

“THROUGH THE BIBLE”

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ROMANS 2-3

People Magazine once published a poll that surveyed attitudes toward various sins. Readers quantified how guilty they would feel after committing different acts. Numbers were tabulated and each sin was given a "Sin Coefficient" or "Sindex." One meant "blameless." Ten was "guilty to the max." Murder was considered the worst of all sins with a Sindex of 9.84. Rape was next at 9.77. Other *sinister sins* included: child abuse 9.59, drug dealing 8.83, adultery 7.63... On the other end of the *sin spectrum* – sins considered benign were selfishness 4.92, gossip 4.1, jealousy 4.08, and lust just 3.65. According to the poll *vice and violence* deserve the highest Sindex, while the sins of the heart came in lower. Yet in tonight's chapters we're going to discover that God looks at sin differently than we do. God has his own Sindex!

In Romans 1 Paul analyzed the hideous sins of the heathen, and while he did, most of us nodded in approval as Paul picked apart their perversity. Some of us might've left last week feeling a little smug – a bit moral superiority! Paul senses our spiritual snobbishness. Our sin may be more sophisticated, our wickedness more well-bred, but we're just as guilty. *Respectable sinners* are just as culpable as *reprobate sinners*.

In the book of Romans, Paul sets up court. God is judge and he's the prosecutor. In chapter 1 the *heathen* get sentenced. In chapter 2 it's the *hypocrite's* turn. In chapter 3 the *Hebrew* and all *humanity* are put on trial. Both the *unrighteous* and *self-righteous* end up guilty as charged...

Romans 2 begins, "Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things." A woman racing to catch her flight, had no time for lunch. She grabbed a pack of cookies on the way to the plane. She was sitting in the aisle seat. A man was by the window. An empty seat was between them. After the plane took off she reached over in the empty seat and opened the package of cookies to eat one. But to her shock the man also ate a cookie. She thought, "How dare that guy eat one of my cookies." A few minutes later she ate another cookie. The man also took a cookie. She took one. He took one. Finally, there was just one cookie left. The man reached for it, broke it in two, and gave it to the lady. *She's was furious!* As they exited the plane she was rummaging through her purse looking for the claim ticket for her baggage. But guess what she found? *Her* cookies! The whole time she was condemning the man for eating her cookies she was guilty of the exact same crime! Paul says to the hypocrite in all of us - who are you to judge another when you "practice the same things?"

In chapter 1 Paul took us on a tour of Skid Rome... The street is lit with neon signs and littered with broken glass. Police sirens scream in the night. Windows and doors are screened with burglar bars. Prostitutes walk the streets, while derelicts lie in the gutter. Skid Rome is an awful place to be. But in chapter 2 we realize all of us live closer to Skid Rome than we think. For the same seed that blooms there, lies just under the surface of our hearts. The anger that causes you to shout a four-letter word, if nurtured and cultivated, can pull a trigger and end a life. Lust that's allowed to inflame can throw you in bed with your secretary, or make you a customer on skid row. Paul's point is that we have no right to condemn the adulterer unless we've never lusted in our heart...

2 Corinthians 7:1 reads, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit..." Notice, both the flesh and spirit can get filthy. You can become dirty on the inside or outside – attitude or action. The consequences of a *spiritual* sin may not be as immediate as a sin of the *flesh*. You avoid the risk of AIDS, you keep your family intact - but though the fallout is lesser, the kernel is the same. Before God the *seed* and *deed* are one. This means don't judge the *deed*, while the *seed* grows in your heart.

Notice three times in verse 1 Paul uses the term *"judge."* The Greek word "krino" means "to condemn, or damn to hell." We should never condemn a person to hell – that's not our call. *But not all judgments are wrong.* In Matthew 7 Jesus commands us to make certain judgments. He says, "Beware of false prophets... You will know them by their fruits" Apparently, it's okay to make judgments for *identification* - just not *condemnation*.

