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Romans Overview (Part 2)



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In this comprehensive overview of the second part of the book of Romans, Steve Gregg highlights some key themes and messages that are emphasized by Paul. The idea of faith is particularly significant throughout the book, as it involves both trust and faithfulness to God. While both Gentiles and Jews are sinners in need of justification through obedience to God's law, justification by faith is not the result of one's own works but trust in God's faithfulness. The righteousness of God is demonstrated through the sacrifice of Christ, and both Jews and Gentiles can be justified through faith in Jesus.

Transcript

Now I have to say I've never talked through Romans with the mind of not commenting very much, and there's very little in Romans about which I would not like to comment. I'd like to comment on just about everything in Romans. There are some passages so key to, you know, understanding what Paul's doing that I will dwell on them for some time, but I'm going to take large parts of it in summary fashion, which is more difficult for me probably than for you.

My lectures on Romans are usually between 20 and 30 hours a set, depending on which year I do it. I do teach through Romans in a week when I go to teach at the School of Biblical Studies at YWAM, but that's usually about, you know, 14 hours. So I have done it in ways that are shorter than I prefer, but I've never done it as short as I have to do it tonight, which is frustrating.

So let me just begin by saying the first 17 verses of Romans, which we could take our first hour talking about, are what we call the prologue. It's basically how Paul opens his letter, sends his greetings, things like that, speaks about how much he appreciates his audience, and before he actually begins his argument, his presentation. But as always, when Paul gives these introductory prologues, they're full of allusions to important things, which I would love to talk about, but I simply will not be able to talk about much of them.

I will say this, that he refers to himself as a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an

apostle. He says that he's an apostle who is sent to... he's separated to the gospel. Now, Paul, before he was a Christian, was a Pharisee, which means a separated one.

But the Pharisees were separated to the Torah. Paul said he's separated to the gospel. So he's like a Pharisee still, but not to the law, but to the gospel.

And when he mentions the gospel, which is so important in this epistle, he mentions it at the end of verse 1, and then he makes several qualifying statements about it. He says in verse 2, which was promised before through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. Now, he wants to make sure that his readers know that he didn't come up with something novel or innovative.

This would particularly be viewed with suspicion by the Jews, who are a major contingent of the crowd he wants to address, and they could easily say, well, Paul, you just, you know, we follow Moses and we follow the prophets. You're coming up with something completely new. He just wants right from the gate to say no.

What I'm preaching was, in fact, promised through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. And later in chapter 3, he's going to make this point again. In chapter 3, verse 21, he says, but now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.

Now, he says the righteousness of the gospel is not related to the Torah. It's a righteousness unrelated to the law. However, it was anticipated by the law and the prophets.

So again, he's not coming out with something novel that it was not considered or anticipated in the Old Testament. Jesus himself, his first preaching represented in Mark chapter 1, verse 15, his words were, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Therefore, repent and believe the gospel.

The gospel is that the kingdom is at hand and the time was fulfilled, suggesting there was anticipation. That's the language of plot fulfillment. You know, there's the plot of the Old Testament has reached its fulfillment with the coming of the kingdom and the gospel.

Likewise, Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5, verses 17 and 18, he said, do not think that I have come to destroy the law of the prophets. I didn't come to destroy the law of the prophets, but to fulfill them. Fulfilling them means to do and bring the thing that they anticipated.

What he did and taught is a fulfillment of what was anticipated in the law of the prophets. He didn't come to destroy them, but that doesn't mean he didn't come to end them. They can end on friendly terms or unfriendly terms.

He didn't come as an unfriendly ender of the Torah. He came as the ender of it that the Torah anticipated, was looking forward to. He didn't come with a destructive mission vis-a-vis the law, but as its fulfillment.

That's something that Paul is saying here too. Now, so the gospel, first thing he says about the gospel is that it was anticipated in the Holy Scriptures, which was something to, of course, especially said it eased the minds of any Jewish readers. Then he says the gospel is concerning his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

So the gospel was anticipated in the Old Testament, but it's the message about Jesus. Now he says several things about Jesus, two in particular, besides saying he's our Lord. He says, who was born of the seed of David according to flesh and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead.

Now, he's Son of God and Son of David. This answers the question that Jesus asked the Pharisees, which they could not answer. During the Passion Week, when he was approached by many leaders who tried to snag him, and they couldn't, they brought trick questions, but he defeated them every time.

Then when they were done doing that, he turned one on them. And he said, well, whose son is the Messiah? And they said, he's David's son. And he said, well, then why did David call him his Lord in Psalm 110 verse 1? Why would David call his own son his Lord? And they couldn't answer.

They were silenced. But of course, Paul answered it. Well, he was, according to the flesh, a descendant of David, just as the Jews expected.

But as many Jews did not anticipate, he is also the Son of God. Humanly speaking, he was descended from David, but he was more than merely human. There's another aspect.

He's the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit declared that about him through raising him from the dead. That's the proof that he was the Son of God. And then he says in verse 5, through whom we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all the nations, that is the Gentiles, for his name, among whom also are you, the called according to Jesus Christ.

So he said, we have become apostles to the Gentiles. We are called to bring obedience of the faith to the nations. Notice, not simply believing the faith, but obeying the faith.

