

God's Righteousness

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[0 : 00] Is everyone there? So Paul begins this passage by summarizing a kind of a perplexing situation in the early church.

It's kind of like the elephant, do you have that saying elephant in the room over here? Elephant in the room? Okay. It's like the elephant in the room for Christianity back in the days. So the early church was growing, but the big uptake was amongst the Gentiles, right?

So a Gentile is like a non-Jewish person. Whereas the Jews, the Israelites, the people group that God had been working with for ages, they just weren't that big on Jesus. They just weren't very big on Jesus.

And Paul says in chapter 10 verse 1, he goes, I wish they were, you know, because you can't fault them in terms of zealousness. They're really into like religion and they want to be right with God, but they just don't want to do it through Jesus.

So you've got the situation in the early church. We've got the Gentiles, the non-Jews, who were not keen as on religious stuff, not keen as at all. They were, you know, self-centered, money-loving, passion-wanting, money-spending, I don't know, you know, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

[1 : 12] Just regular folks, right? So you've got these regular folks who managed to get right with God. In verse 30, the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have obtained it.

So these guys are cool with God. And you've got the Jewish folks who have thousands of years of religious history behind them, practiced in self-denial, etc., etc.

But these guys aren't right with God. Now, of course, that's quite a generalization. It needs to be nuanced a little bit there. Obviously, not every Gentile was a Christian and there were Jews amongst the early Christians.

But Paul is asking the question, why was the early church so disproportionately non-Jewish Jewish when you'd think the Jewish folks had a real head start on the whole God thing?

I mean, it's a very interesting question. And I can relate to this question. I kind of relate to this question. Because I became a Christian when I was 17 years old.

[2 : 19] And I was working at a fast food restaurant, a chain called Georgie Pie, which was like, isn't it part of a poem or something, Georgie Pie?

Georgie, Georgie, Georgie Pie, kiss the girls and made them cry. Isn't that like a poem? I believe it's a poem. Now, it was a New Zealand franchise. It's like McDonald's except for meat pies, which are far superior to your weird hamburgers, whatever they're called over here.

So, meat pies. And so there were some Christians at this workplace. And I had never been to a church. If somebody asked me about Christianity, I would have said, I think I'm an Anglican, because I was a Christian and an Anglican.

I was baptized in an Anglican church. But that is the first and last time I went to a church. And the only thing I knew about religion was, and this is a true story. This is a true story. I remember having this conversation with somebody in a bus, and they asked me about religious things.

And I said, oh, I think I'm an Anglican, which means, it means, like, the difference between Anglicans and Catholics is that Anglicans are allowed to smoke. Like, honestly, that's like, I don't know where I got that from, but that's just what I thought.

[3 : 38] You are not allowed to smoke, by the way. Now, so I met these Christians at this place. I'm a total blank canvas. And they just started telling me about their faith.

And I was very attracted to them, because they seemed very peaceful people. And they just, I mean, it was very simple. They just invited me along to their youth group. And I was completely captivated by Jesus.

And I began to follow him, became a Christian. But here's the thing. I'd never been to church. I wasn't a spiritual person at all. You know, like the Gentiles in the early church. I wasn't spiritual. I wasn't pursuing God. I had never read Cahill Gabran. I'd never read, who's your Vancouver guy? Tolly. Eckhart Tolly.

Anyway, I'd never read him. I'd never done yoga. I'd never sat on a mountaintop drinking beer, wondering what life's about. You know, I was into, like, cars.

[4 : 34] I spent all my money on hot rod magazines and stuff like that, you know. But despite all that, I became a Christian. And I got right with God.

And I have enjoyed that relationship for 25 years now. Now, like the folks in the early church, I was the unspiritual person that found God.

The unspiritual person that became a Christian. Unlike the very spiritual people that I remember from my school who were quite spiritual, on a spiritual journey, who were never really satisfied, who did not find God.

The unspiritual person found God, but there are many more around me who were very, very spiritual, but didn't. And why is that? Why is that?

Well, I mean, the answer is that getting right with God happens in the opposite way that we think it should happen.

[5 : 36] And in the passage here in verse 32, it says, why? Because they do not pursue it by faith. Instead, they pursued it by works. And that's the opposite of what we tentatively think in the world.

If you talk to your average person out there and say, look, you should become a Christian. It's really great. They will think immediately that you are inviting them into a set of values, that you are inviting them into a moralistic grid.

I remember talking to a girl about this and she said, no, I could never be a Christian. I'm just not good enough. I could never be good enough. And it was great being able to explain to her that no, it's the exact opposite of that.

You're a perfect candidate because you've realized you're not good enough. See, the average person does not realize how radical the gospel it is, how ground-shakingly different it is from every other religion and non-religious worldview or perspective out there.