Dad, imagine a young man on your doorstep wanting to take your daughter on a date. Beer cans are in the bed of his pick-up truck - there's a cigar hanging out of his mouth - and a Playboy magazine stuck in his back pocket. It's a dad's job to size this guy up. Dad, you don't need to condemn him, or send him to hell. In fact, you can try to love him, and share the Lord with this young man. But don't you dare let your daughter anywhere near him. You're not being judgmental, you're being discerning!

What Paul forbids in verse 1 is a *"holier-than-thou attitude."* The idea that I'm better, or more spiritual, or more righteous than another person. If a self-righteous person truly had his or her eyes on God they'd realize how far short they fall - so to justify himself in his own eyes, he focuses on the other person he thinks is worse off than he. She *compares* and *condemns*. Her goal is to make other people look bad so she can look good! Its amazing how harsh I can be with other people, and at the same time, how lenient I can be with myself. There's a double standard. My *rage* is always more intense than my *repentance*. It's been said, "Faults are like headlights: the other car's headlights always seem more glaring than your own."

Verse 2, *"But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things."* One of the reasons God forbids us from making judgments is that you and I seldom know the whole story. Things are not always what they seem. Thus, whenever we make a judgment from our limited perspective we're capable of huge mistakes. Psalm 19:9 tells us, "The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether." Only God sees enough of a situation to make the proper call. When it comes to people, we need to do the loving and let God to the judging.

Verse 3, *"And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?"* Sometimes we think we're the exception to the rule. *God will judge everyone else, but me. At least, He grades me on the curve.* Don't be foolish.

"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" Here's a great verse! Remember this when you share your faith. A person is prone to repent and turn to God when they discover how much He loves them. 1 John 4:19 tell us, "We love Him, because He first loved us." I grew up in a church that tried to scare the hell out of you. Fear prompted me to do just enough to avoid hell, but it never caused me to cling to God. Since then, I've discovered love is a far greater motivator. What causes a desire for God isn't *the horrors of hell*, as much as *the attractiveness of God*.

Verse 5, *"But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God..."* The word translated *"hardness"* is the Greek word *"sclerosis."* We call the hardening of the arteries, *"arteriosclerosis."* And this can happen to us spiritually. We can get a hard heart.

I read that in the 1880s a Wells Fargo clerk figured out a way to steal one silver dollar every day without getting caught. He'd bring the coins home and place them in a trunk in his attic. This went on year after year after year. Every day for 30 years the man put one more silver dollar in his attic trunk. Finally, the trunk became so heavy that one night it broke through the boards of his ceiling and fell on the man while he was lying in bed asleep. This is what Paul is saying can happen to us. A hard heart stores up God's wrath until one day the ceiling breaks and it all comes crashing down on you.

Verse 6, *"Who will render to each one according to his deeds":-eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness - indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."* God's judgments are based on obedience – not good intentions, or favoritism. It's not who you are that matters, it's what you do. God will *"render to each one according to his deeds..."* It doesn't matter if you're Jew or Greek, obey God and you can expect glory, honor, and peace... Disobey, and expect wrath and tribulation... Verse 11, *"For there is no partiality with God."*

“For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law...” In other words, God also judges based on opportunity - *the light that you’ve received*. Those who have the Bible will be judged according to the Bible. But those without God's Word won't be held responsible for what they never received. That doesn't mean the pygmy in New Zealand, who lives and dies having never heard the Word of God, won't die in his sins and be judged by God - he will - but the judgment will be different than for the person who lived his whole life listening to the Gospel, while never embracing it's truths in his own life.

Verses 13 explains, “(For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their thoughts accusing or else excusing them*)...” Some people lack access to the *Word of God*, but that doesn't mean they're blind to the *Will of God*. God has declared a enough of His will to hold all sinners accountable.

Paul is instructing us that God has revealed Himself in two ways - through **divine law** and **natural law**. Verse 15 lists three components to **natural law**... First, is an innate sense of right and wrong - “*the law written in their hearts*” Second, is “*their conscience also bearing witness*...” And third, all societies develop a moral consensus “*between themselves*...” It's an agreed upon morality that's formed through reason and logic...

