

A Remarkable Principle

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[0:00] Take your Bibles tonight and let's turn to Romans chapter 3.

! I read a little bit further, in fact, as I recall, we read all the way to the end of the chapter.

But I want to take this block tonight in the reading, though we're not going to get through all of these verses. Let me just warn you, well not warn you, give you a heads up.

We're going to go at a snail's pace. I mean, there's some tremendous truths in this portion of Romans chapter 3. Some very significant doctrinal truths.

And if doctrine, the very word doctrine, just kind of makes you, hmm, kind of thing, then I'm sorry for you because none of us would have anything to believe without doctrine.

[1:21] And so we're going to take some time on these. In fact, I'll just go ahead and warn you now, verse 24 is as far as we're going to get. But I want to read at least three verses. In fact, I want to back up and start with verse 23.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood through faith to demonstrate His righteousness because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.

To demonstrate at the present time His righteousness that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Now, I've stretched the truth just a little bit. Actually, we're going to just see half of verse 24. Okay? Just the first half of it as we go along.

But by way of introduction, I really want to highlight once again verse 23. Verse 23. When I share the gospel, very typically, I will begin with verse 23 of Romans chapter 3.

[2:43] And in a sense convey the idea, the very reality that this is the bad news. I mean, this is serious.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. All. You want to believe in some measure of the doctrine of universalism?

Here it is. All. That's universal. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That is bad news. Bad news.

And, you know, you really cannot even read the first few chapters of Romans without acknowledging the humbling fact, the tragic fact, that we are all sinners.

Because that's the subject. We're all sinners. And to cap it off, to sum it up in just a few words, Paul says, All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

[3:49] See, the Bible reveals to us, contrary to what others believe, what some believe, and many are preaching in our day, the Bible reveals to us very clearly.

The utter ruin of the human race. The absolute ruined condition of mankind.

You cannot read the Bible. And not come away with that reality. As bad as that is, and as negative as that is, and as absolute as that is, dogmatic as that is, and on and on.

It is the case. That is the case. And there are many today who want to soften that truth. Right? I mean, if they don't want to soften it, they want to get rid of it entirely.

And we're seeing more and more of that come to the forefront in, quote, what is called, quote, Christianity today. Where sin is either minimized or just obliterated altogether.

[4:55] The very idea of sin. Christian scientists, for example, say that sin does not exist. And it's not just the Christian scientists. By the way, we're not talking about scientists in the traditional sense of the word scientists.

This is a denomination, a belief system. And they say that sin does not exist. In fact, they say sin, the existence of sin, is an error of the mortal mind.

Just simply an error. Not that sin and committing sin is an error. The very idea and very concept of sin is an error of our mortal minds.

That's what they say. A number of others would say. Now, most, of course, would not go that far. Instead, they would redefine sin. And so, some would say that sin is a negative mental attitude. That's what sin is. Doesn't that make you feel a lot better? We're not talking here about acts of disobedience and lawless deeds and sin against the holy God.

[6:06] We're just talking about a problem with the mind. You know, just negativism. Negative mental attitude. Or sin is the result of a poor self-concept.

That's what some believe. And some are teaching. And so, if that's what sin is, then what is salvation? Salvation is to feel better about yourself. To think positively about yourself.

Salvation then. Salvation from sin. If sin really exists. Salvation is loving yourself and forgiving yourself. Norman Vincent Peale taught that.

Did you know that? And he influenced quite a number of very notable preachers. Robert Shuler, for one.

Good disciple of Norman Vincent Peale. Who also influenced Joel Osteen. And some others that we won't name here tonight.

[7:15] Others say that sin, kind of on a different vein, that sin is a, simply a social injustice. That's what sin is. It is inequality among people of the human race.

It's inequality. And so, the result of that inequality and that social injustice, the result is poverty, which leads to crime. And that's how sin is defined.

And so, what would salvation be? Well, just carry that out logically and rationally in your mind. And salvation then would be social reform. That sound familiar?

Social equality and economic equality. And so, all man needs is simply a kind of a help or a boost economically.

You know, we just need to make sure everyone's equal. You know, we don't want anybody wealthier than others. We want it all equal.

