

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## ROMANS 2-3

People Magazine once published a poll that surveyed people's 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 worst of sins with a Sindex of 9.84... Rape was next at 9.77... Other *sinister sins*: child abuse 9.59... drug dealing 8.83... adultery 7.63...

On the other end of the *sin spectrum* - sins thought of as benign were selfishness 4.92... gossip 4.1... jealousy 4.08... lust 3.65... and nude sunbathing 2.76.

According to the poll *vice and violence* deserve the highest **Sindex**, while sins of the heart come in lower.

Yet in tonight's chapters we're going to discover that God looks at sin differently. **God has His own Sindex!**

In Chapter 1 Paul analyzed the hideous sins of the heathen Romans, 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 smug - a bit morally superior! And Paul senses our spiritual snobbishness. Our sin may be more sophisticated, our wickedness more well-bred - *but we're just as guilty.*

Paul contends in Chapters 2-3 that *respectable sinners* are just as culpable as *reprobate sinners.*

In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul sets up court. And God is both judge and prosecutor...

In Chapter 1 the **heathen** get sentenced. In Chapter 2 it's the **hypocrite's** turn. In Chapter 3 the **Hebrew**; then all **humanity** are put on trial. Both the *unrighteous* and the *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." Once, a woman was racing to catch her flight. She had no time for lunch, so 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 the woman reached over into the empty seat and opened the package of cookies to eat one. 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, just one cookie was 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 us all - *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, can pull a trigger and end a life...

The lust you allow to inflame, can throw you in bed with a neighbor, 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 and on the outside - attitude or action.

The consequences of a *spiritual* sin may not be as immediate or as felt as a sin of the *flesh*. You avoid the risk of venereal disease, or 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*, if 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.”* 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... By their fruits you will know them.”* Apparently, it’s okay to judge for *identification* - just not for *condemnation*.

All the daddies here tonight, imagine a young man on your doorstep wanting to take your daughter out on a date... Beer cans are in the bed of his pick-up truck. He has a joint hanging out of his mouth, and there’s a porno magazine folded up in his back pocket.

I hope there’s not a father in this room who isn’t going to size this guy up, and refuse to let his daughter get near him. At this point, it’s a dad’s job to judge!

You don’t need to condemn him to hell, or send him there. In fact, try to love him. Share the Lord with him.

Just don’t you dare let your daughter anywhere near him. You’re not being judgmental, but discerning!

What Paul forbids in verse 1 is a *“holier-than-thou attitude.”* The idea that at the core of my being, I’m better, or more spiritual, or more righteous than you. The Bible teaches us that we’re all sinners by nature.

In fact, a self-righteous man who thinks more highly of himself than he should, will be quick to judge others.

To justify himself he focuses is on the person he thinks is worse. **His goal is to make the other guy look bad, so that he can look good!** It's amazing how harsh I can be on others, and how lenient I can be with myself.

The hypocrite keeps a double standard. It's been said, **"Faults are like headlights: the other car's lights 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 judging is that you and I seldom know the whole story.

Things are not always as they seem.

Thus, whenever we make a judgment from our limited perspective we're capable of huge mistakes.

Psalm 19:9, **"The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether."** God alone knows the whole story, and can make the proper call. When it comes to people, **you do the loving, let God do 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.

*Hey, God is going to judge everyone else, but me. At least, He'll grade 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.

Paul is saying a person is more prone to repent and turn to God when they discover how much He loves them than when they're rebuked or judged. 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 people. Fear prompted me to do just enough to avoid hell, but it never caused me to want to please God. Since then, I've discovered love is a far greater motivator. Holy desires aren't motivated by *the horrors of hell*, as much as they are *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.

In the 1880s a clerk at Wells Fargo Bank figured out a way to steal a silver dollar each day without getting caught. He'd bring coins home and place them in a trunk in his attic. This went on for years. Each day for 30 years he put one more silver dollar in his trunk.

Finally, the trunk got 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. *It killed him instantly.*

And 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, and not 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, and honor, and peace... Disobey God, 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...”* God judges based on the opportunity we've had - **the light we've received.**

Those who've had the Bible will be judged according to the Bible. But those who've lacked God's Word won't be held responsible for what they never had.

The pygmy in the Amazon, who lives and dies having never heard the Word of God, will still die in his sins and be judged

by God. *He's guilty.* But his judgment will be different than the person who's lived his whole life hearing the Gospel, and never embraced its truths.

Each of us will be judged by the light we've received.

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 folks lack access to *God's Word*, but that doesn't mean they're blind to *God's will*.

God has declared enough of His will - through a myriad of ways - to hold all sinners accountable.

Paul is saying that God reveals Himself to us in two different ways - through **divine law** and **natural law**.

Verse 15 lists three components to the **natural law**...

**First**, is an innate sense of right and wrong - Paul calls this, "*the law written in their hearts...*" **Second**, is "*their conscience also bearing witness...*" Every person is born with a conscience, or an inner policeman who enforces right and wrong... **Third**, all societies develop a moral consensus. Paul puts it, "*between themselves their thoughts accusing or excusing.*" It's an agreed upon morality that's formed through reason and logic...



