

The Cross and Justification

Pillar of Truth Conference

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Bible Verse: Romans 3:21-31
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I invite you to turn as we begin, I'd just like to begin by reading the text that we're going to look at in this session in Romans 3. Romans 3, beginning in verse 21. It is a highly concentrated passage of rich doctrine, of profound theology, and of profound significance as we consider the theology of the cross. With a conference theme emphasizing the cross not glory, what we're going to see this evening is that that is displayed unmistakably in the doctrine of justification and in the reality of the basis of our right standing before a holy God. In verse 21, we read this,

21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. 27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one--who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. 31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Now, in a text like this, it would really take five to 10 messages to do it any kind of justice, so I acknowledge up front, I'm just lightly touching on the surface of everything that is here, but I think it will help set the context for what we want to consider for the rest of the weekend. This text answers the question, how can a man be right with God? How can a sinful man, a sinful woman, be right with God and what is the outcome of that when it comes to our view of ourselves in relationship to Christ?

Now Paul has been building to this climactic text all along since the beginning of his letter. If you go back to Romans 1, in verses 16 and 17, after some introductory comments that are full of doctrine, he says this, actually in verse 15, he says, "I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." I'm eager. I want to preach the gospel to you. I can't wait to be there and to do it in person. And then he goes and he explains why he's so eager to do it. He says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel," which is kind of a reverse way of saying I'm proud of the gospel. I love the gospel. I glory in the gospel. I'm not ashamed of the gospel, "for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" Now he goes from there and then he explains why the gospel is necessary. This gospel that he loves is necessary, it is important to preach, he finds joy in preaching it for a specific reason and we see it in verse 18 when he says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

So follow the logic here and this is all just very introductory. Paul says, "I'm eager to preach the gospel. I'm eager to preach the gospel because I love the gospel. And I love the gospel because in it the righteousness of God is revealed. And this is necessary for the righteousness of God to be revealed because the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." And having taken this 747 or whatever the current big plane is, I'm not a big aviation guy, having launched this 747 down the runway, it's now soaring off into air as he explains the gospel of Christ. And what we see as he unfolds his argument about his love for the gospel and what the gospel is and what the gospel means, what we see in the context that helps us hear this evening, in the context of this conference, is that the gospel leaves us with no human boasting whatsoever. If you want to have a manner of self-righteousness, pride in who you are, the gospel's not for you, you're in the wrong place because the gospel leaves no room for human boasting whatsoever. Indeed, what we're going to see is kind of a two-fold respect in which Paul undermines and takes away all grounds of human glory, of human boasting. He takes it all away and leaves nothing for us except to glory in Christ, to glory in the cross alone.

Now, before we get to our text in Romans 3, if you're taking notes, you can take this down as your first point, to see that the law forbids boasting. The law forbids boasting and then we'll see later that the gospel forbids boasting. Coming and going, the biblical message forbids any boasting by man. So when Paul steps into his explanation of the gospel, he goes someplace that is not the common way of explaining the gospel today. Today we're so eager to have people like us, so eager to stroke and affirm people, that we want to immediately talk to them about the love of God, the promises of God, the help of God, on and on it goes. That's not what Paul does, and that's not a good starting point for the explanation and the proclamation of the gospel. Paul starts with the wrath of God and says the first thing you need to know about the gospel is the existence of the wrath of God, and that's where he starts there in verse 18. Look at it with me again. We're really hitting this at a satellite view here. In verse 18, he says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their

unrighteousness suppress the truth." Now just take a breath, step back, and recognize the significance of what's happening here. Paul says, "I'm here to preach the gospel to you. Let's start with the wrath of God." That's pretty sobering. That instills a sense of fear in our heart. And what he does in the ensuing chapters, all the way through chapter 1, chapter 2, down to chapter 3, verse 20, is that he is showing and he is making an explanation to show that both Jews and Gentiles alike need a gospel to save them from their sin. They need good news. They need deliverance. They need salvation, Jew and Gentile alike.

Now to us, we're so familiar with that, that that kind of makes sense to us, we're used to hearing that. But to a Jew, this would just be utterly revolutionary to think that they were on the same plane as a Gentile in the need of the gospel. After all, they were the chosen race. They had received the oracles of God. They were the ones who were the instructors of the law. And so to come to them, to level their pride, to take away their glory and say a Jew needs salvation as much as a Gentile does, was a radical thought for Paul to be making and that's the argument that he unpacks in Romans 1, Romans 2, and he works that argument out in meticulous detail until you come to Romans 3 and verse 10 and you read this in verse, actually, let's start in verse 9. You see the point that I was just making. He says, "What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.'"