I think most people think pleasing God is about living a good life. And it's true in that sense, you know, that living a good life does please God.

[6 : 51] But we can never live a good enough life to make us completely right with God because God is holy and we are not. We cannot pull off the kind of life that God demands.

Now, the Jews in the passage, it says they tried to pursue righteousness, which means getting right with God, through the law, which is God's guideline to living.

And they couldn't do it. And we can't do it. In fact, no one can do it. So how is it that the Gentiles pulled it off? The Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained it.

Verse 30. Well, the answer to that question is found in a number of places in this passage, but I'm going to go to the stumbling block stuff and use that as our avenue for talking about it because it's kind of a weird part of the passage and so it's probably worth explaining.

Okay. So go down to that stumbling block stuff in your verse there. So that's kind of verse something or other. 33. As it is written, they have stumbled over the stumbling stone.

[8 : 06] It's an odd passage, eh? As it is written, behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. So that sounds like a bad thing. And whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

So in that case, it's kind of like a good thing. So it's a bit odd. So let's talk about it. Okay. What Paul is doing here is he is combining two different verses from Isaiah and he's kind of mashing them up together in a very clever way to make a very clever point.

And here it is. So in Isaiah, the references are chapter 8 and chapter 28. He mashes up to... In these chapters, they talk about stones. All right?

And in one of them, Isaiah chapter 28, the stone is a really good thing. It's like a firm foundation. You can stand on it. In our song, it's like a refuge.

It's a really good thing. In chapter 8, though, when he talks about the stone, in this case, it's a bad thing. This stone is trouble for people who don't trust in God.

[9 : 10] The prophet in this book here, Isaiah, he talks about the Assyrian evasion.

So the Assyrians were bad people in this particular point in history, right? And they're gonna... He talks about them. They're gonna sweep across the land of Israel like this flood, like this raging water.

And in that situation, a hefty big stone is not very good. Because the water will pick you up and carry you and you'll smash into that stone. That's trouble.

I remember surfing in New Zealand once at a beach called Piha. Have you seen the movie The Piano? You know what's in the movie The Piano? You should see it. It's a great movie. Anyway, so I'm on that beach and I'm paddling out and then I get caught in this rip and I get taken along the beach and when I turn around and look back to the beach, there's this massive, huge, jagged rock sticking out between me and the beach.

And when I look forward, there's all these massive waves coming that are starting to pound me, they're pounding me, they're pounding me, right? And they're taking me towards this rock. If I was standing on the rock, that would be a good thing.

[10:23] Getting carried to the rocks, smashing into the rocks, my little ginger body power smashing against those rocks. That's a bad thing, alright?

So that's bad. So you've got that picture in your head? Okay, good. Alright. Standing on the stone, good thing. Smashed against the stone, bad thing.

Okay. So what is the stone? Jesus. The stone is Jesus. So, how could Jesus be good news to some and not to others?

Is that a good, that's a good question, isn't it? How can Jesus be good news to some and not to others? Well, okay. Remember I said that being right with God, it's all about, we need to sort of live out the truth because God is holy, but we can't do that because we're just not good enough.

The Jews tried really hard, but they couldn't pull it off. Well, the good news is that Jesus did live the perfect life that we couldn't.

[11:25] And He paid the price for our disobedience on the cross. And I've said this to you before, but I'll say it again. Herein lies the major difference between Christianity and other faiths.

And it's a significant difference. And the difference is this. Other belief systems say, you must perform the truth. You must live the good life.

And Christianity says, no, somebody else has done that for you. That's a significant difference. So this is very good news, isn't it?

Jesus has lived the life you couldn't and paid the price that you should have. So that's very good news for people who believe that. That's, and if you do believe it, you are standing on a solid rock. You are standing on a big, hefty, great stone. And the last verse, verse 4, chapter 10, is a kind of a summary of what I've just said there.

[12:29] Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Christ is the end of the law.

What does that mean? End, in the word Greek, and I'm talking about Greek because in the original language that this letter was written in was Greek. End, in Greek, is telos.

Telos. From where we get the word teleological. Is that helpful to anybody? Okay. That is the branch of philosophy that deals with end results, end causes.

Tele-vision? Is that a better example? Tele-vision? You familiar with that? Yeah? Tele-vision, right? I think, I'm assuming it's, I'm just assuming it's the telos thing as well.

It's the end point of a transmission. You know, transmission gets that. The end point of that transmission is your television screen, right? So I think that's where the tally part comes into play in that word. Okay.

[13:30] So telos. It has a double meaning. It means goal and termination. And I think Paul, who was the writer of this book, Romans here, I think he's got both of those in mind.