[8:23] And this is social justice. And this, then, by definition, would be salvation. Still, others would argue that sin is simply relative to one's culture.

It's just relative to the cultural norms of society. Or worse, sin is relative to each individual's concept of what's right and wrong.

I mean, that kind of ideology and philosophy and let's just call it that kind of theology has been going on for quite some time.

In fact, you can go all the way back to just before God destroyed the world with a flood and find the Bible saying that every man did what seemed right in his own eyes.

That's where we live today, isn't it? Primarily. And so, we could go on, I guess, and define some of the various philosophies and ideas about sin.

[9:31] But the Bible, let's get back to the Bible, the Bible gives us the true picture. The unvarnished picture of humanity, of human sin and the true condition of humanity.

And what does it say? Well, we've already looked at these passages here in chapter 3. It says that there is none righteous. No, not one. That's all conclusive, isn't it?

I mean, that's the unvarnished truth. There is none righteous. That is, not anyone is right before God. That's the human condition.

The falling condition. It also says, the Bible says, there is none who does good. That doesn't sell very well in our culture today, does it?

There is none that does good. For all, and just what part of all do we not understand? All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

[10:34] Now, having said that kind of by way of introduction, there might be some thinking, well, pastor, why all the emphasis, this emphasis on sin? Well, I'm preaching through Romans and that's the subject.

Okay, I can't help it. But really, that's not the only reason. I tell you, the reason why we need to focus upon sin is that when you and I recognize and acknowledge the depth of our own sin, then we will have a greater appreciation for the height of God's grace.

That's why we need to talk about that, among other reasons. And so we're going to be looking then at here in Romans chapter 3.

And I read there a moment ago verses 24 through 26. And that will be kind of the text that we'll be looking at for several weeks.

As a matter of fact, as we kind of look through some of these, you know, key doctrines of the faith that we need to understand. And so, let's do that.

[11:43] And I'm going to point out to you at least three things. And I'm not going to give you the whole outline on the front. But the first thing we want to look at tonight is that our salvation, and that's the subject.

And I think this thing's about to fall off my ear. Salvation is based upon a remarkable principle. And this takes us to the first half of verse 24.

Just remember, a remarkable principle. In fact, that really, those words are not even strong enough. Verses 24 through 26 that I read just a moment ago, grammatically is one long sentence.

And Paul was pretty good at that. He wrote in very long sentences. And we just have a hard time with that in our day. We want little bite-sized things. And I've even found in the scholastic world that even in writing some of my seminar papers that the professors want me to write short little sentences and short little paragraphs.

And that's not always easy to do. But that's just kind of the way things have evolved over the years. But in Paul's day, they wrote in really not too many years ago, say 100 years ago, men would write in long sentences.

[13:07] And this is a long sentence. It takes up three verses. But it begins with this glorious phrase.

Being justified by His grace. Do you see that there? Being justified by His grace.

That, dear people, is an astounding truth. A truth among truths.

Being justified freely by His grace. Now, what does it mean? It means a whole lot. And really, in order for us to get a firm grip on this truth among truths, we really need to look very closely at the key words in this phrase.

This half of a verse. A phrase in a very long sentence. We need to look at these key words. And what would you imagine would be the most key of words in that phrase.

[14:22] Anybody venture a guess? And justified. Yeah, I think probably so. Justified. Friends.

Friends. As Christians. We need to get a hold of that word. We need to understand.

As best we can. The depths. Of that incredible word. Justified. Or justification. That great theological word.

That is so integral. In our salvation. In our understanding. God's work. Of salvation.

We need to understand this. We're justification. And it's. You know. It's a technical term. It's a doctrinal term. And so. It being that. Let me give you a very technical definition.

[15:22] For it. It's not my own. In fact. I don't remember. Who wrote this. Might have been Wayne Grudem. Might have been somebody else. But here it is. Because it's right.

It's long. So if you're expecting to write it down. Anyway. So I guess we do still write in long sentences. Don't we? And here's a long one for you. Justification.

Is that. Gracious. And judicial. We might insert the word. Legal act. Of God. God. Whereby. He declares. Believing sinners. Righteous. On the basis. Of the righteousness. Of Christ. Which was credited.