And so in this explanation of the implications and the judgment of God, the judgment that the law brings, the guilt that men have before God, we see that it is impossible for men to boast in any way whatsoever. The law condemns us all. The law pronounces us guilty before a holy God, and therefore we obviously have no means, no grounds, no basis for boasting before him in and of ourselves. And Paul brings his argument to a climax in verse 18. He says, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." And then in verse 19, we come to this climax where he says, "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." This means that before God, we're all silenced. The law of God comes to each one of us and in our self-justification, in our love of self, in our desire for glory, the law comes to us and says, "Hush. Shh." Silence on all of it, that there is no ground for boasting under the law because all are guilty, all are condemned, no one whatsoever can boast before God because all are guilty, all have fallen away, all have missed the mark, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And this is the starting point of Paul's explanation of the gospel and we see that the law leaves us completely hopeless. The law leaves us without any glory. We cannot boast of our obedience before God, certainly. We cannot even boast of our obedience in a comparative way to make ourselves better than the next one before us. We're all ruined, we're all guilty, we're all condemned by a real guilt for real sin against a real God that requires real punishment for a real eternity.

Now this is not a way to gain friends and influence people in a worldly sense. Sin does not mean that you have broken your self-esteem. Sin does not mean that you have let yourself down or that you have let others down and you just kind of view and consider sin in that human horizontal dimension. No, sin means that you are guilty before a holy God, that your sin separates you from God, as Isaiah 59:2 says, and that you are in desperate need, you are in desperate need of being reconciled to God as your first and primary consideration of the state of your soul. It's not that you need to feel better about yourself. It's not that you need to find and to untap the beast that's within, or that you need to find something to make yourself feel better about yourself. The beginning point of the gospel is to tell you that you have not met the standard that God requires and as a result of that, you are guilty before him. The law condemns you, the law requires a penalty, and it must be paid, and under those conditions, and in that condition, there is no boasting to be had. Every mouth is silenced. We're lost. We can't find our way out. We are condemned. And this recognition of the judgment that the law brings upon us is the first step away from boasting in self and boasting in man and looking for something to give us relief and reconciliation to a holy God. The law leaves us in a condition where boasting is absolutely impossible and this is the starting point. And so, you know, you come and you realize what the message of the Bible is, and Romans is the most systematic presentation of Christian salvation to be found in the Scriptures from beginning to end, and you realize that this is not a message that caters to the pride of man. It does not cater to the glory of man. And we must understand that. We must grip that if we are going to understand what the purpose of the church is, if we're going to understand the implications of Travis's first message in this conference, is to understand that the purpose of the gospel, the last possible thing that the gospel could be doing is to make us feel good about ourselves and to make us have a sense of pride and self-esteem about matters. That's not the purpose, because in the revelation of the gospel, as we start with the law, we see that the law condemns us and tells us to hush about ourselves.

Now, let's go from there to the point of the gospel, and the second point is that the gospel likewise forbids boasting, and as you work through these things, and as I was preparing this message specifically for this conference, it just overwhelmed me with just the multiplied ways in which the gospel of Christ and specifically the doctrine of justification, completely, repeatedly, conclusively, finally silences all manner of human pride. If we are Christians at all, we must realize that it is not for our glory or to our glory, to our praise or to our congratulation. It's all to the glory of God and our boasting is put away.

Now, if Paul had ended with verse 19 and said, if he had ended on this point where every mouth may be stopped, the whole world may be held accountable for God, through the law comes the knowledge of sin, if he had ended there, the picture would have been immensely bleak indeed. No hope in man. No boasting for man. Nothing but an expectation of the fury and condemnation of God as a just repayment for our rebellion against him. Now, with that context, with hope having been extinguished in man, look at verse 21, where we read this, "But now. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law," apart from human obedience, in other words. In contrast to this dark, bleak picture of the wrath of God upon the sin of men, having silenced man,

Paul says, "Now that we've silenced man, but now let's see what God has done. Now we see that there is something beyond the law that he wants us to consider." It is here where the gospel in which he boasts, he begins to expound and to unfold for us, and the gospel declares for us that by grace, by the undeserved favor and kindness of God, God has provided at his own initiative and at his own cost, a remedy for our problem with sin, a remedy for our guilt. And because the law has utterly condemned us, condemned all of our sin, all of our disobedience, shown us how utterly hopeless it is, then it's obvious, beloved, that the remedy that God provides is a remedy that we could not achieve on our own. Paul has already excluded our efforts, our abilities, as doing anything to contribute to our salvation. And so from the very beginning, from the very start, the fact that God has provided a remedy in Christian salvation immediately forbids any boasting by man. This was not man's idea. This was not man's accomplishment. This is not man's achievement. This is something that God has done. And go back to Romans 1 and just see this, that Paul had this in mind from the very beginning of the epistle when he says in the opening verse of this letter, he says, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God." This is God's gospel. This is God's good news. This is a declaration of what God has done in the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing that is set out for man to do for himself. Nothing that man conjured up in his own mind. This is something that God has done and as such, God's remedy forbids any boasting by man.