The founders of America spoke often of “*natural law*” and “*inalienable rights*.” They understood that man was created a moral being. And that even without the Scripture we all possess an innate knowledge of good and evil. The Roman philosopher Plutarch was once asked, “*Who shall govern the governor?*” Plutarch answered, “*The Law... not written on papyrus rolls or wooden tablets, but his own reason within the soul, which perpetually dwells with him and guards him and never leaves his soul void of leadership.*” There's a law within every human, and tragically all men have broken that law. *Who has always done what they know to be right in every situation?* That's why every man needs the Gospel! No one stands on their own.

Verse 16, “*In the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.*” We'll be judged by the opportunities we received, but one day that judgment will be public and open for all to see. All “*the secrets of men*” will be brought into the light of day. In Matthew 10:26 Jesus says, “*For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.*” There are no secrets with God.

I read of a woman from Lansing, Michigan vacationing in sunny Florida. This woman wanted to do a little nude sunbathing so she found a secluded spot on the roof of the hotel. Within a few minutes the manager was beside her insisting she put her clothes on. She thought no one could see her, but she had actually stretched out on the dining room skylight. Here's a warning, if you go to court with God your life will be naked and open for all to see! If you don't want all your skeletons and dirty laundry dragged out of the closet for everyone to see, you need to cop a plea! Find a way to settle out of court. There is an alternative - the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Verse 17, “*Indeed-you are called a Jew, and rest (or rely) on the law, and make your boast in God...*” In chapter 1 Paul prosecuted the **heathen**. Now in chapter 2 he's exposed the **hypocrite**. In verse 17, it's the **Hebrew's** turn. In the OT the Jews were God's chosen people. They had a proud heritage, but they let their *heritage* go to their *head*. They assumed because they were Jews they were exempt from God's judgment. Jewish tradition said Abraham sat at the gate of Hell to keep all Jews out regardless of the life they lived. Trypho, a Jewish writer, once said, “*They who are the seed of Abraham according to the flesh shall in any case, even if they be sinners and unbelieving and disobedient towards God, share in the eternal Kingdom.*” The Hebrews or Jews were brimming with false confidence! Here's what the Jews overlooked - the Bible teaches that *the greater the privilege the greater responsibility*. Rather than exempt from judgment, because of their enormous blessings, the Jews were due a stricter judgment!

Paul continues to innumerate their advantages in verse 18... “*And (they) know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.*” The Hebrews were the caretakers of the Scriptures. They wrote the Bible - they read the Bible - they copied the Bible - they studied the Bible – they taught the Bible... *they just failed to obey Bible!*

The word “*instructed*” in verse 18 is the Greek word “*katecheo*” - from which we get our English word “*catechism*.” It means “*to teach by repetition*.”

Scripture was drilled into their heads, but it never penetrated their hearts. The Jewish synagogues were full of the same people who sit in churches today. They're going to miss heaven by 18 inches. The Word they know in their heads has never worked its way the 18 inches down into their heart.

Verse 21 "You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery?" The Jews weren't obeying the Law – certainly not its intent - *but they eased their conscience by teaching it.* The joke in college was if you couldn't make it in the *business world* you ended up a professor in the *business college*. It's said, "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach." The Jews were zealous teachers, but horrible doers.

Paul asks them in verse 22, "You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?" Seventy years of hard labor in Babylon had cured the Jews of idolatry. The Jews hated idolatry. An idol robbed God of the glory and preeminence due His name. Yet Paul says the Jews have ripped God off in more subtle ways. We too can rob God! Malachi 3:8 asks "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings." The unwillingness to give God a tenth of our income is nothing less than stealing from God. In the Bible the first-fruits – the first tenth of what you made or grew didn't belong to you – it was considered God's possession.

Verse 23, "You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For *"the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.*" Here Paul quotes Isaiah 52:5. God intended for the Jews to be a light to Gentiles, instead they were a hindrance.

Verse 25, "For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision." Here's another assumption the Jews made. If a man was circumcised he was right with God. One Jewish scholar wrote, "Our Rabbis have said that no circumcised man will see Hell." The Jewish Midrash puts it, "God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised should be sent to Hell." The Jews felt safe, and spiritually secure, because they were circumcised.