All humans, whether they've ever been exposed to **divine law** or not, have *a sense of right and wrong, a conscience, and are privy to a moral consensus.*

The founders of the United States of America spoke often of *"natural law"* and *"inalienable rights."*

They understood that humans are created moral beings. And that even without the Christian Scriptures we all possess an innate knowledge of good and evil.

The Roman philosopher Plutarch was once asked, *"Who shall govern the governor?"* He replied, *"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 knew to be right in every situation?* That's why every man needs the Gospel of Christ! For none of us can stand on our own.

**"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 were given, 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 said, **"For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known."** There are no secrets with God.

This is why we all need the Gospel of Jesus.

I read of a lady from Michigan, vacationing in sunny Florida. This gal wanted to do some nude sunbathing. Remember on the Sindex that's only a 2.76 - no biggie.

She found what she thought was a secluded spot on the hotel's roof. But in minutes the manager was standing beside her insisting that 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, sins that you thought were no big deal, actually are to God. And 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 dirty laundry hung out to dry, you need to cop a plea, and *settle your case out of court!* There is one alternative - salvation in Jesus!

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**. In the first of Chapter 2 it was the **hypocrite**. Now in verse 17 it's the **Hebrew's** turn to stand before the Judge.

The OT declared that 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 that Abraham sat at Hell's gate to keep Jews out regardless of how they lived. Trypho, a first century Jewish wrote, "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 were brimming with false confidence!

Here's what the Jews overlooked - **the Bible teaches *the greater the privilege the greater the responsibility.***

Rather than exempt from judgment, because of their blessings, they would be 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 even taught the Bible... *they just failed to obey Bible!*

**"*Instructed*"** in verse 18 is the Greek word **"katecheo"** from which we get our English word **"catechism."**

It means **"teach by repetition."** Scripture was drilled into their heads, but it never penetrated their hearts.

Jewish synagogues were full of the same type of folks who sit in churches today. They'll miss heaven by 18 inches. The Word of God they know in their heads doesn't work its way the 18 inches into their hearts.

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 God's Law - certainly not its intent - *but they eased their conscience by teaching the Law.*

The joke in college was if you can't make it in the *business world* you end up a professor in the *business college*. “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 captivity in Babylon had cured the Jews of their idolatry. When the Jews returned to the land they 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. *And we too can rob God!*

Remember, 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 ten percent of what you made or harvested was considered God's possession. To keep it for yourself was nothing less than stealing from God.

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.” Paul quotes Isaiah 52:5. God intended for Jews to

be a light to Gentiles, instead the Jews hypocrisy were a hindrance to them.

“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 Jewish assumption - circumcision alone made a man right with God. A Jewish scholar wrote, “Our Rabbis have said that no circumcised man will see Hell.” The 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 their male babies were circumcised on the 8th day.

Yet Paul reminds them that circumcision is just a symbol. What matters to God is one’s heart. If you’re a lawbreaker at heart; then circumcision is worthless.

And there're Christians who make the same mistake. They substitute *symbol for substance, replica for reality*. People think that 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 wrote, “Whenever true Christianity declines, there is a tendency to lay undo stress on external rites.” Ritual and tradition are a cover-up for what's lacking in the heart. *Form never replaces faith!*

*But faith can override the lack of form.* “Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?” An uncircumcised, pig-eating, Sabbath-working Gentile who

trusts God ends up more acceptable to Him 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 (that is, Jews) who, *even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?*” It’s possible that a Gentile with a pure heart, will judge Jews who played the hypocrite.

“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 all their confidence in their fleshly circumcision, but Paul tells them that the true family of God are the humble and circumcised of heart.

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 - the removal of the sin nature... *In a sense 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.

And likewise, we are prone to go south on God.

Our tendencies is to fly the coop and run from God. Well, this propensity needs to be clipped. A genuine child of God -

a person Paul would call a *true Jew* - has experienced *spiritual surgery*. He's been born again!

The Holy Spirit has replaced our *callous heart* with a *caring heart*. Love has replaced lust. Being a Christian is not the *work of a scalpel*, but the *work of the Spirit*.

Romans 3 begins, "What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?"

And this is the argument you would 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 access to Scripture.

Having God's Word as a national treasure spared the Jews many a pitfall common among the pagans.

In the 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 through 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 we're saved by God's faithfulness, not our own - then if a person isn't saved, does it mean God was 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 that complaint, I have a choice to make... God promises to do 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.”*** I would suggest **you** 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 does this at times. He uses silly arguments to get down on the level of silly men to answer their questions.

Here's a example... When man sins, God judges righteously. So some smart elect might ask, ***“why shouldn't we sin? 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 Paul is using, but remember he's 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.”

Here’s Paul’s answer - 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, each of us, Jew and Gentile 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 before God.

This has been Paul's point for three chapters. The **heathen**, the **hypocrite**, the **Hebrew** - Jews and Gentiles - all are sinners and deserving of God's wrath!