Now, as I said, in these 12 verses that we're going to look at, or 11 verses, whatever it is, there's so much packed in here that we can only touch on highlights for the sake of its cumulative effect on us. I hope one day, like within the next five years, to start an exposition of Romans. I'll spend a lot of time in this text when I get there. Tonight we're just bouncing like a skier on the waves, bouncing from wave to wave, and the whole point of what we're going to see here tonight is this, the very nature of justification means that we could never boast in self before men or before God. The gospel, beloved, this is so critical for you to understand, and to understand it in the most clear, simple, direct terms, the gospel is not about your moral attainment of reaching a standard that God will accept based on what you have done. The gospel is about an accomplishment which Christ has done to take away your sin, to provide a righteousness for you that you do not deserve, could not attain on your own, could never achieve. The gospel is not about your moral attainment at all and therefore it is not something that provokes in you a pride in self, a boasting in self about what you have done, and we're going to see this as we go along. I think there's like eight or nine different points I'm going to make under this heading.

So look again at verse 21, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law," and this righteousness of God, that phrase in this context, it refers to the righteousness, to the right standing that God bestows upon men in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not a righteousness that God requires us to achieve. If that was the nature of the righteousness that Paul was describing, it would not be good news. It could not possibly be a description of the righteousness that God requires from man to satisfy God's holiness, because Paul has just said that there is no righteousness in man at all. There's none righteous, no not one. So he's not turning around and contradicting himself. What he's doing here is saying that what man cannot accomplish on his own, God has provided

in the gospel that he has given. It's a righteousness which God bestows on men in Christ and think about what this means. Again, in the simplest of terms, the gospel of God is something that God determined in his counsel before time began. We won't take the time to justify that statement biblically, but God planned the gospel. God provided the gospel in the Lord Jesus Christ. God prepared the way for the gospel. God offers it freely to sinners. Christ, God in human flesh, achieved it on the cross. The gospel is God's and God's alone and so God gets all of the glory for it. There's nothing left for us to boast in ourselves. We can never produce a righteousness to meet God's standard, and therefore we're silenced before him and we come as broken, bankrupt sinners before him, pleading for a mercy that he alone can give and that he alone has provided. And so the phrase there in verse 21, "But now" contrasts the law which condemns everyone that he's just been talking about in the prior three chapters, "But now" contrasts the law which condemns everyone – watch this – with a saving gospel that is available to everyone. The law condemns Jew and Gentile alike. As you read on in Romans, you find that the gospel is available to Jew and Gentile alike on equal terms.

Now, notice in our text the frequent terms righteousness and justify that we find in this text. In verse 21, we read, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law." Verse 22, "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." Verse 24, we're "justified by his grace as a gift." In verse 25, "This was to show God's righteousness." Verse 26, "It was to show his righteousness." Verse 28, "we hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." Verse 30, God is one "who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." Righteousness, justify, out standing before God, that's what this whole text is about is our standing before God and the means by which it was achieved.

Now by way of overview in the fullness of this text, Paul is explaining in this passage how God provides a way for us to receive a righteousness that he accepts. By the fact that we have the condemnation seen in the law in the first three chapters, it's obvious that we cannot bring a righteousness of our own to God that he will accept because there is none righteous, no not one, there's none who does good. And so we're left, the law leaves us utterly bankrupt. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." We have nothing to offer to God and therefore boasting is obviously automatically and completely excluded. But the glory of the gospel is that God, despite our lack of merit, despite our, indeed, our positive demerit, despite our deserving of judgment, God has graciously provided a way for us to have a righteousness that he accepts and Paul's going to explain that in these verses, and in this way we can be reconciled to God despite our sin.

Now what is this term justification that we've been using and referring to already so often here this evening? I think that it would be valuable for every one of you to be familiar with the definition of justification found in the Westminster Shorter Catechism at Question 33. I'm going to read the Answer to you. Question is, "What is justification?" And this is the answer, "Justification is an act of God's free grace wherein he pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone." Justification is the legal act of God by which

he declares our sins to be pardoned. He no longer holds our sins against us. We come to him as guilty, condemned sinners, awaiting the verdict that by law should send us to hell, and God declares all of the sins that deserve all of that condemnation, he declares them pardoned, forgiven, never to be held against us ever again. But not only that, justification does more than take away our sin. In justification, God gives us, God credits us with a righteousness, a positive righteousness which he accepts as the basis upon which he can welcome us into his eternal kingdom, the basis upon which he can welcome us without compromising his own holiness. It's the very righteousness of Christ. The perfect life that Christ led, God accepts that as though we had lived it and gives us that gift of a righteousness that is perfectly holy, perfectly acceptable to God. God credits us with that righteousness of Christ in place of the condemnation that our sins deserved.

