brought the law to a conclusion, like some of you are wishing this sermon would come to a conclusion. No, you're probably not. But has it come to a conclusion?

Christ is the goal of the law? Kind of like I'm thinking of like a medical student. All their training, their goal is to be a doctor.

That's the goal. That's the purpose of it all. The purpose of the law was to reach Christ. Is it saying that he's the goal? Or is the end of the law in that he did the whole law?

[24:14] He's the embodiment of the law. He's what the law looks like. Now one thing we have to rule out is that Christ just comes along and scrunches up the law and goes, oh, let's just get rid of that.

He said, I did not come to abolish the law. I came to fulfill it. Not one tiniest dot or stroke of the pen, not one tiniest dot.

I'm not coming to abolish it. I'm coming to fulfill it. Personally, I think all three are valid, depending where you go in the New Testament.

He is the only one who obeyed. You want to know what the law looks like? Look at Jesus. He obeyed. He's the only righteous one. I think, I think, again, talk about open morning tea, I think Paul is emphasizing here that Christ is the goal that the law was always leading to.

I think we see that in the way he uses Deuteronomy 30 in the next section. He quotes Deuteronomy 30 like, whoa, where did you get that from, Paul? We're going to see that in a second.

[25 : 33] Israel have not submitted to the very purpose of the law that the law pointed to.

It was always pointing to Jesus and then they're going in the complete opposite direction. They should have seen that. Now, this phrase does raise what place does the law have for us Christians today.

I don't want to go fully into that because that is a big question, but I just want to say a few things.

The law is good in knowing God's character. We should read it to know God's holy character.

God's The law is good for understanding what our sin is and our problem. It's good in that it points forward to the solution that Jesus is the high priest we need.

He's the sacrifice we need. He's the temple we need. It points forward to understand Christ, so we should read the law. It gives us wisdom for what love of neighbour looks like, what justice looks like.

[26 : 51] It instructs and informs love. But it is not a code, it is not a rule book that God is either blessing or cursing us according to our obedience.

That has come to an end. That is not how we should read the law today. So verses 5 to 10, Paul shows that the law itself was always pointing forward to Christ.

Verses 6 to 10, he's saying righteousness has always been by faith in what God does. He graciously brings salvation near to us.

Now he quotes Deuteronomy 9, 4. Here's one of those medleys. He jams a few passages here together. The first one, do not say in your heart, which the full quotation there is, it's not according to your righteousness.

Anyone who read the law should have understood that. It's never been about your righteousness. You're blessed by God because of his promises. That's what that quote is about.

[28 : 19] And then he goes to Deuteronomy 30. Now if I was marking an essay and a student interpreted Deuteronomy 30 like this, there would be red pen. Like, where did you get this from Paul?

That's a bit of a leap, isn't it? Now, we're the student here, so what is Paul teaching us? it's a passage, it's a passage about the law.

He's not saying if you read Deuteronomy 30, you would find this hidden meaning. I don't think we should read scripture like that, where we've got to find a hidden meaning.

I don't think he's doing that. I think what he's doing is, and how much more argument. If that was the case then, how much more now?

If under the time of the law, God graciously brought salvation near to them, how much more in the time of the gospel has God brought salvation near to us?

[29 : 29] I think it's a how much more argument. the original context is Moses saying the word of God, what I must do for God to be pleased, to be righteous, it is understandable, it is accessible.

You don't need to go to heaven to find God's will. It's not impossible. God's brought it right close. It's not in the abyss.

Again, something impossible that you have to go find, you have to do something to go find what God wants. He's brought it right up to your heart and mouth, to Israel that is.

He has graciously brought his will close to Israel's heart and mouth. If they just received it with faith, with a heart of faith, it was right there.

Which exposes the problem. The problem was always inside, not receiving it. But then he interprets it how much more now.

[30 : 50] Now we're in the age of the gospel of what God has done. It's not commands anymore, it's a message. It's a God has brought salvation near.