He uses the same expression in Romans 16 when he's closing up, he talks about the obedience of the faith. Interesting combination of words, because we usually would say obedience to the rules or obedience to the law, or it would say belief of the faith. But Paul sees the faith as something to be obeyed.

Why? Because the faith, as he says, is concerning our Lord, Jesus our Lord. He says in verse 3, the gospel is concerning Jesus Christ, our Lord. A Lord is somebody you obey.

Do you believe he's the Lord? Well then, obedience will show up in your life, because why else, what else would you do? If you have a Lord, what else would you do but obey him, of course. So the faith in Christ is something not only acquiesced to, it is something obeyed, because the faith in Jesus Christ is the faith that he is the Lord, and therefore that he is the one to obey. So he gives his grace to you and peace that he has at the beginning of almost all his epistles, and then he goes through and says, I've been wanting to come see you for a long time, because I'd like to have some fruit among you as I do among the other Gentiles.

He sees the Roman Church as primarily a Gentile church. He treats them as a Gentile church. Later on in chapter 15, he says, I magnify my ministry to you as the Apostles of the Gentiles.

He sees himself as primarily sent to the Gentiles, and therefore since Rome is a Gentile nation, city I should say, and Rome and the church is apparently predominantly Gentile, but has a significant Jewish contingent, he says, I've been wanting to come to you, but I have been hindered. Now again, he doesn't say what hindered him, doesn't say it here, but in chapter 15 says the thing that hindered him was he has a policy about not preaching the gospel where others have preached Christ. He wants to hit the unreached peoples first, but he says in chapter 15, I've already done that.

I've reached all the unreached peoples, pretty much the major cities, major populations, there's between my starting point in Antioch in Syria and Illyricum, he says, which is the ancient name for what would more recently been Yugoslavia, but north of Greece. He'd also evangelized Greece, of course, so there's, you know, as he moves further west, Rome is next, Spain is beyond, and he says, for I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift so that you may be established. That is, that I may be encouraged too.

I'm not just here with, as the sugar daddy, here to make you a dependent class on what I have to do. I expect to receive blessing and benefit from you too. So he says in verse 15, as much as is in me, I'm ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

Now, there's two more verses that are usually considered part of this prologue before he begins his argument, and these are the verses in which he states his thesis, the thesis of his preaching. I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first, but also for the Greek. For in it, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith.

The quotation, of course, is from Habakkuk chapter 2 and verse 4. Again, he's pointed

out earlier that the gospel he preaches was anticipated in the prophets, and this is one of them. He likes to quote Habakkuk 2, 4, the just shall live by faith, which to Paul means they are justified by faith. They are just, that is, they're justified because of their faith, and that's the point he's going to make.

Now, I need to point this out early because it's a major word in the book of Romans, the word faith. In Greek, it's the word pistis, P-I-S-T-I-S, pistis. That word is a word that, generally speaking, means faith, that is, trust, reliance, believing that something is faithful.

But the word also in the Greek language meant faithful, not as frequently, but often enough to make that an established option. Pistis can mean faith or faithfulness. For example, in later on in Romans, in Romans 3, 3, he says, for what if some did not believe, will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? The word faithfulness there is pistis, the same word that's translated faith elsewhere, and it is correctly translated faithfulness in this particular passage.

It is referring to the faithfulness of God, not faith as we think of it. Also, there's several other places in the New Testament, Titus chapter 2 and verse 10. It says, exhort servants, verse 9, exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well-pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity.

Fidelity means faithfulness. It's pistis here in the Greek, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. So, fidelity, faithfulness, these also are legitimate translations of the word pistis.

In 1st Timothy 5, 12, we have the same. It says, verse 11 and 12, 1st Timothy 5, 11, 12, but refuse the younger widows, for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first pistis, which means fidelity or faithfulness in this particular case. They have not abandoned the faith, but they have broken a vow or a commitment that they've made that's casting off their first faithfulness.

So, we have cases like this. 1st Timothy 2, 7, I believe, also has a case like this. Paul says about himself, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle.

I'm speaking the truth in Christ and not lying, a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth, meaning faithfulness. He's a teacher faithfully teaching and faithfulness he's teaching. So, pistis can mean faith or can mean faithfulness.

Now, faith, of course, is putting your confidence in someone who's faithful. Faithfulness means being someone that someone else can safely put their confidence in. It is a covenantal bond between two people.

A husband and wife become a married couple by making promises to each other. It is the

faithfulness of both that keeps them married, and it is each one's faith in the faithfulness of the other that is presumed to be there too. One person is faithful, the other has faith in them.

In a marriage, both are to be faithful and both are to trust the others. Likewise, in a covenant with God, it's not just that we believe him, it's that we have fidelity, we have faithfulness to him too. Now, this would bother many people.

In fact, having said that, I expect some people to see this video and say, oh, that sounds like salvation by works, not by faith. No, it's salvation by pistis, which is faith and faithfulness. Faithfulness is not the same thing as works, at least not in any sense that Paul used the term works.

Of course, when Paul talked about works as not good for salvation, he's mainly talking about the Jewish ceremonial ritual laws. But even if he were talking about anything else, there's works. If you're faithful to God, of course, works will come of it, but they come not as things in themselves, they come as expressions of something that's a commitment in your heart to be faithful.