Now if you have any spiritual sensibilities at all, that should be an overwhelming thought to you. You come to God clothed in rags of sin and filth and all of your dirty thoughts, all of your dirty words, all of your dirty acts, all of your secret sins, all of the things that have been exposed, the sins that you're aware of, and the 50,000 times more that you're too spiritually dull to recognize for yourself. All of that sin, you come before God and he pardons it all, declares you not guilty of those things because Christ paid for them on the cross, as we'll see. And in place of that, he doesn't just leave you in a neutral condition. He doesn't simply raise you to an innocence like Adam had and then leave you to pursue that. He positively credits to your account, he imputes to you the righteousness of Christ and says, "I will receive you on the same basis upon which I receive my own beloved Son." It's incredible. It is incredible to contemplate that we who are guilty are not only pardoned, but credited with a righteousness that is nothing less than the perfect righteousness of Christ and all the full obedience of his obedience to the law during his earthly life.

That's what justification is. It's not an attainment by man. It's a gift of God, and it's something that we receive by faith alone. And what I want to do tonight, I think the number seven, there's a reason why I'm uncertain about the numbers and it's not worth, it's the way I prepared my notes, but in justification, we see at least seven aspects from this text of justification that exclude boasting. And we'll start with this, number one is this, is that justification comes apart from the law. In other words, it comes separate and distinct from any obedience that we give to the law and as a result of that, we have nothing in which to boast. Paul starts with this point when he says in verses 21 and 22, he says, "now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law," in other words, apart from the principle of man's obedience to the law. Justification is given to us apart from the principle of obedience and moral achievement and attainment. It's been manifested apart from the law, "although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." Now beloved, God's way of righteousness, gospel righteousness, this is such blessed truth, I mean, this is refreshing to my heart even as I stand here. It's just like getting a fresh breath of air to rehearse these things before you. God's way of righteousness does not leave it to you to meet the standard. He doesn't leave it to you to satisfy what he requires. The righteousness that God requires was achieved by the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ achieved the righteousness. Christ rendered the obedience to the law that God requires and we who

could not give it are met in the gospel with one who did it on our behalf. This is glorious and it is completely humbling at the same time.

Beloved, the obedience that God requires from each one of us to enter into heaven, to be right before him, someone else did the obeying. Someone else rendered the obedience and did it on our behalf. It's not our obedience that God accepts, it's the obedience that Christ accepts. In other words, it's not through your compliance with the law that you are saved. It is through the obedience and the compliance with the law that Christ rendered. And so what we trust in, what the ground, what the basis of God's acceptance of us, the basis of our justification, we trust not in ourselves and what we have done, we trust not in ourselves, we put our faith in Christ. We look outside of ourselves. We look to what someone else did for us on our behalf and we rest all of our confidence, all of our hope, all of our plea before God is the blood and righteousness of Christ and nothing of ourselves. That's justification received by faith alone and for the purpose of what Paul's argument as we'll see later, and in the context of our conference tonight, the fact that it's someone else's obedience that God accepts, the fact that it's the obedience of Christ that we trust in, not our own, you know what the spiritual consequence of that is? There's only one conclusion. It necessarily excludes all boasting by you and me. We don't boast before men that I'm a Christian because it wasn't anything to our credit. We don't add anything that's to our credit to the work of Christ. We trust in him and in him alone, in his obedience, in his shed blood, and none of our own obedience, and that by definition excludes any boasting because justification comes apart from your obedience to the law.

Now secondly, there's another reason that boasting is excluded in the gospel, and it's this, it's that justification is needed by all. Everyone needs this. Everyone who has lived since Adam over the course of some 6,000 years of human history, everybody needs this gift of justification. No matter what the language, no matter where they live, no matter the color of their skin, everybody needs this. You and I are on the same level as everyone else. We're all leveled by our guilt before God and everyone needs this justification that is offered to them in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jews and Gentiles face the same problem. We all have failed. We all are guilty before God apart from Christ, and we are all without hope.

