

God's Righteousness

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Date: 03 April 2011

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[0 : 00] Our heads for prayer for a moment. Our Father, we come together today with hearts that are distracted, some broken, some weak, some hard.

We thank you for the great privilege of hearing your Holy Spirit through your word. We ask that you would give us ears to hear and eyes to see the Lord Jesus Christ and how magnificent he is. And to build our lives on him. We ask this in his name. Amen. Well, if you're new with us, we are working our way through the book of Romans and we've passed the halfway mark a few weeks ago.

If you would open your Bibles to Romans 9, 30 to 10, 4, that Alistair just read for us with his beautiful Scottish accent.

Alistair, just put your hands on your ears for a moment. I don't know what it is about the Scottish accent. I love it. I listened to a preacher once who was saying absolute nonsense.

[1 : 11] But he had this beautiful Scottish accent. I just thought it was wonderful. I've also put it on the front of the bulletin. I'll mention that in a minute.

But here we go. If you've been with us through the book of Romans, you will know that the Apostle Paul can never be accused of being half-hearted or lukewarm.

We built up to this brilliant crescendo of bliss and joy at the end of chapter 8 and then boom in chapter 9, despair, anguish.

What's giving Paul both feelings really is that so many non-Jews are responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Whereas so many of his brother and sister Jews, the ones to whom God had spoken in the Old Testament, are refusing to believe that Jesus is the Christ and rejecting him.

And Paul, as he searches this through, gives us two reasons why. And the first reason is the first 29 verses of chapter 9.

[2 : 21] And it's a reason, it's a stratospheric reason from God's perspective and has to do with election. And the second reason is in our little passage, 30 to 10.4, where Paul comes right down to the ground and the other reason has to do with Jesus.

Now, I'm not going to go over election. You might be pleased to know. But I just want to say that even though this is way above our spiritual pay grade, God gives us the great dignity of really revealing to us a number of things that are absolutely impossible for our finite, sinful minds to comprehend.

It's one of the great things about Christianity. If you're looking for a faith that puts everything in a neat box with lots of answers, Christianity is not for you. Take the fact that Jesus is fully God and fully man.

Or that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but one God. These things we can't understand. And I think, well, I think if God is God and I'm not God, there are likely to be a number of things I'm not going to grasp.

Don't you? I think election is just one of those. And if you think election is unfair or unjust, that God is not as compassionate and loving as you are, and you demand justice, I warn you, if you demand justice, none of us are going to make it in the end.

[3 : 46] The point is, from the first half of nine, that it's God who makes Christians. Christianity is not about us seeking for God, it's the opposite.

And it's very good to struggle with the doctrine, not good to dismiss it or reject it because you don't like it, or don't understand it, or refuse to believe it.

And I just want you to have the imagination and the humility to think that your framework and understanding of things might not be 100% perfect, and to sit with your Bible in your lap and pray the Holy Spirit that you might come to a place of, well, let me tell you where you need to come to.

Don't get your prayer book out, but let me just read to you one line from Article 17. Yes. That little wine-coloured prayer book because there are 39 articles in it, which is what we Anglicans believe. And on predestination it says this, the godly consideration of predestination and our election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons.

[5 : 04] So there you have it. That's where you need to come to. However, that's not my topic. So let's get to our passage. And here Paul lands the plane. And if you look at the bulletin, I've printed the passage out for you for those of us who are visual learners.

And even if you're not a visual learner and you don't have that ability, just have a look at the front because you can see the passage comes to us in two parallel halves with the same three elements in them.

First he speaks about Jew-Gentile issue, 9.30.10.1. Then he comes back to the very familiar language of righteousness and then finally he finishes with Jesus.

And I've put a box around both, the last thing that is said in both halves which is about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Because when we get right down to it, Christianity is about Jesus.

And there's nothing unfair about the way God saves us. It has to do with my response and your response to Jesus. So let's look at the two halves.

[6 : 10] I've called the first half the rock of righteousness. What shall we say then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is a righteousness that is by faith, but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.