To them. Now. I'm not done yet. That's the first part. In fact. To make this a little bit easier. We might divide this definition. Into four parts. Four movements. Four elements.

[16:19] That's the first one. Let me read it again. Justification. Justification. Is that gracious. And judicial. Act of God. Whereby. He. Declares. Here's the first part.

Declares. Believing sinners. Righteous. On the basis. Of the righteousness. Of Christ. Which is credited. To them. Which God. Is credited.

To them. Here's the second part. Forgives. All their sins. Third. Adopts. Them.

As his children. And four. Gives them. The right. To eternal life. That's pretty long definition. But let me read it again.

Justification. Is that gracious. And judicial. Act of God. Whereby. He declares. Believing sinners. Righteous. On the basis.

[17:14] Of the righteousness. Of Christ. Which is credited. To them. Forgives. All their sins. Adopts them. As his children. And gives them.

The right. To eternal life. Now that's an incredible thing. Justification. Now I'm not through. Explaining what it is.

We'll. Say more about it. Because there's. More to understand about it. And so. There are several things. That we need to consider. To help us understand.

Well. To understand the definition. But maybe expand upon that. And understand. Just. How incredible. This thing. Justification. Is. For us.

And so. I'm going to give you several things. Number one. Justification. Presupposes. Presupposes. The reality. Of God's wrath.

[18:08] That's where we need to begin. We need to be justified. Because God. Is a holy God. And. There is the reality. Of God's wrath.

Why? Because we're sinners. We're sinners. See. God is a holy God. And the Bible says. And you can jot this passage down. Habakkuk.

Chapter 1. And verse 13. Habakkuk is speaking. And he says. To God. He says. Your eyes. Speaking of God. Your eyes. Are too pure.

To look on evil. You cannot tolerate. Wrong. That's who our God is. He's a holy God. He cannot look upon. Any evil.

You see. God directs. His wrath. Against. Our sin. And we must realize that. John 3.36.

[19:07] Says. The wrath of God. Abides on those. Who reject the son. That's the. Idea of John 3.36. Paul says. In Ephesians 2.3. That we are all.

There's that word. All again. That's all conclusive. All. By nature. Objects. Of. God's wrath. I'm sorry. That. That. That doesn't. Set well.

With a lot of people. In our culture today. Who would rather. See God. As a loving. Benevolent God. You know. As some kind of.

Grandfather type. Person. You know. Sitting up there. On a fluffy. Cat. Cloud. And looking down. And when we mess up. He says. Naughty. Naughty. Naughty. We'd rather have that kind of picture. You know. Of a. Benevolent God. A benevolent deity. But God's. Wrath. Is upon. Sin. And all those who sin. And so.

[20:05] Justification. Presupposes. A recognition. Of the reality. Of God's wrath. Now we're just getting started. Number two. Justification.

And this comes. Is. Made clear. In the definition. Justification. Is. A. Declarative. Act. Of God. It's something.

God declares. It is not. A process. I mentioned this morning. In the course of. Preaching. And. Mentioned.

Salvation. And the tenses. Of salvation. And I. I. Just kind of. Very briefly. Very quickly. Mentioned. Sanctification. Justification.

And sanctification. And glorification. The. Three tenses. Of. Salvation. I. Have been saved. And I am being saved. And I. Will be saved. One day. And.

[21:00] Right in the middle. Is sanctification. Sanctification. Is a process. It is certainly. A work of God. But it is. The only. Work. Listed. In the.

Great. Various. Works. Of God. And salvation. That you and I. Are expected. To participate. But justification. We do not participate. Participate.

Or just. Justification. Rather. Is a declarative. Act. Of God. It's not a process. It's not something. That is. Evolving. And. And. And. Be. And. Coming into being.

In our lives. It is a. Once. For all. Declared. Standing. From God. Before God.

Now. That means. That God. Declares it. God. Pronounces us. What? Righteous. In his sight. Or. Just. In his sight. That's what God does.

[21:57] But what. On. On what basis. Does God. Declare us. Righteous. There's where the problem is. With. With. With our understanding.

There's where. Many times. And often times. We'll make. Make a mistake. And many have. In our doing today. In our preaching. What. On what basis.

Does God. Declare. Us. Righteous. On the basis. Of personal goodness. Everybody in here. Would say. Absolutely not. And that's right.