But Paul reminds them that circumcision is just a symbol. What matters to God is the condition of the heart. And there're Christians who've made the same mistake. They've substituted *symbol for substance, replicas for reality*. People think if they've been baptized, or take communion, or worship on a certain day, or join a specific church they're now acceptable before God. Charles Hodge writes, "Whenever true Christianity declines, there is a tendency to lay undo stress on external rites." Ritual and tradition can be a cover-up for what's lacking in the heart. *Form can never replace faith!*

But faith can take the place of form... "Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?" If a uncircumcised, pig-eating, Sabbath-working Gentile loves God, and has faith, he ends up more acceptable to God than the orthodox, kosher, circumcised Jew. Pleasing God is about *faith not form*. "And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you (he's speaking to the Jews) *who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.*" To a Jew this was a two-by-four between the eyes. Paul rattles them. They put so much confidence in their fleshly circumcision, but Paul tells them true people of God are circumcised of heart. They trust and obey.

In Deuteronomy 30:6 God made a promise to Israel, "The LORD your God will circumcise your heart... to love the LORD... with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." Physical circumcision was merely the symbol of a deeper cut - a cutting away of the sin nature. *We need our wings clipped*. If you're going to domesticate a duck you've got to clip its wings, or at the first hint of winter it'll fly south. Likewise, we're prone to fly south on God. The tendencies, and propensities that cause us to fly the coop and run from God need to be clipped. A genuine child of God – the person Paul would call a *true Jew* – has experienced *spiritual surgery*. He's been born again! The Spirit replaces a *callous heart* with a *caring heart*. Love replaces lust. Being a Christian is not the *work of a scalpel*, but the *work of the Spirit*.

Romans 3, "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?" This is the argument you'd expect from a Jew who'd just finished reading chapter 2. If being born a Jew, and being circumcised, doesn't make you right with God - is there any benefit to being Hebrew? Paul answers, "Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God." The word "*oracle*" refers to "*a divinely inspired message.*" The

advantage of being a Jew was their access to Scripture. God's Word spared the Jews pitfalls common among the pagans.

In his book *"None of These Diseases,"* Dr. S.I. McMillen describes how many of the OT laws helped the Jews avoid various diseases. In the Middle Ages when the bubonic plague swept across Europe, the one group of people largely unaffected were the Jews. Their dietary and hygiene laws prohibited the *deadly disease* from spreading into the Jewish community.

Verse 3, *"For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect?"* Here's another argument Paul anticipates. If a man is saved via God's faithfulness, not his own – then what of those who aren't saved, does it mean that God has proven unfaithful? *"Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: "That You may be justified in Your words, and may overcome when You are judged."*

On occasion someone will complain, *"Pastor Sandy, I'm struggling with sin, but God refuses to deliver me. I really want His help, but its just not working for me."* When I hear such a complaint, I have a choice to make... God promises to His part - if we do our part! So if it's not happening, then who's the one that's dropping the ball? *I choose you!* Either you're a liar or God is a liar! And quite frankly I'm siding with God! As Paul put it, *"Let God be true but every man a liar."* You might need to take another look at you!

"But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust who inflicts wrath? (I speak as a man.) Paul will do this at times. He'll use silly arguments to answer the questions of silly men. Here's a example... When man sins, God judges righteously. So some smart elect might ask, *"why shouldn't we sin more and more? If our sin puts God's righteousness on display, then don't we do God a favor by sinning?"* It's a silly, stupid argument, but Paul is dealing with silly, stupid men.

He answers, *"Certainly not! For then how will God judge the world? For if the truth of God has increased through my lie to His glory, why am I also still judged as a sinner? And why not say, "Let us do evil that good may come"? -as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say. Their condemnation is just."* Even though God displays His glory and righteousness in the judgment of our sin, you and I are still responsible for the deeds we do.