If you don't have the commitment to be faithful to God, even unto death, the Bible says, then you don't have what the Bible is calling pistis. Your faith in him means that you've made a commitment to be faithful to him as well. If someone says, well, I believe in God, but they have no such commitment, they have not been converted.

The devil has faith in God. He knows that God tells the truth. He knows who God is.

He knows who Jesus is. He knows Jesus rose from the dead. He knows all the doctrines we know, but he doesn't have a commitment to be faithful, and therefore he doesn't have a saving faith.

This is the summary. Now, he does say at the end of verse 16 there, for the Jew first and also for the Greek, and I have to say this, this phrase comes up again twice in chapter 2 in verses 9 and 10, where in verse 9 he says that there will be tribulation and anguish on every soul of man who does evil on the Jew first and also on the Greek, but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Now, to the Jew first, when I was younger I heard teachers teach, this means that we have an obligation to go to the Jews first.

The gospel is to the Jew first. The Jews have priority with God and Gentiles, they can wait in line. We need to reach the Jews first, but this is not what he's saying.

He's not trying to say the Jews are somehow a higher priority than the Gentiles. He's simply saying the Jews were there first. God, Jesus came to Israel.

The Jews heard the gospel first, but it's not just for the Jew, it's for them first, but also for

the Greeks. The emphasis here with Paul is that, yes, the Jews had the first opportunity and they will be judged first and rewarded first, but the Greeks too, the Gentiles, the emphasis is also the Greeks. The Greeks simply means Gentiles.

In the Roman world, anyone who spoke Greek was called a Greek, even if they were not ethnically Greek, and everyone in the Roman Empire spoke Greek. People who did not speak Greek were called barbarians, and they were largely outside the Empire, and Paul didn't really reach out to them, though he did say in one place he was a debtor to the Jews and the Greeks and the barbarians, but we don't know if Paul really went to the barbarians much. In any case, when he says Greek, he doesn't mean ethnic Greeks because his readers were Romans, but he means Gentiles in general.

So the gospel is, of course, for the Jew. It came to the Jew first. Jesus came to the Jew first.

Even Paul preached to the Jews first when he went to a town, he went into the synagogue. In Pisidian Antioch, chapter 13 of Acts, he says, after they rejected him into the synagogue, he said, it was necessary that the gospel first be preached to you, but since you rejected it and count yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we're going to go to the Gentiles now. So it's a chronological thing.

God had a prior relationship with the Jews through the Old Covenant. He promised Israel there'd be a new covenant, so he had to take it to them first. As they rejected, the Gentiles get in too, but not as second-class citizens.

It's not that the Jews have some kind of priority and importance, only that they were there first. They had their foot in the door first. They had a relationship with God first, and therefore he goes to them first before he reaches out to strangers on the outside.

Now in verse 18, he begins his argument, and it begins, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. He says, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

Because although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools. They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.

Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness. And it says later in verse 25, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie. And in verse 26, for this reason God gave them up to vile passions.

And in verse 27, it says that they began to engage in homosexual lust. Verse 27, likewise men, leaving the natural use of woman, burned in their lust for one another. Verse 28, and even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, he gave them over to a debased mind.

Being filled with, then he gives a long list of vices, at the end of which he says in verse 32, who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same things, but also approve those who practice them. In the most common exposition of Romans that you'll usually find, it is argued that this is the denunciation of the Gentiles. He talks about their idolatry, he talks about them having access to the knowledge of God through the things he has made.

He doesn't make any reference to the Torah, which is the thing that makes most people say he's not referring to Jews here. He would have referred to that, you'd think, but he only refers to the things that are made, their testimony to the invisible attributes of God, so they're without excuse. The idea here being, he has just described Gentile pagans and shown how evil they are, and that when he goes to chapter 2, he's going to change gears and talk to the Jews and show that they also are sinful.

Now, at chapter 3, verse 9, he says, what then, are we better than they? Meaning, we Jews better than those Gentiles? Not at all, for we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they're all under sin. So it is thought by many that Paul has just summarized in Romans 3, 9, the first two chapters and at that point where we've charged that Jews and Greeks are under sin. The Gentiles in chapter 1 and the Jews in chapter 2. Now, we haven't read chapter 2 yet together, but I want to make this point.

It is true that what he has said in chapter 1 can easily apply to the Gentiles, but Paul would not have to make a case to any audience that the Gentiles were sinners. We might have a little more need of that because we live in a Christianized culture. Most Christians are Gentiles.

There are Jewish Christians, but more Gentiles. We usually think of the church as more of a Gentile kind of demographic, and also we think of, you know, Western civilization as fairly Christianized, even among those who aren't real Christians. So we might think in a society like ours, we might need to convince somebody that we're trying to convert that they are a sinner.

Paul wouldn't have to make that case against the pagans. He didn't live in a Christianized world. These pagans were worshiping idols.

They were fornicating. They were drinking, having orgies. They were doing all that stuff.

Nobody doubted that the Gentiles were sinners, the pagans were sinners. The Jews certainly knew it without being told, and I think even the sinners knew that the Gentiles

knew that they're not behaving the way that the Jews did, or even or that the Christians did. I don't think Paul needed to to lay out a chapter like this to prove the Gentiles were sinners.