God. Does not. Declare. Us. Righteous. On the basis. Of personal goodness. Or worthiness. Or. Good deeds. Or right. Living.

Not even. On the basis. Of. Foreseeing. Goodness. Now. Some. Would say. Well. I know. That I'm never. I'm not good enough. But. But. God's able.

[22 : 51] To look down. Through time. Down. Through the corridor. Of time. In my life. And he's going to see. At one point. That God. That Don Coleman. Is going to make.

The right decision. And put his faith. In. In. In Jesus. That. Don Coleman. Is going to be. A worthy recipient. Of my salvation. And so. I'm going to justify him.

Based upon. What I. See. Out there. In the future. Not based upon that. I'm not. Not based upon goodness. Not based upon. Any potential goodness.

Not based upon me. Or you. To any. Any degree. Any degree. Now that's a hard one. For us. Because it is.

It is. Born. Into us. Into our flesh. That we must deserve. What we get. That we must work.

[23 : 46] For the good things. In life. It's very much born into the fabric of what it means to be an American, for one thing. It's who we are. You know, we've got to work at it and get out there and be self-made.

And that's just kind of the mentality of Americans. And that works all right in some contexts of life. But it does not work with salvation. And God does not justify us or declare us just based upon our own self-effort.

But rather, God declares the believer righteous solely on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, 21, God made him, capital H, that's Jesus.

God made Jesus who had no sin. He made him to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

What I would call a very unfair exchange from man's perspective. To make him who knew no sin, to make him sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God.

[25 : 00] Third, not only is it declared, a declarative act of God, but justification is received by faith alone.

By faith. Now, I'm not going to spend any time on this because we're going to get to this when we get to verse 25. And so I'll move on to the fourth. Fourth, justification is based upon the substitutionary work of Christ.

The substitutionary work of Christ, that is, his cross. We can be justified because Jesus exchanged places with us at the cross.

That's what he did there at the cross. He exchanged places with us. And in doing so, he bore the wrath of God against our sin, the wrath that we deserved.

But then how do we become justified? Well, justification involves, this is number five, the, here's a big word, imputation of Christ's righteousness to us.

[26 : 18] Justification involves the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us. What does the word imputation mean? It's a legal term.

And it means that God credited to our account. It, it, it, it, that God credited the righteousness of Christ or reckoned to our account the righteousness of Christ rather than our own.

We don't have any. Now, you'll find it used in three instances in the New Testament. And all three are glorious when you put them all together.

Just jot these passages down. I'm not going to read them. Romans 5, 12 to 21 speaks of Adam's sin being imputed to his descendants.

Who were they? All of us. We be his descendants. That's right. All right, so you can read about that in Romans 5 and eventually we'll get to Romans chapter 5.

[27 : 26] Jesus doesn't come first. Romans chapter 5, 12 to 21 speaks of Adam's sin being imputed to his descendants. That's all of us.

2 Corinthians 5, 21 speaks of the sins of God's people being imputed to Christ.

Now, who are God's people? That's us. Whose sins? Our sins.

Imputed to Christ. So Adam's sin imputed to all of his descendants. That's all of us. Our sin imputed to Christ.

And then here in Romans chapter 3 that completes the three. We have the righteousness of Christ being imputed to his people. There's the word used three times in scripture.

[28 : 31] And it completes the work. Adam to you and me. Our sin to Christ. And in exchange his righteousness imputed on us. To us.

That's what justification refers to. You know, think about it. Jesus gets our sin and we get his righteousness. Not because we deserve it.

But by the gracious act of God. Now, you put this all together and you have one of the most awesome truths in scriptures. By grace and through faith, we are united with Christ.

And in that union, God declares us righteous. And in God's judgment, he sees us. Now, get this. He sees us now as though we had never sinned.

That's what justification is. But it's even better than that. Now, think about that. Is that fair? Is that right? That God would see us now as though we had never sinned.

[29:41] That's the way we must be seen. Or there would be no hope for us. But it's better than that. He also sees us as though we are and always have been perfect obeyers of his word.

As though we had always obeyed him. In short, he sees us as righteous as Christ. That's pretty awesome truth.