Look at Romans 3:23. Having just said in verse 22, actually I should pick it up there I guess, "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction," verse 23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." There's no distinction based on geography. There's no basis for distinction based on ancestry. Those of you that were blessed to be born into a Christian family, you have no advantage in the matter of justification over someone who is not because you are guilty in and of yourself, and there is nothing about your spiritual heritage that puts you in a better position as it relates to the matter of justification than anyone else in the world. There is no distinction because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Humanity, we are in a common lot with everyone else in humanity so that there's no possible grounds for boasting based on some kind of personal distinction. That's what the Jews thought, and we don't have time to go into this, but as you read through the gospels, you can see again and again when you're alerted to the issue how the Jews had this suffocating

arrogance and spiritual pride that thought because they were physical descendants of Abraham that they were in a better position than the Gentiles and Paul's argument obliterates that for them and says, "As a Jew, you need it as much as a Gentile." Today, we would look out on a fine Christian congregation, and that's what Grace Church of Greeley is, a fine Christian congregation, one dear to my heart, but to be faithful to the gospel, we have to look out and say to those that are children of parents that are here, "You need justification as much as anyone else. You are not in a privileged position before God in the matter of justification simply because you were in a Christian family. You have to humble yourself. You have to forsake any confidence in your parents' faith, your parents' salvation, and say, 'I have to come to God as a broken sinner myself, as a guilty, condemned, vile, law-breaker, rebel against God. I have to come to him on those terms personally because there is no distinction.'"

Justification is needed by all. We all have inherited sin from Adam. Our own conscious sin and rebellion condemns us. Our hidden unrecognized sins, our sins of commission, our sins of omission, it all condemns us. We're all in the same boat. I'm in no better position than you being a preacher of the gospel than someone who's not. Nothing about our human position bumps us up even one notch. You and I, all of humanity, we have disqualified ourselves and we stand disqualified apart from Christ from the holiness of God. We cannot stand in his presence. We have lost all glory that God assigned originally to humanity, and that necessarily excludes all boasting in self. There's nothing that makes me better than someone else, you should understand and say to yourself, and have it settled deep in your heart.

Now beloved, as we start, these things build on one another in a very, very powerful way, and as we go along step by step, I need to ask you, I need to ask you whether deep in your heart your self-assessment, your understanding of who you are before God is determined and framed by these things. Have you been humbled by the recognition that you cannot justify yourself? Have you been humbled by the fact that the law of God condemns you so that there is no righteousness of your own to cling to, to boast in? Have you been humbled by the fact that justification comes apart from your obedience? Have you been humbled by the fact that you need justification as much as the worst possible sinner that you could contemplate outwardly in your mind? Have you been humbled by that because this is what the gospel does, and it's the flavor that it gives to our hearts, and as you continue in Paul's argument, you just see this, you just see him drilling this deeper and deeper into us. No room for boasting.

We see that not only is justification comes apart from the law, not only is it needed by everyone who has ever lived, we see that justification is a gift of grace. Justification is a gift of grace. The gospel excludes boasting because justification comes apart from the law. The gospel excludes boasting because justification is needed by all. The gospel excludes boasting because justification is a gift of grace is our next point as we go into verse 24. Let's look at it here. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," we saw in verse 23, verse 24, "and are justified by his grace as a gift." Now, God would have been perfectly just, perfectly righteous to have required an eternal penalty from every one of us as the just punishment that our sins deserved. As I like to say, a sin against the

eternal law of an eternal God requires an eternal punishment. Look, this is not a light matter. This is not something that we can just kind of casually interact with. This is life-stopping, soul-stopping truth that stops every one of us in its tracks and calls us to come to grips with the condemnation of the law and the reality of the offer of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the gospel, and to work out the implications of that in our heart. God would have been perfectly just to require an eternal penalty to pay for our sin. Beloved, you and I, you and I cannot argue any righteousness of our own to mitigate the penalty or the guilt. There's nothing that we can say. Our mouths have been closed by Romans 1 through chapter 3, verse 20. Our mouths have been closed. There's nothing for us to say. The guilt is universal. The guilt is individual. The guilt is deep. The guilt is eternal. There is nothing we can do. There's nothing we can say.

For those of you that have ever been in a courtroom, at least in the way that it used to be when I was practicing law decades ago, it's been a very long time these days. But especially if you would step into a federal court, there is a, I still respect the legal system, even though it's just kind of collapsed all around us, but you step into a courtroom, the high ceilings, the wood paneled walls, the judge on his bench, black robe, elevated above, "All rise." And the judge walks in, told to be seated, and this judge has the authority to deal with the legal matters that are brought before him and the people that are before him. It's pretty august, just on a human level, just on that little, just on that little basis. Multiply that by eternity and recognize that we're going to step in, so to speak, I'm speaking rather figuratively here, to make the point, Scripture says that we're all going to give an account before God. Romans 14, each one of us will give an account before God. The sinner is going to stand before the throne of Christ in his guilt, in his sin, and receive a condemnation from a much higher judge on a much higher platform in a far more august legal setting, and receive condemnation by God in essence saying, "I condemn you for your guilt. Depart from me, I never knew you," and send us away and these will go off into eternal judgment, Scripture says. And that's the position that each one of us is in apart from Christ. It's frightening. Scripture would teach us the fear of God as we contemplate the reality of our guilt before him.

