

The Goodness Of God

Turn to Paul's letter to the Romans, if you would, please. Romans, written just before he delivered the special offering for the beleaguered Christians in Judea to purchase food with, is a wonderful missionary letter written to show the Christians in Rome that Paul was well qualified, both doctrinally and by virtue of his experience in the ministry, to receive their prayer and financial support so he could evangelize Spain to the west. Written to people who only knew him by reputation, Paul's inspired communication also served to tighten up the understanding of the Roman Christians on what may be the single most crucial issue that faces Bible-believing people: the doctrine of justification by faith.

Justification by faith is what I call the nexus doctrine of the Christian faith, in that it brings together and focuses all of the crucial doctrines which are essential to New Testament Christianity, be it the deity of Christ, the humanity of Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of God's sovereignty, the doctrine of man's depravity, and numerous others. These vital truths find their greatest expression as they relate to the doctrine of justification by faith. But what is the doctrine of justification by faith? Though thorough explanations of the doctrine take up good-sized books—and I got a bunch of them in my library—justification essentially refers to that act of God whereby He gives to that one who embraces Jesus Christ with saving faith the standing of a righteous man in His sight. It's a declaration. Justification has to do with what is done by Jesus Christ for the sinner, now become a saint, not what is done by Jesus Christ to the sinner, now become a saint. Justification is something that's done from afar.

I was on Aria Boulevard in Torrance, California, 51-plus years ago—no, coming up on 51 years ago—but how far removed was I from where the Lord Jesus Christ was when I trusted Him as my Savior? So, what He does, He must do from afar. That means He doesn't do it to you; He did it for you. That's profoundly significant. Though justification is one of more than 20 separate works of grace performed by God in the life of one who comes to Christ—such works as

regeneration, pardon, indwelling, and adoption being among them, and most of them are not experienced; you wouldn't know God did it unless He told you—it is the only doctrine that merits an entire book of the New Testament, unless you include the Revelation as that book given over to the doctrine of Christ's second coming. Do not forget that this doctrine, justification by faith, is nestled in the context of a missionary seeking support for his church-planting ministry. So, what should we be all about? Amen. And what should you be all about? As for the content of Paul's letter to the Romans, following a rather lengthy introduction, the letter is obviously divided under four major headings: the need for justification, the nature of justification, the nation of Israel's relationship to this grand topic, and the kind of behavior one should expect to see in the lives of those who are justified. You have an encounter with Christ of the justifying kind; it changes the way you live your life. If it doesn't, if you stay home all the time and only tell people you're a Christian, you're a liar. You may think you're telling the truth, but justification begins a series of changes that radically and in a revolutionary way changes not only the life but the lifestyle of the person who has been justified.

Throughout Romans, we benefit from Paul's debate in a dispute with an imagined opponent, clearly resulting from his years of ministry in which he would seek to persuade both Jewish and Gentile audiences that justification is the sinner's only possible solution for his problem of sin. It is during the course of Paul's effort to prove to his audience that every sinner, both those who are Gentiles and those who are Jews, need to be justified that we come to the text we will deal with. But do not think that the Romans being written to did not already grasp Paul's doctrine in the main; they did. Rather, it is likely that the apostle's goal was first to clarify the doctrine of justification to them in a way they had not seen previously and then to convince them that he was a missionary who was orthodox according to their understanding of this vital subject and worthy of their support.

Because he is a depraved sinner, every person stands in need of being justified in the sight of God. Because he is a depraved sinner, since no sinner has any ability to perform good deeds by God's standards—by your standards, yes; by my standards, yes; but by

God's standards, no—religious deeds that would satisfy God's demands for establishing a righteous standing, each and every sinner desperately needs to be justified, desperately needs to be declared righteous in God's sight. This is where the Catholics went wrong, St. Augustine having no facility in Greek. He misunderstood the Greek word for justify; he thought it meant to make righteous in the sight of God. It does not. The Greeks never, ever use the word in that way. It means to declare righteous in the sight of God. Because you can declare someone righteous that fast, but how long does it take to make them righteous? It takes too long.

Paul first informed his readers in Romans 1:18 that mankind has a desperate need, where he writes, "for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." But how does sinful man respond to this revelation of God's wrath? At this point, Paul dealt with the two groups into which humanity is divided: Gentiles and Jews. In the second half of Romans chapter 1, Paul illustrated Gentile wickedness by means of three cycles of man's rebellion against God followed by God's response to man's rebellion. I dealt with that this morning. Now, having clearly established to the satisfaction of all the sinfulness of the Gentiles in Romans chapter 1, Paul turns to his prosecution of the Jews. He's like a prosecuting attorney because he's laying a legal foundation.