But I would say to you that it had to be that way. It had to be that way. Because if even one thousand. If you could. You know, we can split an atom.

I don't know how to split a sin. But if we could split a sin. Down to one thousandth of a sin. Or ten thousandth of a sin. I can't even say it without spitting. If we could do that.

If one thousandth of a sin was credited to my account. Then the wrath of God would abide upon me. And hell would be my destination.

[30:51] It all had to be removed. All had to be removed. And I had to be justified before him. Now, we're drawing to a close here. And I mentioned that there are three words.

I don't know if I said three. But there are three key words in this text. And I'm about to put the last two on the end here. The word freely.

And the word grace. Two awesome words. Now, especially the word grace. Great doctrinal word. Freely.

Freely can be used in so many different ways. But used in this context. It's awesome. These are, in a sense, the icing on the cake. Freely.

Freely. Or some translations, I think, expand upon that. And say, as a gift. This justification. This declarative act of God.

[31:56] Whereby he declares us righteous. Righteous. Based upon the righteousness of Christ. Which he has credited to our account. That justification.

He has given to us. Has declared us to be. And he did so freely. Isn't that just like God? Freely. God forgives us for all our sin. God credits to our account. The perfect righteousness. Of his son, Jesus Christ.

And he charges us nothing for it. Nothing. That's the nature of a gift. In the truest sense. Sometimes we give gifts. And we expect something in return. Sometimes we give gifts. Because we think the recipient is worthy of it.

[32:57] And don't look at me like that. You know we do that. Some degree or another. We do. Maybe not in every case. Okay. But with God.

It is a true gift. It is given freely. And so what about the word grace? Well my goodness. We could. We could. Spend.

A year of Sundays. Maybe more. Discussing this great word grace. Grace is. Is God's unmerited favor. I think the best way to understand it.

I may have shared this with you before. And you probably have heard it before. Certainly not original with me. But if you take the word. The letters. The word grace. And.

Kind of form an acrostic. It would be God's riches. At Christ's expense. G.R.A.C.E.

[33:56] God's riches at Christ's expense. Grace is getting something. We could never deserve. In fact I.

See. A bit of a distinction. Between grace and mercy. Even though they are used. Sometimes interchangeably. In scripture. It kind of depends. On your translation. And certainly there are two different words.

In the. Original languages. But there is a. Nuance of a distinction. Between grace and mercy. Mercy. Is God withholding. What we do deserve. Grace.

Is God giving us. What we could never deserve. Justification. Justification. Is given to us freely. By his grace. And.

We had better. Get that through our thick heads. It's free. If you think. God is. Looking. To you favorably.

[34 : 51] Because you. Say. You didn't sin like others. You know. That's. That's why you were saved. That's why God's favor is on you. That you're not. One of those. Big sinners.

If you think that's. The way. Or that's the idea. Forget it. It's not true. Just picture in your minds. The most. Putrefying thing. Imaginable.

You think. You think you could just kind of imagine something. Maybe you've seen something recently. That just. I mean. Would make you. You know. As. We have kind of expression. Around our house. At least between the boys. The expression. That would make. I mean. That would gag a maggot. I mean. That's pretty. You think of the most.

Putrefying thing. Imaginable. I had. I had a. A seminary professor. In fact. A couple of years ago. Was. Sharing with us. That.

[35 : 49] His house. For. Several weeks. Had just been. Stinking. Terrible. And they couldn't figure out what it was. And he. Finally crawled under the house. And there was a dead dog under there. It had been under there. For quite some time.

And he said. It was just there. You know. Oh. Well. Scrap. You think of the most. Putrefying thing. Imaginable. And that. Does not even. Come close. To what God thinks. About. Our personal goodness. I know that flies in the face.

Of. Of. Of. Of. Of. Thinking. Of. Of. Of. Of. in our own thinking. We just don't want to think that way. But that's the way God feels about our goodness.

I mean, that's what the Bible says. Our righteousness is as filthy rags to God. Putrefying rags to God. No.

[36 : 48] You see, it's God who justifies us. And it is the righteousness of Christ that merits God's favor. Not our righteousness. And it is appropriated through faith.

Faith alone in Christ alone. So, you can see that salvation is truly justification is truly a remarkable principle.

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