They are, and they would certainly be condemned by everything he said here, but throughout the passage, Paul alludes to Old Testament things in his description that apply in the Old Testament to the Jews, uniquely to the Jews. And it's interesting when he's done here, in chapter 2 verse 1, he says, 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. Now who's he talking to in verse 2, in chapter 2? Well look at verse 17. Indeed you are called a Jew, and you rest on the law, and you make your boast in God, that you know his will, and you approve of the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and you're 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.

This is how the Jews felt about themselves. This is who he's speaking to in chapter 2 verse 1. You're inexcusable, O man, if you judge those who do these, because you do them too. Now he starts that with the word therefore, as if this is the natural conclusion of what he's just said in chapter 1. Since chapter 1 is true, therefore you are inexcusable.

Why? Because the Jews did all these same things, as he says in chapter 2 verse 1, but more than that, he has crafted chapter 1 to make it a stealthy description of Jews history. Everything in it, you find in the Old Testament history of the Jews, and many of the things he says are almost direct quotes from Old Testament statements about the Jews. In Romans 11:8, he says, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in their unrighteousness.

Not so much in the Old Testament, but in 1st Thessalonians, Paul makes the exact statement about the Jews, the unbelieving Jews. In 1st Thessalonians 2, verses 14 through 16, Paul said, for you brethren, meaning the Thessalonian Christians who are Gentiles, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Jews, who, the Jews, killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets.

They have persecuted us. They do not please God. They're contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins, but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.

Now notice he talks about they're suppressing the truth. They won't let Paul preach the Gentiles, or when he does, they try to stop him. They're trying to stop the gospel from reaching the Gentiles.

Jesus said that to the Pharisees too in Matthew 23, verse 13, he said, woe unto you scribes and Pharisees and hypocrites, for you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men, for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. The Jews don't want to go in, but they try to keep the Gentiles from being able to go in. They try to stop Paul from preaching to the Gentiles, he says.

He says the wrath has come upon them to the uttermost, meaning the wrath of God which will come upon them in AD 70 is looming. It's upon them. They are about to be destroyed because of this kind of behavior.

Now that's what he says in Romans 11:8, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against these people who suppress the truth. That's exactly what he says the Jews are doing in 1st Thessalonians 2. Beyond this, in verse 19, he says the truth was manifest in them, or among them, it can be rendered. And he says a little later on in verse 21, they knew God.

Okay, well who knew God? The Gentiles? When did they know God? When was the truth manifest among them? It was certainly manifest among the Jews through the law and the prophets got manifested as truth, but when did that ever happen to the Gentiles? Like never before Jesus came. But he says they didn't like the truth. Now it says in verse 22, they profess to be wise.

That's exactly what he says about them in chapter 2, verse 20. They see themselves as instructors of the foolish, as teachers of babes. They think they're so wise.

He said, well they think they're wise, but they become fools. And they made idols. Did they? Did Israel make idols? They did.

That's why they went into Babylon. That's why they went into captivity. They were hopelessly idolatrous.

They changed the glory of God, he says in verse 23. That expression comes from Psalm 106:20, where it says, thus they changed their glory into the image of an ox that eats grass. That's speaking about the Jews.

Another Old Testament passage, Jeremiah 2:11, says, has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods, but my people have changed their glory for what does not profit. God is their glory. They've exchanged him for idols.

And that's the phrase he used in verse 23. They changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the image made like corruptible man. Gentiles didn't.

They never knew the glory of God. They never had Yahweh. They didn't change out the glory of God for something less.

They never had the glory of God. They always were idolaters. This is Jewish history.

When it says in verse 24, God gave them up. In verse 26, for this reason God gave them up. In verse 28, and because they did not retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over.

This is a phrase from Psalm 81. Psalm 81 verse 12 says, so I gave them over to their own stubborn heart to walk in their own counsels. That's what God said about Israel when they were hopelessly idolatrous.

God said, I gave them up. I gave them over to do what they wanted to do, which is what Paul says they did. In Acts 7, Stephen is preaching about the history of Israel.

He says, then God turned and gave them up to worship the host of heaven. Acts 7 42. God gave them up to do their own thing.

Now when it says they burned in lust toward one another, men against men and so forth, did Israel practice sodomy? They did. Not all the time, but at its worst times when it worshipped idols, they did. In fact, we read of some of the better kings chasing the sodomites out of the land.

For example, in 1 Kings, I'm sorry, yeah, 1 Kings 14 24, it says, and there were also sodomites in the land. This is the King James Version. And they did according to the abominations of the nations.

The word sodomites in the New King James says perverted persons. In 1 Kings 22 46, and the remnants of the sodomites, which remained in the days of his father, Azaz, he took out of the land. That is when the reformers of Israel were trying to reform, so they had to drive out the sodomites.

Yeah, the Jews were involved in sodomy, just like Paul says they were. Now, maybe more importantly than that, verse 32 says, who knowing the righteous judgment of God? Did the Gentiles know the righteous judgment of God? We know that Israel did, but they knew it because of the law. To them, the righteous judgment of God was revealed in the law.