Now, in light of all of that, to realize that justification is freely offered to us as a gift, a God who could righteously condemn us instead offers a gift to us? Something that is apart from merit? This is not from the mind of man. This is not from human philosophy and human speculation that would create a gospel. Man would never create a gospel that condemned himself, vindicated God, and left man without hope or without boasting before man or before God. Men don't come up with things that condemn themselves. And in light of this, salvation must be something other than our merit, and we read in verse 24, we "are justified by his grace as a gift." Now, beloved, this is succulent fruit at the tree of the gospel to pull down and to bite into and to taste the sweetness of what this means about salvation, about the character of God, about the glory of the gospel. The word grace means that God extends to condemned sinners, he extends undeserved favor to them in the gospel of Christ. He offers them something that they completely do not deserve, in fact, they deserve the exact opposite. In the gospel of Jesus Christ, God freely extends his kindness to sinners who deserve his judgment. In the gospel, he offers his love, he offers his forgiveness, he offers his patience, his kindness, his goodness, the righteousness of

Christ. He offers all of that generously to anyone who would believe instead of the righteous wrath and condemnation that they actually deserve. I realize that for some of you, this is familiar truth, we should never lose the sense of awe and majesty that God would do something like that in light of how guilty we are before him.

Salvation is a gift. It is not payment for something that we deserve. It's a gift in place of what we deserve. Salvation is a gift God extends to unworthy, unfit sinners like you and me. Romans 6:23, of course, says, "The wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Go back to verse 24, Romans 3:24, and again, I acknowledge that this is such a concentrated expression of truth. Verse 24, we "are justified by his grace as a gift," look at that next phrase, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." We're justified by grace, undeserved favor, as a gift, not something that we deserve, and it's accomplished through the redemption that is in someone else, namely the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that term redemption refers to a purchase in the slave market. At the cross, Jesus was paying the ransom price necessary to deliver slaves like you and me, slaves to sin, slaves to Satan, slaves to death, slaves to judgment, with no hope, with no ability to deliver ourselves by the works of our own hands. Jesus Christ at the cross paid with his own blood the price required to deliver us from that judgment, from that slavery, and he did it, he did it with no help from us, no help from you. He did it, think about it this way, beloved, you know, I mean, he did this 2,000 years ago. When he laid his life down, we hadn't asked him to do it. We hadn't even asked. We hadn't even asked. He just did it voluntarily at his own initiative as John 10, I believe it's verse 18 says. "No one is taking this away from me, my life away from me," he says. "I lay it down on my own initiative." The God of creation, the God of righteous judgment, the God that we've sinned against has done this. He did it, he did it, and he did it like that, and he did it for sinners like us? Christ alone shed the blood necessary to secure our release apart from any prompting on our part, apart from any merit on our part. Beloved, do you see the necessary conclusion when it comes to this matter of pride and boasting? Because Christ paid the price and we contributed nothing, then there is no boasting for us. The glory belongs to Christ alone. The glory of the gospel is God's alone. We don't come to Christ and say, "Oh, what a great thing that Jesus and I did together to save my soul." Christ gets all of the glory and that necessarily excludes all boasting in self.

Fourth aspect of how the gospel forbids boasting is this, kind of building, these things kind of overlap and that's okay, justification is in Christ alone. Justification is in Christ alone. We saw what we've said is the gospel forbids boasting because justification comes apart from any obedience to the law, justification is needed by all without distinction, justification is a gift of grace. Now we see that justification is in Christ alone. Salvation is completely humbling because true salvation is found in someone else not ourselves, not even the strength of our own faith, the strength of our own repentance. Repentance is a gift that the Spirit of God works in our hearts. Faith is a gift that the Spirit of God works in our hearts. We don't contribute faith as our own independent contribution to save our own souls. It's all, the whole complex, the whole matrix of it is all a gift that God does to unworthy sinners. And so salvation is utterly humbling because we find everything about

it outside of ourselves, done by someone else, done by Christ, and we haven't added a nickel to the value of it. We haven't tossed in a few pennies that we can boast in. It's in Christ and it's in Christ alone.

Look at how Paul expresses this. Go back to verse 22. Where does this righteousness that God accepts, where does it reside? Where is it found? Where is its source? Where does it come from? Verse 22, "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ." Verse 24, "redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Verse 26, "he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Jesus Christ. Christ Jesus. Faith in Jesus. If we are to be saved, it comes only by what Christ has done apart from our contribution to it. Look, this is completely humbling. There is nothing to glory in self here. Acts 4:12 says, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." And so if you are a real Christian, implicit in the seed of your faith from the very beginning, was a reality, a spiritual recognition, a spiritual reality, a spiritual rest, a spiritual repose that said, "If I am to be saved at all, it must be by what Christ does because I cannot save myself. I have nothing to contribute. I have no good of my own to offer. I simply come to God as a guilty, condemned sinner and in the spirit of the tax collector in Luke 18, I say, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner. I appeal to your mercy, not on anything in me, as a ground by which you would receive me.'"