I'm not convinced, but I think he has both of those in mind. So on one hand, Christ is the goal at which the law is aimed. So God has his law.

This is how you're supposed to live. Christ embodies that. He lived the perfect life. He embodied the perfect life that the law prescribed.

And he says this in Matthew 5. He says, I did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. Christ is also the termination of the law, meaning that the law as a means of getting right with God by living this perfect life, he's ended that as a means of getting right with God because he did it for you.

So that's a good idea. So that's a good thing. That is a firm foundation. That is a good stone. So how can all of that be bad? Why can that be bad for people?

[14 : 38] I'm starting to wrap this up here. The stumbling stone. It's bad. It's an offense. It says in verse 33. It's an offense because the cross is offensive to us.

because the cross looks at you and says, I exist because of you. If you could have saved yourself, you wouldn't have needed the cross.

But you couldn't and so it was necessary. And the cross undermines some things which are very important to us. and these are our pride and our self-righteousness.

And this is a very self-righteous city and I'm part of the city so I'm including myself here. Very self-righteous city. We love the fact that we are tolerant. We love the fact that we recycle.

We love the fact that we're really green. You know, we love the fact that we embrace multiculturalism. We love all these things and they're great things, you know. But we're a very self-righteous city.

[15 : 49] And the cross attacks that. It says, you know, you want to be the authors of your salvation. You want to be cool with God by being a good person but you know what? You can't. And the uber religious people of Christ's day, the really religious folks, thought they could purchase a path to God through their works.

And they missed the climax of salvation history. They missed Jesus because they wanted to do it themselves. The stunning truth of the gospel is this, is that you have nothing to contribute to your salvation.

You've got nothing to contribute. And that truth hurts us. And we don't want to believe it. And that's the great stumbling block of Christianity. We don't want to admit that we are actually quite a bit lamer than we anticipated.

And you can see how this stuff relates to the election stuff over the last couple of weeks. You know the last two weeks we've been talking about God's election and stuff and that's just been awful. Like you don't like it, hearing about it and stuff because it makes us feel uncomfortable.

Makes us think God is unfair or something. You can see how this relates to that. For those of you who haven't been here the last few weeks let me just briefly summarize. Election is this, all human beings given a hundred chances, a thousand chances, a million chances will always choose to be their own saviour, their own God and will never choose Jesus.

[17 : 45] So what God does is he opens the eyes of some but not all so that they'll see the truth. And I know some of you don't like this concept. So let me ask you a question because I believe it.

I come to it kicking and screaming. I come to it kicking and screaming. But I think this is what the Bible teaches us. So let me ask you a question just to help sort of frame this concept and then I'll relate it to what we're talking about here.

If you are here and you are a Christian, why are you a Christian? How did that happen? You might say, well, you know, somebody invited me to church. Okay, well why did you go to church?

Well I just thought it would be a good idea. You know, I'm on a journey. I wanted to hear about it. Okay, and did you like it? Yes, I did like it. And so why did you like become a Christian?

Like how did that happen? Well, I guess I just became really interested and decided to follow Jesus. And why did you decide to follow Jesus? Well, I guess I just kind of I found it humbling and I just, you know, just seemed like the right thing to do.

[18 : 53] Well, why did you choose that and somebody else not choose that who was equally as normal as you are and you would have to say at some point, well maybe I guess I was just like more humble than they were.

Which sounds kind of reasonable, you know. I was just more humble. They were kind of a bit more prideful and weren't ready to let go of their life and I just was, I think. You see, at some point, at some point, you have to say, I was better than somebody else and that's why I became a Christian. I did the thing that somebody else wasn't willing to do and that's why I'm a Christian. And as soon as you say that, you're saying that you contributed to your salvation.

And that's just not on because you didn't. Like we, we sung about it, we sung about it, didn't we?

And this wonderful choice of song here, this is like the last song we sung.

What do you call the sections of a song? Like the verse, yeah, verse three, right, sorry, it's my second language. Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to your cross I cling.

[20 : 16] Naked, come to you for dress, helpless, look to you for grace, stained by sin, to you I cry, wash me, saviour, or I die.

Nothing in my hand I bring. You bring nothing. You bring nothing to your salvation. You know, this stumbling block thing, you know what this says to us?

It says that we are far more self-centred than we realise. But God is far more gracious than we can, sorry, that's probably my mum. Can you just, can you take that?

Can you tell her I'm preaching? All right, let me finish here with some implications. It's a difficult passage I know and the stuff we've been covering is difficult.

So here's an implication of what we've talked about here. If someone lives their entire life, a good life, but doesn't follow Jesus, and they die and as a result they live for eternity without God, which is, the Bible calls that hell, if that happens, it's not God's fault.