Remembering that all through Romans chapter 1, verses 20 through 32, the imagined Jewish reader was in agreement with every word Paul said about the wickedness and horror of Gentile sin—"Yes, they're evil, wicked, mean, and nasty"—and understanding that Jewish individuals characteristically condemned the Gentiles around them for their ungodly lifestyles, it might come as a great shock and surprise to learn that Paul now turns to the question of the Jewish people and shows that they, too, stand condemned before God for their response to God's revelation.

In verses 1-5 of Romans chapter 2, we see three reasons why Paul accused the Jewish person of being in the same boat spiritually with the pagan Gentile whose lifestyle and sins he agreed with Paul in condemning. "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man," because of the

actions of your doing. Though you might think that in condemning the lifestyle of the pagan Gentile, the Jewish person ought to be commended, we see in verses 1, 2, and 3 that such was not the case with the Apostle Paul. In verse 1, note their condemnation: "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things." My goodness, what an ingrate Paul is, huh? Here, the Jewish people are on his side on this issue, and he comes back at them like that. But are they on his side on this issue just because they oppose what he opposes? I don't think so. Paul says that they are inexcusable, the same thing he wrote regarding the Gentiles in Romans 1:20, the only other place in the Bible he uses this word. But why would Paul say that Jewish people are without excuse? Because they were guilty themselves of what they condemned in others.

Does that mean they were idolaters like the others, or disobedient to their parents, or that they hated God, or fornicated, or were sodomites? Not at all. He's not accusing them of those particular sins. Paul was not accusing the Jewish people of having the same symptoms as the Gentiles, only of having the same underlying problem. What they did was only symptomatic of the underlying problem. The Jewish people condemned Gentiles for rebellion against God, for failing to respond properly to God's revelation of Himself, but that's exactly what they had done in their own lives, just in a different way.

In verse 2, note Paul's confidence: "But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things." Paul seemed rather sure of himself in his pronouncement, doesn't he? Pretty confident here. The "we are sure" indicates that he expects absolutely no opposition to the statement he is about to make: God's judgment is according to truth. First, God does not judge according to what anyone thinks—"Well, I think that He doesn't care," or "It's my opinion that He does." God does not judge according to what anyone thinks but according to what is. You thought that Ben Shapiro came up with the concept of "facts don't care about your feelings"? The Apostle Paul wrote it 2,000 years ago. God does not deal in fancy or façade

but in facts that will shake up a great many people come Judgment Day who have fooled themselves, fooled other people, and thought they fooled God. Secondly, God's judgment is against them which commit such things, different than what people want to think about God. Amen. God's judgment is actually against people.

Now note their conceit in verse 3: "And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" You think you're going to get away with it? I had a spiritual encounter of some kind when I was about 12 years old when my great-grandfather died. Something happened that night about 2 or 3 in the morning when I was awake, and everybody else in the house was asleep, and there was a certain realization, but I dismissed it because I'm a Gentile. Then, when I was 15 years of age—eight years before my conversion—I was shooting hoops in the basketball court across the street from my house. When you're shooting hoops, you never quit except on a swish, right? You don't leave the court until swish. Well, I swished, went over, got the ball, and I hadn't been thinking about spiritual things at all. It was almost audible—it wasn't, but it was almost audible. I felt as though God was dealing with me: "You think you're going to get away with this, but you're wrong." At 15, I began to realize I was not an exception to any rule. If you think you're going to finagle your way out of it, you're wrong. Smarter people than you have imagined they could, and were shown by God to be wrong, because nobody is smarter than God.

Where is their conceit? In thinking they would escape the judgment of God, even though they deserved it. These people Paul is dealing with did not deny they were sinful. They were not deceived into thinking they had no sin, as 1 John 1:8 says some are. Where they were deceived is in thinking that because they sided with morality, they were on the side of good. They liked to virtue signal. They probably would have worn a mask in a car by themselves. Because they agreed with God that sin is sinful, they thought that would somehow enable them to escape the judgment of God. Just because you agree with God that sin is sinful doesn't mean you're getting away with anything. You do not escape the judgment of God just because there

are some issues in which you and God are in agreement. The fact that they presumed to judge those who had the same root problem they had—the same sin problem, differing only in some of the outward symptoms—indicates that they were condemning themselves.