The message Christ has come down from heaven. He has lived the life you should have lived, I should have lived. He has died the cursed death, I should have died, and he's been raised, he is Lord.

That message, God has graciously brought it to your heart and mouth. It is so near to you than me. You don't have to go to heaven to find it, you don't have to do, it's right there. We often fret, have I done enough?

we fret, all those sins of my past that pierce your conscience, and a child can understand this, it is so close to each one of us, because it's a message.

[32 : 01] Verse 9 and 10, these are, if you want a memory verse, it often is a memory verse, because they're beautiful words, because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. He has graciously brought salvation so near.

The heart, the inner, hidden belief, and the lips is just an expression of that belief, the public confession, Jesus is Lord, saved.

How good is that? In a group one night, there was a man named William Holland, he was with John Wesley and Charles Wesley, and they're reading Martin Luther's preface to Galatians, and Martin Luther wrote, what have we nothing to do, no nothing, only to accept of him who God has made to us our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, our redemption.

William Holland said, at those words that came over me such a power that I cannot well describe.

My great burden fell off in an instant. My heart was so filled with peace and love I burst into tears.

[33 : 47] I almost thought I saw my saviour. My companions perceiving me so affected fell on their knees and prayed. And when I afterwards went into the street, I could scarcely feel the ground I trot upon.

God has graciously brought salvation right up to your heart and mouth. What are you going to do with it? All he asks you to do is receive.

Have we nothing to do? Nothing. And so verses 11 to 13 is just emphasising, he's piling up Old Testament quotes.

Anyone, everyone, children, old, deathbed, anyone, any past, everywhere, any race, anyone.

God is bringing, through the gospel message, God is bringing salvation right up to your heart and mouth. Anyone who responds in faith declaring Jesus as Lord is righteous in him, found in him, not having a righteousness of their own, but found in him.

[35 : 09] That you can even be called sons and daughters of the living God. God. There's false forms of Christianity that add to this message.

They say, okay, yes, that's all well and good, but you've got to improve in your character and doing and what you do in life will contribute on that final day in judgment.

judgment. That is zeal without knowledge. That is heading in the opposite direction. It is trying to establish a righteousness of your own and they can never go to bed at night knowing I've done enough.

Whereas you can get wheeled into that theatre at hospital not knowing you're going to wake up after surgery and you can be at peace. This knowledge is everything of what God has done.

And because God has brought righteousness right up to our hearts and mouth in the gospel message, the main barrier to salvation salvation is pride. That's the main barrier.

[36 : 44] John Stott in his book The Cross of Christ, he says this, this is the scandal, the stumbling block of the cross for our proud hearts rebel against it.

We cannot bear to acknowledge either the seriousness of our sin and guilt or our utter indebtedness to the cross. Surely we say there must be something we can do or at least contribute in order to make amends.

We sing that song, Rock of Ages. Have you paused to consider the humiliation we're admitting? Nothing in my hand I bring.

Simply to you cross I cling. Naked come to you for dress. Helpless look to you for grace.

Foul I to the fountain fly. Wash me saviour or I die. One person said all you need is need.

[37 : 57] all you need is nothing. But the problem is most people don't have that. Pride is the barrier.

There is sweet assurance here. Lay your deadly doing down, down at Jesus' feet and stand in him and him alone, gloriously complete.

well I'm going to pray and if you're hearing God's message to you for the first time I'm just going to offer you to pray this in your mind after me as a way to respond to that message but also as we prepare for the Lord's Supper.

May we all be praying this afresh. Let me pray. Amen. God I desire your salvation more than anything else.

I renounce any confidence I have in myself, my religion or my doing to win that salvation.

[39 : 23] in my heart I believe you raised Christ from the dead to be my saviour. And according to your promise I come to you with nothing in my hand, naked, helpless, foul.

And I call upon you Lord Jesus to save me, to clothe me in your righteousness that I might be called a son, a daughter of God.

Amen.