"What then? Are we better than they? Not at all." In fact, Paul is just as accountable before God as the next guy. *"For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin."* Everyone is accountable. This has been Paul's point for 3 chapters. The *heathen*, the *hypocrite*, and the *Hebrew* - Jews and Gentiles - all are sinners and deserving of God's wrath! We need to add a verse to the Sunday School song, *"Red and yellow, black and white - we're all sinners in His sight."* We are all *"under sin."* The phrase *"under sin"* or *"hupo harmartia"* means *"under the power, or sway, or domination of sin."* Man's problem is not that he's sinned, but that he's control by it. He's mastered by sin. Outside Christ it's his *basic instinct*.

Verse 10, *"As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one..."* Of the 100 billion human beings who have walked this planet there's been only one person who was righteous in God's eyes - *and His name is Jesus!*

"There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God." Did you hear about *Ringo the duck* who made his home at the city park in Toronto. Ringo poked his bill through the pull tab off a Cola Cola. With his bill stuck shut, he had no way to eat and was on the verge of starving to death. An enormous rescue was launched. Park officials tried to lure Ringo with food. They hired a champion duck caller. But Ringo mistook all these attempts to help him, as threats. He ran from the very people who wanted to save him. This has been man's reaction to God. He loves us. He sees that we're starving to death, and wants to help us, but we keep trying to avoid Him.

"They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable..." The Greek word translated *"unprofitable"* was used to describe spoiled milk. God looks at the combined efforts of all humanity and says we all *stink!* *"There is none who does good, no, not one."* There is none, there is none, *"there is none who does good..."* Paul shoots us down with *the none gun*.

Verse 13 describes us all, *"Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit;" "the poison of asps is under their lips;" "whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." "their feet are swift to shed blood;"* Paul begins with our mouth – he highlights the venom we can release with our

tongue. He ends with our feet. He's saying *we're sinful from head to toe*. Verse 16, "*Destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known.*" "*there is no fear of God before their eyes.*" There you have it - *case closed!* God has rendered a guilty verdict on all humanity!

Once a man was strolling down the street carrying his Bible over his shoulder in a leather case. Some kids thought it was a camera bag, and asked if he'd take their picture. The man said he already had their picture. They wanted to see it, so he opened his case and pulled out the Bible. He told them, "*This is your picture*" – then he read them Romans 3:9-18... The man went on to share the Gospel. And this is what Paul does. He's shown us our picture. It's bleak. But now he explains to us God's salvation.

Verse 19, "*Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*" The Jews made the mistake of thinking they could be made right with God by keeping the Law of Moses. People today adopt the same erroneous assumption. They think God's favor is something we can earn or work up. Not so! Paul says the Law was never intended *to save*, only *to show*. The purpose of the Law was not to make us righteous, but to show us our sin. The proud Jews boasted of their piety, but the Law shut them up!

Like most teenagers my brother and I thought we knew it all. Every night at dinner we'd stir up an argument over a slice of trivia, "*What's the capitol of Panama?*" I'd have an idea... Ken had an idea... My dad had his own idea... But after dinner we always settled it! My parents had invested in a set of World Book Encyclopedias. And those World Books became the arbitrator of every argument. Every Adams' debate was finally settled by the World Book. And this was the purpose of the Law of Moses. It was the referee. It decided right or wrong. The Law of Moses called you safe or out.

The Law became the muzzle. It silenced every claim of self-righteousness. It was evident that no one could live up to the standard the Law laid down. Think of the Law as an X-ray. An X-ray doesn't heal a bone, it only detects if a bone is broken. Likewise, the Law didn't heal or save, it only detected the major fracture in man's relationship with God. It pointed out our need.