Next, “Thou art inexcusable, O man,” because of the attitude of your despising. Look at verse 4: “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” When a Jewish person observed that God’s judgment had already begun to fall on the Gentiles, as we saw this morning in Romans chapter 1, but had not begun to fall on him, and falsely concluded he was somehow right with God, he revealed an attitude of despising. Paul’s unconverted Jewish readers were guilty of despising the riches of God’s goodness, God’s forbearance, and God’s longsuffering. God had not begun to judge them, and they had no appreciation for that. They despised the riches of God’s goodness by thinking He was satisfied with their lives and pleased with their lifestyles. They ignored the reality that God was just being good to them, not because they deserved it, but because goodness is one of God’s attributes. It’s just the way He is. Somebody who has not detected God’s wrath being poured out thinks they’re okay. No, God’s just good; you’re not okay. They despised God’s forbearance because they did not recognize that forbearance does not mean judgment won’t fall, just that it won’t fall yet. They despised God’s longsuffering for not realizing it explains God’s willingness to give them time to repent when they deserved immediate judgment. Something is despised whenever you think you deserve it when you don’t, treat it as common when it isn’t, or think it’s guaranteed when it’s not.

With this understood, what is disclosed with these things despised? First, a disclosure related to knowledge. When a person despises God’s goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, that individual shows, in addition to his wickedness, his ignorance. He who thinks he’s so smart demonstrates his lack of knowledge. People who condemn others, so self-righteous in their lost condition, these Jewish readers who thought they knew so much about God—or how God ought to be—knew very little. They were profoundly ignorant about

God's nature and dealings with sinful men, resulting in profoundly misunderstanding what God was doing and why. They had no idea what God was doing or why.

The second disclosure is a disclosure of need. Not only did they misunderstand what God was doing and despise His goodness as a result, but they also misunderstood why He was doing it. Though they didn't think they were good, they thought they were good enough. God, however, is not of that opinion. God showed His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering for the express purpose of giving the Jewish people time to repent, not because they were good enough. Finally, "Thou art inexcusable, O man," because of your accumulation toward His day. Look at verse 5: "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." People who are religious but unregenerate think they're doing good things and that God will be pleased with the treasures of good works they store up, granting a nice eternity in heaven. In reality, they are storing up for their own destruction. Notice why there is such an accumulation: hardness and impenitent heart. Don't picture a rock when you imagine "hardness"; imagine a twig that ought to be green and flexible to stand against wind but is dead, dry, and brittle. Apply force, and it breaks. Paul is talking about someone who doesn't commit the horrible sins of Romans chapter 1 but is rigid and inflexible to God's will, stubborn. "Come to Christ." "I won't." The second description is an impenitent heart, refusing to repent, perhaps thinking repentance is for those in chapter 1, not them. Because they refuse flexibility to God's will and acknowledge the need for repentance, they store up wrath, not treasure for reward, but fuel for wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of God's righteous judgment. By their hypocritical piety, they ensure God's cup of wrath will be full on Judgment Day. Paul showed that Jewish sinners, like Gentiles, were guilty, differing only in the kinds of sins committed. He compares them to a gas station robber versus someone like George Soros, who allegedly used wealth to undermine societies. Both are sinners, just with different expressions.

Please locate Romans 2:4 again, so I can drive the nail home. I'd like you to stand for the reading: "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Please be seated. Are you a moral person, much like the Jewish people Paul addressed? Pay careful attention while I show you how you have despised God's goodness. First, God's goodness is a divine attribute, part of His nature. He cannot be not good; everything He does must be good. Some question God's goodness, thinking He's only good when things go their way. God is good even when you think it unpleasant. Next, God's goodness is abundant, with an inexhaustible supply, and leads some sinners to repentance. Like the Jews with patriarchs, law, prophets, and oracles, you have the gospel, church, Christian parents, role models, a Christian school for some, and well-prepared sermons. God's goodness aims to lead you to repentance, to see your sinfulness, benefit from prayers, and avoid temptations, so you come to Christ early and amount to something for God. But what have you done with God's goodness? Instead of repenting, many use opportunities and blessings to commit more sins.

The Lord Jesus Christ left heaven's glory to suffer, bleed, and die for sinners, was buried, rose on the third day, and sits at the Father's right hand. God's goodness places someone to hear the message of salvation, to be forgiven by turning to Christ. To ignore God's opportunities and continue in a lost condition is worse than not coming to Christ—it's active opposition to God by despising His goodness.

Romans 2:5 says they store up wrath for the day of wrath, shoveling coal into their furnace of eternal torment. Do you shovel coal into your own furnace? Are you sure you want to despise God's goodness? Not a good plan. By resisting the gospel, you are despising God's goodness.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You for the word and pray that by Your precious Holy Spirit, You might convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment, that You, Father, might do what only You can, draw sinners to Your Son, that with simple, childlike faith, they might trust Him, not understanding everything, not knowing all answers, but having enough

answers for faith to be operative. Please draw sinners to Christ now, I pray in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.