In Deuteronomy 4 8, Moses says, and what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in this law which I set before you this day? Okay, the righteous standards and judgments in Psalm 119 verse 62 says, at midnight I will rise to give thanks to you because of your righteous judgments. Psalm 119 is all about the law, about the Torah, and David says, I will rise and give praise to you in the middle of the night because of your righteous judgments. Paul says these people knew the righteous judgments of God.

Did the Gentiles know the righteous judgments of God? Where'd they hear them? They

didn't have the law. And then at the very end of chapter 1, he says, they not only do the same, but they approve of those who practice them. In Psalm 50 verse 18, rebuking the wicked in Israel, God says, when you saw a thief you consented with him and have been a partaker with adulterers.

That is, even the ones who didn't practice it put up with it and consented to it. By the way, we shouldn't get too smug. Anyone who watches modern movies has probably consented to some pretty sinful actions they've seen.

Not consented in saying that's okay, but we pay for them. We pay for them by paying the price of seeing the movie. You know, we certainly, God does not want his people doing those things or consenting to them.

We need to be careful about what we may inadvertently consent to. But you see that these, the wording of chapter 1 is all about Israel. Yes, the Gentiles too, but that would go without saying.

Paul didn't have to argue that the Gentiles are sinners. Everyone knew that. What he needed to convince the Jews of is that they too are sinners.

And what he says is in verse 12 of chapter 2 or verse 11, there is no partiality with God. That is, the Jews don't get a special standard, a special break, a special concession because they're Jews. There's no partiality.

God doesn't distinguish between a person's race and another person's race. He says, for as many as have sinned without law, meaning the Gentiles, will also perish without law. As many have sinned in the law, meaning the Jews, will be judged by law.

So they're all in trouble if they sin. For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified. I thought Paul didn't think people were justified by keeping the law.

Well, he said if you do the law, that'll please God. God will approve of you. You'll be vindicated if you're obedient.

No one really is completely, but the point he's making is you Jews think that you're justified because you hear the law. You go to Tabernacle, excuse me, you go to the synagogue and hear the law every week and you think you're more righteous because you're hearing the law. And he says, no, it's not hearing, it's doing.

God's looking at what you're doing, not what you're hearing. He says, for when Gentiles who do not have the law by nature do the things contained 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. In the day when God shall judge the secrets of

men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

Now, these Gentiles who do by nature from the heart things written in the law. This is the point that I was challenged on once many years ago because I said about this what every commentator says, what every preacher says. And someone said to me afterwards, what they said was, by the way, what I said was, even Gentiles who haven't heard the gospel, even unbelievers, have a conscience that tells them some things are right and some are wrong, which is the law of God written in their hearts.

Now, is it true? Yes, it is true. Gentiles do have a conscience. Therefore, that statement makes sense.

But is that what Paul's talking about? That's the point. Almost all commentators say, see, Paul says that even unbelievers have a conscience. Well, maybe they do, but that's not what Paul's saying.

When I preached that the first time and when I went at the School of Biblical Studies, the leader of the school said privately to me, I'd like to talk to you sometime about your doctrine about the Gentiles having the law of God written in their hearts. And we were passing and we didn't have a chance to talk about it. It got me thinking, wait a minute, you're right.

The law of God written in the heart is specifically said to be a condition of the New Covenant according to Jeremiah 31, 31 through 34, that God will write his laws in their hearts. That's the believers. That's those who are in the New Covenant, not the pagans.

He doesn't write his law in their hearts. And then I realized, especially as I began to see what Paul's doing here, he's telling the Jews, you think you're better than Gentiles because you're circumcised and you have the law. But there are Gentiles, namely Christian Gentiles in your own church, who actually keep the law without being put under the law.

They actually live a righteous life, keeping the righteous requirements of the law without ever being under the law. These Gentiles have never been under the law. But look, their law is written in their heart because they're Christians.

They've been born again. These are Gentiles who you look down on, but they are as good a law keeper as you are in terms of the righteous requirements of the law. Yeah, they're not circumcised.

But is that really what matters? Paul goes into that a little later. For example, he says in 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.

Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, that's

what he was talking about a couple verses ago, back in verse 14, Gentiles keeping the righteous requirements of the law. He says, when an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? That is, he'll be counted as a Jew. Why? Because he says in verse 28 and 24, he is not a Jew who's one outwardly, nor is circumcision, which is outward and of the flesh, but he's a Jew who's one inwardly.

And circumcision is that which is of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter, whose praise is not from men, but from God. So Paul is saying, Gentiles in the church have the law written in their hearts and they keep by nature, from the heart, the righteous requirements of the law. They're not under the law.

They're not like you, not like you Jews. They don't have the law, but they have it in them. And that will be counted by God as circumcision.

Why? Because circumcision is not physical, as far as God's concerned, but the circumcision of the heart. He's saying the Gentiles he's talking about are circumcised in their hearts. God counts them as circumcised because they live a Christian life, basically, and which is much more moral than many Jews live.

Because back in chapter 2, he says in 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? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? Now the average Jew would say, no, I don't. And correctly so. Most Jews probably didn't steal, they didn't commit adultery, probably didn't rob temples.