[21 : 35] It's not God's fault. When you think of election, don't think, you know, John Doe goes to hell, it's God's fault. No. No, it's their decision. They have chosen it.

It's their fault. A good, moral, upright person who doesn't build their life on Christ is in trouble. The Dalai Lama, Gandhi, all the spiritual superstars you can think of, they will face eternity without God if they don't build their life on Jesus.

Now this passage uses really strong language to talk about this, you know. It says, in verse 3, it says that they are ignorant and in the Greek it's a willful ignorance.

They choose to ignore Jesus. They choose to not know about this. It says that they try to establish their own righteousness by doing good things, which is noble, but it can't, it can't bridge the gap between us and Jesus, between us and God.

It says they do not submit to God's righteousness which can only be found in Christ. It is not God's fault that people do this and given a thousand chances they would do exactly the same and so would we, every single one of us, except, except that Jesus has made a way and God has opened our eyes to it.

[23 : 09] It's not God's fault. The second implication, the last one here, based on what we've learned from this passage, I think we should have a spirit of wonder that permeates our life, of just amazement that should permeate our life.

I'm a Christian. I am a Christian from a completely un-Christian, non-Christian, atheistic family. That's astounding to me.

The, you know you get a paycheck, right? I get a paycheck at work. That's a good thing. And when I get it, I don't, I'm not like, this is, I can't, again?

You guys are great. You paid me again? This is like every week. You know, I'm not, there's no wonder about that because I earned it. I sort of go, yes, of course, of course you pay me.

I come here to go to work, I do a job, you pay me for that. There's no wonder in that, right? Now, if I was getting a paycheck for nothing, that would be something to be amazed about.

[24 : 34] So I think when you understand the incredible grace of God that God opened your eyes and chose you, there should be no, of course I'm a Christian about you. There should be no, it makes sense I'm a Christian.

There should be none of that. There should be no, I made that decision and that's it. No, no, no.

There is no place for those kind of sentences, for those kind of words, for those kind of thoughts in your Christian journey.

There should be wonder, there should be amazement, you should be astounded because God chose you. Amen.

Amen. Colm is coming to pray for us. We're going to, am I on?

We're good to go. All right. We're going to pray and you can sit or kneel, whatever's comfortable for you. There'll be sections in this prayer and I will say, Lord, in your mercy and if you could respond with hear our prayer, that would be great.

[25 : 50] Dear Lord, we thank you for this rainy spring evening where you have sent the rain to this earth and you're watering all the green things and flowers.

We thank you for this new life and we're reminded that whoever is in you in Christ is a new creation. Dear Lord, we're looking forward to Easter as well and we're reminded of the new life that comes from Christ at Easter time.

Lord, we thank you that you have chosen us and we thank you that you have done all the work and that Jesus has lived the perfect life and that we can call on him and that if we trust in him, we will be

saved.

Lord, in your mercy, dear Lord, there's a lot going on in the world right now. Just, it seems like everywhere we turn there's political unrest or a natural disaster.

Lord, we think especially of Japan and New Zealand, Myanmar, that have all been hit by earthquakes. Dear Lord, we pray for the people there. We pray that you would protect them and provide for them and we pray that through these disasters, through this hardship, they would learn to call on you.

[27 : 14] We pray for the churches there, that they would really be a light for you in this hard time. Lord, in your mercy. Dear Lord, we also pray for the political unrest going on in Egypt and Libya and for the ongoing conflict in the Middle East.

we know that you are the Prince of Peace and that the governments are on your shoulders. And Lord, we pray that the people in these areas and across the world would know your peace.

Lord, in your mercy. Dear Lord, we pray for our church with mixed emotions. We're looking forward to sending off Jim and Keith.

Dear Lord, we pray for them as they prepare to head out to their new churches in London and Montreal. And we pray that you be raising up people to take their place at St. John's.

We pray for the evening service that you would raise up a minister for the evening service who is faithful to you and faithfully teaches your word. Lord, in your mercy. And dear Lord, this week, help us to realize that we bring nothing to you and that every good gift and especially our salvation comes only through you and through Jesus Christ.

[28 : 32] And dear Lord, we pray for our friends who do not know this. We pray that they would put their trust in you. We pray that you would open their eyes and that they would learn to trust you.

Lord, in your mercy. Now, join with me in the prayer that Christ taught us. I do not Apocalypse This. I do not agree with you. This is a Salzmη word. Let us do it. May have a great time for your time, and may have a great time for our lives. Let us know this and let us survive for two weeks. Let us see the ■ali and ouritiesct bookaders and entireges in 560s. For a blessing, after the ■ ■ ici, try to finish the praying and ether and mad workers and the peace to the sermon and empire bless.

This is a effectiveham because I do not that such