The simple fact is that since Jesus Christ has gone to heaven, it's always the wrong people who become Christians. It's not the people who have their lives together and a good moral record, have tried to live up to the Ten Commandments and have the big resume.

They can become Christians, but generally it's those who are not trying. And it just seems wrong. Why, verse 32, why has this happened?

Because they, Israel, did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. Now we're back on familiar ground, aren't we? There are two different kinds of righteousness.

There's a human righteousness, which is about me and what I do and my deeds, and there is the righteousness of God, which comes to us by faith in Jesus Christ.

[7 : 30] And to stand before God and to be welcomed into His presence, we need a perfect righteousness, which none of us have, on our own.

You remember Paul said, no one is righteous, no not one, no human being will be righteous, declared righteous by works of the law. But this is where the great good news of the gospel comes in. This is why Jesus came.

That the righteousness of God is now manifest, available, apart from the law. That the gospel is the power of God for salvation because in it, the righteousness of God is revealed.

The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ. We are justified by faith apart from works of the law. The trouble with grace is, although we think we're very gracious, it's not until we hear God's grace that comes to us as a bit of a shock really, that He offers us His righteousness as a gift.

And the non-Jews were receiving the gift by faith, but many of the Jews who were living impeccable, upright, generous lives do not receive the righteousness of God, but they pursue it as if it is based on works.

[8 : 48] But God never gave the law for that purpose. Do you remember when God gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai? He had already redeemed and rescued Israel. It wasn't given as a way for us to make ourselves right before Him.

Now this may be new for some of us, and it's not because God just has a thing for scoundrels. It's not that God is against morally upright, tax-paying citizens.

The Ten Commandments were His idea, and they remain His idea. The issue is that if we add up every righteous thing that we've ever done, multiply it by ten trillion squillion, it cannot please God because it is not built on the base of Jesus Christ.

The kind of righteousness we need to stand before God comes from Him and from Him alone.

That's why Jesus is the issue. So He says in 33, They have stumbled over the stumbling stone as it is written.

Then He quotes the Old Testament, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, a rock of offense. Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.

[10:06] I think you'd call this the elephant in the room. You know, if you've been reading Romans up till now, the one thing that is blindingly obvious is that Christianity is about Jesus.

It's about Jesus and people. Jesus and people. The gospel is the gospel of Christ, Paul says. A Christian is someone who belongs to Christ.

Our redemption is in Christ. We have peace with God through Christ. No condemnation for those in Christ. And the whole purpose of God centers on and pivots on Jesus Christ.

Do you remember back in chapter 8 verse 29 where God talks about His purpose? God's purpose is to make Jesus Christ the firstborn among a big family of brothers and sisters.

So God's purpose does not terminate on you and me. It terminates on Jesus Christ. And hear this. That means the predestination and election and justification and glorification and all those things, they're not the ultimate goal.

[11:14] They are all there to serve this, to bring people to Jesus Christ, to make Him the firstborn among many brothers. And the way Paul puts it here is God is laying in Zion a stone and there are two diametrically opposed human responses.

To some He's their object of their faith and desire and we build on Him and to others He's the object of stumbling and offense. There's no middle ground despite the fact that we try and make it.

Now it's a very familiar picture this one isn't it? Jesus used it, it's used a number of times in the Old Testament. The apostles use it when they're preaching the Gospel in the book of Acts. Peter quotes it, Paul uses it here.

I think it's a clever picture, it's a wonderful picture. The idea is all of us are very busy building our lives and we're building our lives on something and those things may be good and last for quite a while.

The Bible says God is also building and He's building a place for Himself to dwell in and He's building it out of living stones, men and women and boys and girls who belong to Jesus and by far the most important thing in that building is the foundation, cornerstone, Jesus Christ.

[12:36] And the only way you can come into God's house and become a living stone is by being on that rock, by building your life on that rock. If you build your life on anything else you are building on sand.

sand. And the tragedy and what has Paul in great sorrow here is that there are two ways to build on sand.