But some did. Everybody knows that some Jews in history, Old Testament and apparently in Paul's time too, they would not be able to say, no, we Jews don't do that. Well, some Jews do, just like some Gentiles don't.

The point is, if you're thinking that being part of the solidarity called Jews makes you something more righteous, can't you think of some Jews who commit adultery? Can't you think of some Jews who steal? Can't you think of some Jews who rob temples? There was actually a famous case shortly before this letter was written of two guys, two Jewish guys came to Rome teaching Gentile proselytes the law, and one of their students was the wife of a senator in Rome. And they persuaded her to give a big gift to take to the temple in Jerusalem, and she gave it to him, and they absconded with it. It became scandalous because she was a senator's wife, and this was a scandal in Rome to the Jews, because Jewish guys had absconded with money given to the temple.

So, one says, do you rob temples? Now, the average Jewish would say, well, I never robbed a temple. But that's not what he's getting at. He's not saying, did you, Mr. Jew, ever rob a temple? If so, most would say, sorry, you missed me with that one.

I didn't. But if he's speaking collectively of Jewish identity, Jews as a class, do Jews as a class do these kinds of things? Well, there's some famous cases where they did. Do Gentiles as a class do these things? Some do, some don't.

So, what's the difference between a Jew and a Gentile? If a Gentile keeps the righteous requirements of the law, and you don't, you're a Jew and he's a Gentile, but he's circumcised. You're not circumcised as far as God's concerned. That's what Paul's saying.

He's trying to make it very clear that being a Jew, being circumcised, doesn't automatically place you on some kind of a tier above the Gentiles, as Jews typically thought. Now, in chapter three, and we need to move off this very fast, but these are the foundational chapters that will help us understand what Paul's trying to do in this letter. He raises some questions.

You know, is there any benefit in being a Jew, being circumcised? He says, yeah, there is, because especially they had the oracles of God, they had the scriptures. But then, in verse nine, he says, what then, are we any better than they? Now, what he means is, we Jews, are we any better than the Gentiles? We had an advantage. He starts off by saying, is there any advantage of being Jewish? Yes, there is a tremendous advantage.

We had the oracles of God. Well, did we turn out better than them? Apparently not. Are we any better than they? No, we're not.

Yes, we had more advantages, but no, we did not live up to our privileges, and we aren't better than Gentiles in our behavior, in general, as a race. He says, therefore, for we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. Again, the mention of the Greeks here sometimes encouraged people to say, well, chapter one, that was about the Greeks.

No, what Paul's assuming is, all his Jewish readers, and they're his main target of this discussion, they know the Greeks are sinners, but they don't know they are. He says, I've just proved that you are, so now we know Jews and Greeks are under sin. You're just as bad as they are.

Now, he quotes quite a few verses from the Old Testament, in verses 10 through 18, and this has confused many people. Most of the verses he quotes are from the Psalms. In one case, he quotes from Isaiah, but it's a medley of phrases out of the Old Testament describing wicked people, and it says, there's none righteous, no not one.

There's none who understands. There's none who seeks after God. They've all gone out of the way.

They've all together become unprofitable. There's none that does good, no not one. 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.

Destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace they have not known. There is none that fears God. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Now, you can see in the margin of your Bible what verses he's quoting from the Old Testament. As I say, there's a bunch of them from Psalms, one at least from Isaiah, but what's this doing? Now, Calvinists use this particular passage to prove one of their most unsupportable points, and that is the point called total depravity. Total depravity is not the doctrine that everybody is sinful, but it is the doctrine that everyone who is not regenerated only sins, does not love God, cannot love God, cannot believe, cannot repent.

These things cannot be done by someone who's totally depraved. Now, of course, biblical doctrine is that any sinner can repent and can believe if they will, but the Calvinist doctrine is no, they don't have a free will in this matter. If you're not regenerated by God, you can't even seek God, and what they like to quote most is verse 11, there's none that seeks after God.

So, they say, see, Paul said nobody seeks after God, and they say, of course, that's different if you're regenerated, but in the unregenerated will never seek after God. You have to be born again before you can seek God, and that's what Calvinism teaches. However, Paul didn't say none of the unregenerate seek after God, nor does the Psalm 14 that he's quoting.

It doesn't say the unregenerate don't seek after God, it just says none seek after God. If you read this particular Psalm in its context, there are some who seek after God because, as you get further down, it says God is among the congregation of the righteous, or the generation of the righteous. Oh, so there is a generation of the righteous, but nobody seeks God.

Now, what David is doing is using hyperbole. When he says no one seeks God, no one does good, no one's, you know, no one's righteous, David is not saying that he doesn't seek God, or that there aren't some others who do. He's using hyperbole, just like you might say nobody drives a six-shift anymore, you know.

Nobody has a car without coffee cup holders in it, nobody. Well, there might be some old cars around that are like that, but the point is it's a hyperbole. If you say no one believes the earth is flat anymore, well, there happen to be a group of people who do, but really, generally speaking, probably nobody does.

Now, the truth is that that's how the Old Testament prophets and psalmists wrote. They're writing poetry, for one thing, and they use hyperbole a great deal. More than

that, they are not speaking anthropologically.