We need to add another verse to the familiar Sunday School jingle, “Red and yellow, black and white - we're all **sinners** in His sight.” We are all “*under sin.*”

The phrase in verse 9 “*under sin*” - “**hupo harmartia**” means “under the power, or sway, or domination of sin.” Man's problem is not that we’ve sinned, but that we’re controlled by sin. We’re all mastered by sin.

Outside of Christ this is mankind’s *basic instinct*.

Verse 10, “As it is written: “*There is none righteous, no, not one...*” Of the 100 billion humans who have walked this planet

there has been only one person who was right 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?

Poor Ringo poked his bill where it didn't belong. He got it stuck in a Coca Cola can and couldn't eat. This went on for days. Ringo the duck was starving.

A rescue was launched. Park officials tried to lure him with food. Champion duck callers were brought in. But Ringo mistook these efforts to help, as threats. He ran from people who were trying to save him.

And this has been man's reaction to God. He loves us very much. God sees that we're starving spiritually, 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 *“unprofitable”* was used to describe spoiled milk. God looks at the combined efforts of all humanity and says we 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 humanity, *“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.”* Paul starts with our mouth, and the venom spewed by our tongue.

Then goes to our feet, *“Their feet are swift to shed blood...”*  
In other words, *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.”* And with that - *case closed!* God has rendered a guilty verdict on all humanity!

Once a man was asked by some kids to take their picture. He pulled out his phone, and snapped a photo.

But when he showed the kids their picture he opened the Bible on his phone, and pointed to 3:10, *“there is none righteous.”* This is our true picture in God’s eyes.

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 mistakenly assumed they could be made right with God by adhering to the Law.

Folks today make the same mistake. They think they can earn God's favor. Not so! *The Law was never intended to save us, but to show us our sin.* The proud Jews boasted of their piety, but the Law shut them up!

It reminds me of the World Book encyclopedias my dad bought when we were kids. Those encyclopedias were our ancient Google. Any debate that erupted at dinner ended up getting resolved by the World Book.

And this was the purpose of the Law of Moses.

It was the encyclopedia, or referee. The Law decided right and wrong. It showed man the error of his ways.

Think of the Law as an X-ray. An X-ray doesn't heal a bone, it only detects if it's broken. And likewise, the Law didn't heal or save, it only detected the fracture in our 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 raised his hand. The pastor ignored him. But before long he was waving his hand.

Finally the pastor asked, "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 sums it all up, "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*"

The Hawaiian Islands are roughly 2000 miles from LA. Yet suppose you, I, and Olympic Champion Long Jump holder, Jeff Henderson, decide to jump from LA to Honolulu. Jeff jumps first and soars nearly 30 feet.

You're next and you jump 10 feet - a respectable effort. I'm last and I clear 3 feet - I'd just ate a pizza.

Well, Jeff did better than you, and you did better than me - but in light of 2000 miles none of us were close.

And the same is true when it comes to God's glory!

You're better than me, and I might be more righteous than the next guy, *but how do we all 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 Olympics of Righteousness Jesus wins, and everyone else is tied for dead last.

**"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 truly mind-boggling - **a righteousness apart from the Law.** In other words, God struck a deal with our Attorney Jesus to settle our case out of court...

You don't want to go to trial with the evidence that is stacked against you. Chapter 3 contains enough to bury you, but there is 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 that has nothing to do with your performance! It's a gift - by grace - paid 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"** sounds out its meaning. It means **"just-as-if-I'd"** never sinned. Even though you're guilty, God is willing to treat you as if you're innocent.

In 1986 the US Congress enacted the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act 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 are bankrupt spiritually. He sees our sin - knows we can't afford the treatment.

Yet it doesn't stop Him from applying it anyway. He justifies us *“freely”* - 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 a free man! And you and I become free from our past sins to start a new life in Christ Jesus!

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 that 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 - God's throne on earth... Inside the Ark was the Law. Over the Ark was God's glory... Thus, how can man come to God after breaking His Law? His 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 for judgment, God brought 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 - the cross - God applies the blood and extends His mercy. Jesus put a lid on the law. He fulfills God’s glory, and 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...” Throughout history God’s righteousness had cried out for sin to be judged, *but God waited*. He passed over sin until the day when His Son took our sin on His shoulders to pay its price.

Today, Jesus is our “*propitiation*” - our place of mercy. Jesus is the only place you can find mercy.

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.”

Thus, Jesus died to *pacify God's justice*, and at the same time to *satisfy God's mercy*. The cross enabled God to *save face* and *save us* simultaneously.

The cross earned both *our salvation* and *God's vindication*. It makes God both “*just and the justifier.*”

“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 sees salvation as his prize. But justification by faith nullifies our pride. *You can't take credit 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 same way: **by grace through faith.** Thus, there's no more *room for pride or prejudice.*

Both Jew and Gentile come to God through Jesus.

Finally, “Do we then make void the law through faith? **Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.**”

I love the light Max Lucado shines on this verse. He says, **"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; then you'll want to love Him in return.

Hey, I can testify, I've experienced far greater purity by resting on grace than I ever achieved by my own grit and discipline. *Will power* is no match for *God's power*. The key to abundant living is faith in grace!