One is the Romans chapter one way, the life of indulgence and excess and moral chaos. But there's a much more respectable way to build on sand and that is to try and build your own foundation of religious works of moral decency.

Again, God is not anti-virtue. It's just all our virtue cannot make us righteous before God. That only comes from Christ. And here is the really tricky thing. Those houses that are built on sand look just like the house that's built on the rock.

If you're building your own foundation of good works and religious behaviour you look like someone who's building on the rock and building on Christ because the person who's building on Christ ought to be full of good works.

[13:51] But the Christian is not doing those good works to build their own acceptance before God. They're doing it because we have been accepted and we've got the new life of Christ flowing through us.

It's like the two trees in the front room the little apple tree and the Christmas tree with apple decorations. They look the same they smell the same but only one has fruit that's coming out of the life in the tree.

Or I might want to become a member of the British royal family. Nine o'clock congregation laughed when I said that.

Thank you for taking me seriously. They're a much more respectful congregation. I have more of it. I could go to royal etiquette school I'd have to change my accent.

I'd have surgical alterations but I'm never going to be part of that family. I'm never going to inherit the throne of England. Unless I was born a different person or Her Majesty happens to adopt me.

[14:50] Like the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son. He stayed at home he obeyed all the rules but his heart was a million miles from the father because he wasn't loving his father. He was just devoted to his own moral excellence.

You can be a thoroughly spiritual person and reject Jesus Christ. You can reject Christ incredibly morally. You can give to charity.

You can be eco-friendly. You can watch every episode of Oprah and never know God. We don't become holy from doing things or not doing things.

Holiness comes from Christ and this offends our pride. God and I think that's why it's easier for the religious decent person to stumble on Christ than the genuine rogue.

You're very busy building your own respectability and the high opinion of others. If you're doing that Jesus is only going to get in your way. It's only when Jesus is your true heartbeat, your hope.

[15:58] It's when he's the centre of your affection. the first thing you think about when you wake up or the last thing you think about when you go to sleep. This is the one central choice that you and I have to make in life with eternal consequences.

Will I build my life on Christ the rock or on something else? Or will I try and pretend and put my feet on two things at once? God's eternal house is built on one rock and one rock alone.

Not Jesus plus my good life, plus my good family, plus my good record. Not Jesus plus anything else. Jesus alone. And that's why he is called in the Bible the rock of offence.

I wonder if you see this. I mean it's an absolute scandal to say that Jesus is the only way to God and that our most righteous deeds are just like filthy rags and we need his.

That we cannot achieve our salvation, we just have to receive it. We can't add to it, we can only adorn it. Can you see how offensive that is to our multi-culti, pluralistic, tolerant, individualistic, relativistic, post-modern approach to life here in Vancouver?

[17:18] That was a mouthful. Let me put it more strongly. If Jesus is right, if Paul is right, if the Bible is right, it means that Buddha, Muhammad, Confucius, Zoroaster cannot be welcome in the presence of God in heaven because they did not build their lives on the rock of Jesus Christ to say nothing of all their followers.

Does that make you uncomfortable? It ought to drive us to tears. And to our knees, as it does the Apostle Paul, in painful, persistent prayer.

I know you'd be much more comfortable if your preacher didn't say these kinds of things, but my choice is to say what the Bible says or to just avoid it or to tell you lies or to tell you interesting things. My choice really is to either offend you or offend God.

And this is why so many Jews in Paul's day stumbled. It's not because Jesus is the problem, but because you can't carry your own righteousness and hold on to Christ's righteousness at the same time.

You've got to put one of them down. If you cling to your own righteousness, you'll fall over Jesus, you'll stumble over him. And to begin building on the rock of Jesus Christ, the very first step is to renounce your own, to relinquish it, to not to look to it.

[18:48] Tragedy, God's own people, shaped by his word, reject Jesus, the righteousness of God because they're trying to build their own. So I just, before we go to the second point, you can't blame election, you can't blame God, you can't blame anyone if you don't have faith in Jesus Christ.