They're not trying to give a doctrine of total depravity. They're speaking prophetically denouncing their generation. They're speaking against the moral state of their times.

They're not talking about everyone being born a certain way. That's not the discussion in those psalms or in Isaiah, and in fact, they are describing Jews. Every one of those passages, the psalmist or the prophet, are describing his own people, and that's why Paul quotes it.

He doesn't quote it to try to get across a doctrine of total depravity. He quotes it to point out that the Jews are no better than the Gentiles. The very point he's been making up to this point.

He says in verse 9, we have previously charged that the Jews and Greeks are all understood as it is written. Now, what is written here, if you look in the context, every statement is made about Jewish people. So he says, I have told you that the Jews are just as sinful as the Greeks.

Your own Bible tells you that many times. Here's the description of many of Jews, and to sum it up in verse 19, he says, now we know that whatever the law says, it means the Old Testament scriptures, referring to the passages he mentioned, none of which were in the law. They were in the Psalms and the Prophets, but sometimes the law refers to the whole Old Testament oracles of God.

We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, meaning the Jews. The point he's making is, this is not talking about Gentiles. The law doesn't really address Gentiles that much.

These ones didn't. It's speaking to those who are under the law. It's talking to Jews.

He's saying this is a description of the Jews by their own prophets, showing that they can be every bit as obnoxious to God as Gentiles can. Now in verse 21, he's made his point. He says, 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, which is 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, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be 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 this present time his righteousness that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Now this is a layout of the gospel. He's pointed out that you guys who are under the law are not any better than those who are not under the law.

So righteousness apparently doesn't come by giving people the law because God gave Israel the law and it didn't make him righteous. He says, but there is a righteousness which is not related to the law. It was witnessed to by the law and the prophets, so it's not some new, you know, novelty idea, but it is what the Old Testament says, the just shall live by faith.

He already said that earlier. He said this is righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe for there's no difference. Meaning there's no difference between the Jew and the Gentile, those who have the law and those who don't, for all Jews and Gentiles have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Now he says we are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that's in Christ. How is it that righteousness can come to us apart from law and apart from behavior? Well, it says Christ was set forth as a propitiation by his blood, propitiation as a sacrifice of atonement to demonstrate his righteousness as God's righteousness. God is righteous in spite of the fact that he can justify people who aren't righteous.

A judge who lets criminals go scot-free as if they're innocent is not a righteous judge. He's a corrupt judge. How could God justify us who are not innocent and still be righteous himself? Well, he says here's how.

God sent forth Jesus and he'll explain this later in chapter 5 who represents the whole human race like a new Adam and let him stand in for us just like Adam stood in for us in the Garden of Eden. So Christ stands in for us for the human race as a second Adam and he is put to death the crime, the penalty for our crimes is put on him. He says that way God demonstrates in verse 26 at the present time his righteousness that he may be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

The one who has faith in Jesus is someone who's got a criminal record. Everybody does. How can God justify? Well, he can be just and justify them because he has punished sin in the substitute Christ.

There is a sacrifice that stood in for us, Christ, and he suffered the penalty. Therefore, if the penalty has been executed on our representative, there is no double jeopardy. You can't have the penalty on you too.

So God justly can forgive you, can justify you, can treat you as if you've never sinned because you are in Christ and he stood in for you. You were involved in that when he died. You were crucified with him, he says in Galatians 2.20. He says in verse 27, where is boasting then? It's excluded.

By what law? Of works? No, by the law of faith. And by the word law here means principle. By what principle is boasting excluded? By the principle of obedience to law and works? No, that would actually allow for boasting.

Boasting is excluded by the principle of faith because you can't claim that when you believe something that you've done some difficult or virtuous thing. We believe things all the time. Children believe their parents.

We believe anyone that we think is honest. It's effortless. It's not a work to believe.

It's just acknowledging the faithfulness of the person that we're believing. So once we recognize that God is faithful, we believe him. But that's not doing a work.

That's not earning anything. So we can't boast if we're saved simply by believing and the only reason we believe is because he's faithful. Our faith actually reflects on him more than us.

If I believe, if I trust my wife, it's because I have found her to be faithful. So if I tell people I trust my wife, that's not telling you something about me. That's telling you something about her.

It's not my virtue. It's her virtue that's reflected there. So I believe God.

That's not my virtue. That's God's virtue. It's not.

He's faithful. Why wouldn't I believe him? It's a commendation of God, not me. So there's no boasting if I'm saved by simply believing, by faith.

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Verse 29, or is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes of the Gentiles also. Now the Jews thought he was the God of the Jews only and the Gentiles might be able to sneak in on certain terms like circumcision and so forth.

He says no. He made everybody, not just the Jews. When Abraham was called, he was called to be a blessing to all the families of the earth.

That was the promise. God's the God of everybody, not just the Jews. That's what Paul says here.

Since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith, do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not. On the contrary, we establish the law. Now something needs to be said about this because of how this verse is so often misunderstood.

Sabbatarians and Torah observant people say, Paul said we establish the law. We don't make the law void. So we Christians keep the law.

No, Paul didn't say we keep the law. He said we establish it. What does he mean by that? Well if there weren't the artificial chapter divisions put in the Bible, we could see easily because he goes on to answer that question.