I remember clearly the moment of my salvation. I don't expect everyone to be able to remember theirs as the Lord works in different ways. I remember the overwhelming fear of God and conviction of sin that came upon me. I remember crying out to Christ. And prior to that, looking back on it, as Travis talked about, you know, you see these things in retrospect, you see the glory of the cross in retrospect, not looking forward, looking back on it, I was such a... I hate the old Don Green. I've probably said it here in times past, if the old Don Green ever walked into this room, I would find a ball bat and I would beat him to death because I hate him that much. I never want a breath of life in the old Don Green ever again. The old Don Green boasted in self. The old Don Green boasted in the fact that he hadn't committed certain sins at different points in his life and found his righteousness in the things that he had not done, not recognizing that he was guilty because he did not love God with all of his heart, soul, strength, and mind, he did not love Christ, he did not love the word of God, and yet he boasted in himself because he was a little bit more righteous on a comparative human basis with others that were around him. Then in a night of partying, he threw all that away and he had nothing left. The Spirit of God said, so to speak, not in verbal audible voice, "You thought you were righteous. Look at who you are. Look at what you did last night." And I was utterly ruined and decimated, knowing that I had nothing to claim before God, and under the work of the Spirit of God, I went and cried out to Christ to save me. The exact words don't matter, but for the first time in my life at that moment under the leading and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, I understood that I had to rely on Christ alone for my salvation and I had no righteousness of my own to contribute.

And beloved, that's the way it is for every true Christian and so I have to ask you in a room of this size, have you come to the end of yourself, something like that, where you realize that if God were to condemn you, it would be just? That not only do you not

deserve to go to heaven, but that you actually deserve to go to hell? There's a distinction there, isn't there? Plenty of people say, "Oh, I don't deserve to go to heaven," but to press the question and say, "Do you deserve to go to hell," that's when you'll get objections. Say, well, "No, that's not fair. That's not right." That's somebody that hasn't seen the gospel at all. The point is, is that justification is in Christ alone and a Christian, a true Christian rests and puts his faith entirely in Christ and in no way trusts himself and that means all boasting is excluded. The theology of the cross, salvation in the cross means that there's no glory left over for you and me.

Now going on, justification is by the blood of Christ. Justification is by the blood of Christ. Now go back to Romans 1:18 for just a moment here. Romans 1:18, "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." It's against all of us and so somehow, somehow we have to address the problem that that ongoing wrath against us has to be turned away and redirected away from us if we are to be safe and secure and not have our souls eternally condemned. If wrath is against all men, including us, then that wrath has to be turned away.

Look now at verse 25 in Romans 3. Romans 3:25. He just said that the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, the word propitiation refers to a sacrifice that turns away divine wrath. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. Beloved, your blood is guilty. You couldn't shed your own blood for your own sin. There's no human being apart from Christ that could shed their blood to wash away your sin, because it takes a pure, spotless lamb to have that blood shed. And without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin and so it requires an innocent victim as established by the pattern of the Old Testament sacrifices; God for millennia established in their minds an understanding that there must be a substitute sacrifice where blood is poured out in death as a substitute for the guilty sinner if that sinner is going to be able to stand before a holy God. An innocent victim and beloved only Christ was qualified, only Christ himself would suffice, and he hung on that cross in our place, bearing our sins in his body and bore God's wrath. God treated Christ as though he had committed every one of your sins and poured out the full fury of his wrath as Christ shed his blood on the cross and, beloved, as it were, as it were, you and I stood by passively as that happened. We didn't help Christ on the cross. We didn't have anything to support him. We weren't even there. He stood in our place, suffered the price, and the price that he paid and the fact that we could never have begun to pay it is humbling and that forbids all boasting in self. Do you see how every aspect of justification completely levels human pride to the glory of Christ and leaves us with no boasting?