There is no excuse not to build on Christ. And I am aware as I'm speaking to you that I'm putting you in the place of having no excuse. And I say this, whoever believes in him will never be put to shame, you'll never fall.

He is God's most precious work, He is the rock of righteousness, He's the only safe place when the sky falls, He's the rock of God. Well, let's move to the four little verses in chapter 10 and to the second point.

You with me so far? Do you want to be with me? John Chapman used to say, are you awake?

Do you want to be awake? Okay, if the rock of righteousness, I've called this second part the end of righteousness. There's just this mood of agony, isn't there?

[20:03] You see verse 1. Ever since the beginning of chapter 9, Paul's in despair. You've got to feel this, haven't you? I think the apostle is a rebuke to us. The more you know of Christ, the more you want others to know of Christ.

You can only be casual and careless about mission if you've got a low view of Jesus. Paul's heart's sick. Look, chapter 10 verse 1, brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them as they be saved.

This is Paul. He had to be dragged, kicking and screaming onto the rock of Christ. I mean, he was the rabbi's rabbi.

I mean, he was the man. He persecuted Christians. He volunteered for the job of killing Christians. Until the day when he met Jesus Christ, everything changed.

And in the presence of Christ, he realized that his immaculate track record, his vast knowledge of scripture, all his religious, cultural, social pedigree, instead of bringing him closer to God, we're dragging him away from God.

[21 : 08] God, with all his religious zeal, he was persecuting the truth because he was persecuting Christ. That's what happens when you meet Christ. In his light and glory, all our accumulated good deeds and legal obedience and a life of righteous deeds collapse.

Paul says, they are like garbage and the word he uses in Greek is a much stronger word. And after he says that, he says, I count it, I count all this stuff of mine as refuse because of the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord.

This is the root of his pain. His Jewish brothers and sisters are climbing a ladder but the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall. No matter how hard they climb, how upright and righteous and blameless their record, it does not bring them one hair closer to God because they are rejecting the very reason for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul doesn't doubt their zeal. Look down at the next verse. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge. Being ignorant of the righteousness of God, it should read ignoring the righteousness of God and being zealous to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Paul's saying, I'm not saying they're not sincere or devoted or hard working and dedicated. I know this is another offensive thing to say in our culture but you can be well intentioned, zealous and terribly sincere and sincerely and zealously wrong.

[22 : 40] Open the newspaper. But now that Christ has come, ignorance is not an excuse. Verse 3, they are ignoring, they are disregarding the righteousness of Christ.

They saw Jesus but refused to acknowledge him as God's righteousness. Again, think, there are two kinds of righteousness, ours which is full of holes and God's and the way to refuse and to disregard God's righteousness is to try and establish your own.

There's only two options. Either we submit to God's righteousness and build on Christ or we build our own. And the question is why? Why is it this way?

Why can't I build my own? Why is Jesus' righteousness the only one that will please God? And the answer is in chapter 10 verse 4, for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

You would not believe the number of books that have been written on this verse. I haven't read many of them, I promise you. The word end is a very rich word in the Greek.

[23 : 45] It doesn't just really, it's not about termination, it's about culmination, fulfillment. What Paul is saying is that God, Jesus, I'm sorry, is the goal, the fulfillment of the law of God.

The whole reason God gave the Ten Commandments was to lead us by the hand to Jesus Christ to a different kind of righteousness. And every part of the law and every part of the Psalms and every part of the Old Testament point to Jesus and are fulfilled in him.

So to grab a commandment and try and do it without Jesus is to miss the whole point of it. Take the commandment against murder. Most of us probably have never officially been convicted of murder. We can tick that commandment although in the nine o'clock it's full of people. But you know, if you tick that box, that's the very least of it.

Jesus, remember in his teaching, he said, look, we hate someone else and we look down on them, we gossip about them, we've already committed murder in our heart. But there's more. The command is not just a negative thing, that's less than half of it.