What do you mean we establish the law by this justification by faith? How does that message establish the law? Well let's look at the law, the Torah. Let's look at Abraham. He was in the Torah.

Genesis is part of the Torah. It says, what shall we say then that Abraham our father has found according to flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which he may boast, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

Now to him who works the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt. But to him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.

And he quotes Psalm 32, blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and those whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin. Now just in case you're wondering, we're not going to go beyond this tonight.

I'm gonna have to next month pick it up again. There's just too much here. And I have been in my mind skimming up to this point.

But it's crazy to try to do this in one evening. But let me just tell you what he has said in verses 1 through 8 of chapter 4. He has said, when we preach justification by faith, not by works, we're simply agreeing with what the Torah, the law, says. We're establishing the truth of what the law itself affirms.

What does it affirm? Well, what's it affirm about Abraham? He's in the Torah. It says Abraham believed in the Lord and it, his faith, was counted to him for righteousness. That's justification.

So Paul has two favorite verses from the Old Testament about justification by faith. One is Habakkuk 2.4, the just shall live by faith. And the other is Genesis 15.6, Abraham believed God and it's counted him for righteousness.

So he chooses the law and the prophets. He points out that Abraham was not justified by works, but he was justified by faith. Therefore, the law, the Torah, teaches justification by faith in the case of Abraham.

And if someone says, yeah, but he lived before the law. Of course he couldn't be justified by the works of the law before the law was given. But after God gave Moses the law, then, of course, then that becomes the means by which people are justified.

And we Jews were given the law, so we're justified by the law. But then he points out David. Now David sinned and he lived under the law.

That was after Moses' time. He was a Jew living under the law and he committed some terrible sins. In fact, the sins that David committed, there was no law that would cover them except execution.

The law just said adulterers and murderers, put them to death. There was not even a sacrifice available in Leviticus or in the law that would cover murder or adultery. There simply was no way to be justified of that.

You had to be put to death. David, however, was forgiven because he humbled himself before God. He repented and God saw his revenge and said, okay, I'm not going to kill you.

That's what you deserve. I'm not going to kill you. And therefore David was justified without the law.

In fact, the law could do nothing but condemn him to death. God, the grace of God, spared his life, not the law. And so he quotes David in Psalm 32, which was written after David repented of that particular sin.

Psalm 32, where David said, blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven. He means himself. And whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute sin. Now he had committed sin, terrible sin, but he saw himself as one that the Lord was not imputing that sin to. Instead he was imputing him to be not sinner, a righteous man.

He had imputed righteousness without the law. So what Paul has done is said, okay, the law doesn't, is not going to save anyone. Being a Jew under the law, that's not going to help you.

If you keep the law, that is if you are righteous in your life, well then you'll be as good as any Gentile who's righteous, but being a Jew won't make a difference. And this is the message of righteousness apart from the law. The righteousness of God apart from the law, he said in chapter 3 verse 21, which was witnessed in the Old Testament by the law and the prophets.

And it's because Jesus took the penalty for us, therefore God can say the penalty has been served. I am going to let you off, but I'm still just because I have not left your crime unpunished. It has been punished in a substitute.

Now all we need then is to be joined to Christ through faith. And we are justified by faith, not by works. But he's afraid people are going to say, but then you're throwing out the law.

Well, you know, this isn't really against the law. We're not destroying the law. We're

actually, we're actually establishing what the law says.

The law said that Abram was justified by faith. That's what the law says. We're establishing that fact with our gospel.

In fact, it was not only Abram, but David. And presumably Paul's implying and everyone in the Old Testament who had faith. If David was forgiven by faith, if Abram was, then presumably everyone who had faith was.

And so he's argued and proven that the law does not distinguish a man as dear to God. But faith is recognized as justifying the sinner. Therefore the Jew has no particular advantage over the Gentile.

He had an advantage. The Jews had the advantage of having the law and the prophets before the Gentiles had any access to them. But the Jews didn't use that advantage and they didn't turn out better.

And they were just as sinful as Gentiles. And by the way, many of the prophets point that out in the Old Testament. They were just as bad as the Gentiles.

Now we can't go any further tonight because of the limits on our time. And so we will come back next time, which is a long time from now, but we'll take hopefully the rest of the Book of Romans. All right, well then why don't we close? Thank you, Father, for this evening.

We thank you for your Word and for those who are interested in knowing your Word and I hope following it. I pray that your Holy Spirit will continue to give us insight into all the scriptures and into Romans as we've given some special attention to that tonight. I pray you bless each one as they go where they go from here.

And we do pray for our nation, which in the judgment of many is on the brink of perhaps a war, perhaps nuclear war. And we know that if we had a more intelligent set of leaders in Washington that we probably could have averted, but we don't have any confidence in them. Lord, our confidence is in you, not necessarily to spare America, though we do ask for that.

I don't know if we deserve to be spared the way we've gone, but we would desire you to spare the country from disaster, if it's your will, and to avert the kind of war that seems to be looming, if it is your will. And especially, Lord, that you will remove from positions of power any who hate you, any who despise all that you stand for, who rule with injustice, and you'll replace them with leaders who will fear God and do justly. And we ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.