Did you hear of the pastor who told his congregation, "*There's been only one perfect man, and his name is "Jesus."* A man in the back of the room raised his hand. The pastor ignored him. Before long he was waving his hand. Finally the pastor asked him, "*Don't tell me you think you're perfect?*" The man answered, "*No, but I know someone who is.*" "*Who's that?*" the pastor asked him... The fellow replied, "*My wife's first husband!*"

The truth is not one of us is or every will be perfect! Look down at verse 23, Paul says, "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*" The Hawaiian Islands are roughly 2000 miles from LA. Suppose you, I, and World Record Long Jump holder, Mike Powell, decide to jump from LA to Honolulu. Mike jumps first and soars nearly 30 feet. You're next and jump 10 feet - a respectable effort. I'm last and I clear 3 feet - I'd just ate some pizza. Mike did better than you, and you did better than me - but in light of 2000 miles none of us were even close. You might be better than me, but that's not saying much. *The question that matters is how do we stack up to God?* And here's Paul's answer... Up against God, we all "*fall short!*" Or as another translation puts it, "*we have all come in last.*" In the World Rankings of Righteousness everyone but Jesus is tied for dead last.

Vs. 21, "*But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*" Here we're introduced to something marvelous and mind-boggling - **a righteousness apart from the Law**. God struck a deal with our defense attorney, our advocate, Jesus. There is a way to settle out of court... You don't want to go to trial with this much evidence stacked against you. Chapter 3 is enough to bury you, but there's a plea bargain on the table... You aren't good enough to fabricate your own righteousness, but there's a righteousness apart from the Law. It has nothing to do with your performance! It's a gift - initiated by grace - paid for by Jesus - received by faith.

Paul explains it in verse 24, "*being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...*" The word "*justified*" means "*just-as-if-I'd*" never sinned. Even though you're guilty, God treats you as if you're innocent. In 1986 the US Congress enacted a Law that requires hospitals to treat an emergency patient as if he had the wherewithal to pay, even if he doesn't. In essence, this is what the Bible means by the term **justification**. God doesn't

ignore that we're bankrupt spiritually. He sees our sin. He knows we can't afford treatment. Yet that doesn't stop God from administering His life-saving salvation. He justifies us "freely" – or literally, "without a cause."

We also have the "redemption that is in Christ..." The idea behind this word came from the slave markets. When a man purchased a slave in order to set him free he was "redeemed." His debts were paid in full. He was free! You and I are free from our past sins to start a new life in Christ!

God justifies us freely. He redeems us in Christ "whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness..." Trace the word "propitiation" back to its Hebrew origin and you'll find it referred to the "mercy seat" - the gold lid that sat on the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark rested in the Holy of Holies. It was God's OT throne on earth. Inside the Ark was the Law. Over the Ark was God's glory. How can man come to God's throne. He's broken the Law. God's glory demands judgment.

Well, God put a lid on the law. A blood-stained mercy seat became the meeting place between God and man. Our debt was paid. Atonement was made. At the very place that cried out for judgment, God extended mercy. The word "propitiation" means "a place of mercy." And today, Jesus has become our mercy seat. At the very place our sin was judged – on the cross – God applies the blood and extends His mercy. Jesus put a lid on the law. He fulfills God's glory. He extends mercy.

And I marvel at what Paul says next, "Because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness..." Over the years God's righteousness cried out for sin to be judged, but God waited. He passed over sin until the day when His Son came and took our sin on His shoulders and paid its price. Today, Jesus is our "propitiation." He is the only mercy spot on earth.

And all this has happened so "that (God) might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." I love the phrase – "just and the justifier." God loves you, but He can't bend the rules. The Judge can't fudge. God said, "the wages of sin is death." Jesus had to die to pacify God's justice, but He also died to satisfy God's mercy. The cross enables God to save face and save us at the same time. It produces our salvation and God's vindication. It makes God both "the just and the justifier."

Verse 27, "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." The legalist boasts. He tries to earn His way to God. He sees salvation as his own achievement... but justification by faith nullifies our pride. How can we be haughty when Jesus paid it all? "Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." All men are saved the exact same way – by grace through faith. That's why there's no more room for pride or prejudice – Jew and Gentile come to God through Jesus.

Finally, verse 31, "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law." I love how Max Lucado renders this verse. He writes, "Faith causes us to be what the law truly wants." We're given grace, then driven by grace. Grace fuels our engine. When you understand how much God loves you, you'll want to love Him in return. I can testify, I've experienced far greater purity and holiness by walking in grace than I ever achieved through my own grit and discipline. Will power is no match for God's power. The key to abundant living is faith in God's grace!