[25 : 00] The command is a positive to love and to give life. And Jesus Christ comes and he doesn't take life, he gives his own life to give us eternal life.

He is the fulfillment of the command, do no murder. We'll take the Sabbath for example. You know, you can religiously and self-righteously be strictly taking one day off in seven, that's the least of it. Sabbath is given so that we might enter into God's rest. And where does God offer us rest? It's in Jesus Christ because only by receiving Jesus' righteousness can we rest from trying to build our own.

Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, he's the meaning of the Sabbath, he's the fulfillment. that's why Paul says Christ is the end, the goal of the law for righteousness for everyone who believes.

So all of his promises, all God's purposes come to climax in him. He's the goal of God's words and deeds and there is no righteousness outside him.

[26 : 06] He is the rock and the end of righteousness. And that's our passage. And it has tremendous implications, lots of them, but we only have time to do three, I think.

How are we going? Can we do three implications? One more? I laugh. Let me try and be very personal with you.

This is the first implication. The question is not how long have you been going to church? The question is not whether you've prayed the sinner's prayer or been baptized or how much you've given.

The question is are you a believer now, today? Are you trusting in Christ now? You're building on him right now. You've probably heard this old question many times.

If you were to die tonight and stand before God and he were to say to you, why should I let you into my heaven? What would you say? would you say I've given my life to Christ, I've invited Jesus into my heart, I've served him many years?

[27 : 24] Nothing wrong with those things in themselves but if you are trusting in that, you are not submitting to the righteousness of God. You are trusting in something that you have done.

But if you were to say with all your heart, Christ is my righteousness, Christ is my hope, Christ is the rock on which I build, that is the way to treat Christ as the rock of righteousness.

And I know some of you here have heard this many times but still you are not sure you can really trust Christ, you are not sure you can really cast all your goals and dreams on him.

And others of you here I think are careless about Christ, you are trying to build your life with one foot on Christ and one foot on something else and I warn you it's a very dangerous thing to do.

Christ alone is the rock of righteousness, he's the key to life, he will never let you down, you'll never be put to shame.

Secondly, what does it look to build our lives on Christ and I think it's going to look different for each one of us. Perhaps the thing to say is that we will evaluate our lives differently increasingly.

[28 : 46] We will make decisions about more things intentionally, what pleases Jesus, what leads others to see Jesus, what works for his glory.

It will make a consistent difference in the actual decisions we make. Checkbooks, calendars, aspirations and dreams, the kind of people we are, the way we think, the way we talk.

We'd be more committed to serving than being served, more committed to welcoming others than being welcomed, more committed to showing grace than receiving it. It will affect where you choose to live.

It will affect what you do with your retirement and your travel plans. In Australia, there's a growing movement called Grey Nomads. these are people who retire early and blow their fortune on travel. They just travel, travel, travel, travel. And they drive around Australia with a bumper sticker with four letters, SKIN, S-K-I-N, which stands for spending the kids inheritance now.

[29 : 56] Nothing wrong with it. And it's, you know, there's nothing wrong with travel, so long as you're using your travel to serve Christ.

That when you arrive, you're engaged with other Christians or serving a church there. If you're never in one place long enough to be committed to other Christians and committed to the body, I want to encourage you, just pray about it.

Ask yourself, am I making my decisions out of faith or just indulgence? Do I want to appear before God with a full passport or with a heart full of hope?

And thirdly and finally, if God is laying in Zion a stone who is Jesus, we as a body of believers have something outside ourselves which is the basis of our lives together, which is absolutely brilliant.

Because it means we don't gather together and meet here and belong here because we like each other, even though we like each other very much, I'm sure. We don't belong to one another because of the colour of our skin, our taste in music, our family breeding, our income bracket, our IQ, because of Jesus.

[31 : 17] If God is building his house on Jesus, the basis of our unity, the basis of mission, the basis of our longing for others to come, the basis of our life and our preaching and our prayer and our hope is Christ.

So let's make Christ the focus. Well now let's kneel for prayer as I think Bev leads us in prayer. Thank you.