Sixthly, justification is received by faith alone. Justification is received by faith alone. Paul explains the plan of God in the next verse. The condemnation of the law, the sacrifice of Christ combined to show that we could do nothing, we did do nothing to achieve salvation on our own, and if there is nothing that we can do, then how can we possibly be saved? Paul explains the plan of God in verse 26 when he says, after having referred to the death of Christ on the cross, he says, "It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that God might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in

Jesus." Well, whatever faith is, it's pretty important to understand what it is. Again, the Shorter Catechism asks the question, "What is faith in Jesus Christ," Question 86. And there's two key words in this that I want you to hear and retain. Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel. We receive Christ and we rest in him. This is what faith is. Christ is offered to us in the gospel as the perfect God-man, perfect life, perfect sacrifice, offered to us freely for the forgiveness of our sins. The question is, how do we appropriate that? We receive him, we yield to him, we give ourselves to him and we rest upon him alone for salvation, meaning that we are no longer trusting in anything that we have done, anything that we will ever do, no commitments of our heart, no promises of our heart, we are resting alone in what Christ has done and we receive him in the fullness of who he is, fullness of his Lordship, fullness of his role as Savior, Prophet, Priest, and King, we receive him unconditionally for who he is and we stop there and say, "My salvation is in Christ alone." We receive him and we rest in him alone for salvation and that's a gift, even that's a gift of grace. Faith is something God gives to us, not that we give to God first. If our faith rather than grace distinguished us, we'd have something to boast in. "I had faith and the other guy didn't. I'm better." That's not the point of the gospel at all. If we generated our own faith, it would be a ground of distinction before men and give us a ground for boasting but faith itself is a gift of grace, simply the means by which we receive Christ. Not an independent effort of our flesh. You must be born again in order to exercise faith.

Now beloved, this is all good news for guilty sinners, those crushed under the weight of their sin, crushed under the weight of an accusing conscience, to realize that what God requires is not ritual, not new obedience from you, not promises, not tears. What God requires is faith in Christ and since Christ obeyed the law perfectly, paid the full penalty for its violation, he satisfies everything that God requires. He did it on our behalf, on your behalf and so God can be just and uphold what the law requires and also justify us, declare us righteous through faith in his Son. The point is this, God has supplied everything in the gospel, God has supplied everything in Christ, and by faith we merely receive what God offers to us as a gift. You know what that does? Start to see a theme here, you start to see a pattern here. It excludes all boasting.

There's nothing for us to boast about and that leads us to our final point for tonight, certainly doesn't exhaust the text, but justification forbids all boasting by man. Justification depends entirely on Christ and on his work on the cross. He made atonement for our sins by bearing the penalty of a sin on our behalf. He voluntarily gave himself for us. And here's the conclusion that Paul comes to after having laid out all of this rich exposition and explanation of what Christ did for us. Look at what he says in verse 27. Look at how Paul applies it to his readers for all time, "Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded." You could paraphrase it by saying, then where is the role, where is the place for human pride in the gospel of God and in God's salvation? It's excluded. We have no grounds for pride in self in the gospel. This way of salvation gives all the glory to God and none to us.

Look at verses 27 and 28, "By what kind of law? By a law of works?" Is it by obedience that we have done, Paul's speaking rhetorically here. He says, "No, it's by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." Apart from your obedience, God has saved you and given you this righteousness and in this way, God shows that he's the God of the whole world and not only of the Jews. Verses 29 and 30, "is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one--who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." And this way of salvation honors, it confirms the law. Everything that God requires is accomplished. Nothing about what the law has required from men, none of that has been set aside or abrogated. All of the positive commands have been fulfilled in the obedience of Christ. All of the penalty that the law requires for our sin paid in full in Christ. And so, that's why Paul can say in verse 31, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?" He says, "By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law." The law is fulfilled in Christ, not set aside. God doesn't lower the standard and then let us in. He doesn't wink at our sin. He doesn't say, "Well, you know, I was just kind of kidding with that. That was an empty threat, what the law said. I'll just let it go." God didn't just let our sin go, the full price of sin was paid for by Christ on our behalf and for that, we give him all of the glory, all of our love, and reserve no boasting for ourselves.

Saving faith no longer looks to self in any way to satisfy the law. Saving faith looks entirely and exclusively to Jesus Christ and his finished work. Saving faith rests in Christ alone. Everything about our salvation, everything about our justification is in Christ and as a result, he alone gets the glory and we get the cross. And we thank God for that. And so my friends, in any way, after seeing what Scripture says, in any way do you boast in self? In any way do you boast like I used to? "I haven't committed these certain sins. I'm better than So-and-so. I'm not that bad. I don't deserve to go to hell." All of those are marks of someone still trusting in self and boasting in self and all of that, beloved, all of that wicked pride has to be forsaken and approach Christ as a beggar, giving him the glory alone. The Apostle Paul said elsewhere in Scripture, he said, "Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world."

Let's pray.

Father, we give all the glory to you for your gospel, the gospel you planned, you prepared the way for, O Christ, the gospel which you purchased with your own blood. Father, give life to dead hearts. Open blind eyes, open deaf ears by the work and circumcising work in the heart by your Holy Spirit to cut away the deadness of our works and our pride and open before our eyes the glorious path of the gospel that we might embrace Christ, receive and rest in him by faith alone, and as a consequence, give him all of the glory and boast not in self, but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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