

Romans 3B (2017)

- There is a very old joke I know you've heard that goes something like this:

A traveler on a country road comes to a creek where the bridge has been swept away by a recent flood. The traveler sees an old farmer standing next to where the bridge used to be and asks, "Is there a way to back track and find some where else to get across the creek?"

The farmer responds, "Yep. Just, go back two miles turn right and... No, go back one mile and turn left..." The farmer stops for a minute, shrugs his shoulders, scratches his head, and then says to the traveler, "Come to think of it, you can't get there from here."

- "You can't get there from here" is an appropriate way to summarize Romans 1-3
 - Men in their ignorance have imagined countless ways they might merit entrance into heaven when they die
 - All those inventions can be categorized into one of the four religious lies Paul has addressed in these chapters
 - Paganism, Moralism, Nomianism and patriarchal Judaism
- Each of these categories possess a critical flaw
 - Pagans worship creation yet overlook the question of Who created everything they worship
 - Moralists judged themselves worthy of heaven, while supposing their obvious sin won't disqualify them in the end
 - Nomianists define for themselves rules for entry into heaven making sure the standard is low enough they can reach it
 - And patriarchal Judaism ignores all questions of standards or personal goodness while trusting that God plays favorites
- Paul has shot down all four categories by exposing each system's flaw
 - None of these imagined ways to heaven are *actual* ways to heaven

- Because none of them corrects for the reason why men were barred from the presence of God in the first place
- None of them answers the fundamental question of how did mankind get into this situation in the first place?
- Paul raised this fundamental question in Romans 3:10-18 during last week's study
 - The problem is our sin nature, which produces our sinful actions
 - We were born with a spiritual birth defect, and this defect must be corrected before we may enjoy fellowship with God
 - We inherit our sin nature from our parents, who inherited it from their parents, and so on
- We all descend from a common ancestor who passed along his sinful nature through reproduction
 - Placing all humanity in our common predicament of sin with all its horrible consequences
 - And unless, and until, we correct our sin nature, we cannot reach the standard of perfection required by God
- So to summarize, we aren't sinners because we sin; we sin because we're sinners
 - So it's not enough to address our sinful behaviors
 - Even if we could erase our past track record of sin and avoid any future sinful acts, nevertheless we would *still* be sinners by nature
 - And it's our sinful nature that bars us from heaven
 - So if you're trying to get to Heaven without changing your spiritual nature...you can't get there from here
- So because we couldn't solve this problem in our own strength, God made a way available to us

[Rom. 3:21](#) But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

[Rom. 3:22](#) even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;

[Rom. 3:23](#) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

[Rom. 3:24](#) being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;

[Rom. 3:25](#) whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;

[Rom. 3:26](#) for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

- These verses begin Paul's summary of the solution to our sin
 - The summary runs from vs.21-26 and is one sentence in the Greek language
 - This is Paul's unfolding of the plan of God to bring men and women into heaven despite our sin nature
 - God's plan has seven parts, which we will examine one at a time
 - And Paul himself will examine each part in depth over the next two chapters
 - All together, God's plan addresses all the problems Paul has raised in his earlier chapters concerning the sin nature of mankind
 - God's solution does away with condemnation and in the process He overcomes the spiritual barrier created by our fallen nature
 - Remember, Scripture declares that every human being is born spiritually blind
 - Our sinful spiritual nature blinds us to spiritual truth and prevents us from truly seeking for God
 - But God's solution solves all these problems
- It begins with Paul's opening statement which we read briefly last week: apart from law (no "the" in Greek)
 - I call this first part The Disclaimer because it sets aside any notion of performing works to obtain righteousness
 - And based on Paul's analysis of religious lies, this makes perfect sense

- Obviously, our solution to entering heaven won't be found in following Law, not even God's own Law
- Because a new course of actions can't address our sin nature
- Simply put, our problem isn't *what* we do; our problem is *who* we are
 - Who we are spiritually drives what we do, and therefore we can't solve our problem merely by changing what we do
 - We need a new spiritual nature, not a new list of works
- We need to find a way to change who we are, spiritually speaking
 - We need a nature that is as good as God's nature, for that's the standard for heaven
 - Once we obtain the spiritual nature of God, we can expect that our behaviors will change as well
- Which moves us to Part 2 of the solution: the Righteousness of God manifested
 - Since we cannot help ourselves, we have no choice but to look to the mercy of God
 - And God grants us mercy by assigning us His righteousness in place of our unrighteousness
 - We trade in our old nature for the perfect nature of God Himself
 - This solution makes perfect sense given what we've learned earlier about our sinful nature
 - It won't be enough for us to simply try harder to do better
 - We must discard the source of our bad behaviors
 - We must become perfect by nature, which then will lead to better behaviors
 - And the only nature that is perfect belongs to God Himself
 - Furthermore, Paul says the righteousness of God is manifested to us
 - The Greek word for manifested could be translated "is now forevermore revealed"
 - Paul is clarifying that God's solution is something brought to us; it's not something we discover on our own

- Here again, this makes perfect sense, since we know our sinful spiritual nature is a barrier
 - It blinds us to spiritual truth and leads us away from seeking God
 - So how else could we ever hope to find a solution to our problem unless God Himself should reveal it to us
- And Paul adds that the revelation of God's righteousness began long ago in the word of God
 - The Law and the Prophets foretold of God's plan to give sinful mankind His righteousness
 - The Law refers to all that Moses wrote
 - And the Prophets refer to the prophetic works of scripture
 - Collectively, Paul's referring to the entire Hebrew Bible
 - The Old Testament bears witness to God's plan to bring us His righteousness through a great Good Cop, Bad Cop routine
 - Both show us the impossibility of reaching the standard of heaven on our own
 - The law shows the impossibility of God's standard
 - While the prophets reminded God's people how far away they were from that standard
 - Secondly, the Law and the prophets taught that the Lord would make a way for His people to receive His righteousness
 - For example, in the Law we read the story of Abraham being declared righteous because of his faith
 - Or of Abraham taking Isaac to the mountain where he tells his son this:

Gen. 22:8 Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

- These moments suggest God's plan to bring us His righteousness by His own means
- Later in the prophets, God says He will bring us a new righteous spirit

[Jer. 31:31](#) “Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,

[Jer. 31:32](#) not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord.

[Jer. 31:33](#) “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

[Jer. 31:34](#) “They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

- So Paul’s explanation for how we find heaven isn’t new or surprising, at least not to anyone who has read their Bible
 - Some Christians mistakenly assume that God offered men and women of times past one solution for heaven in the Old Covenant
 - But now He offers us a different solution in the New Covenant in Jesus
 - But Paul says the solution has always been the same
 - We need the righteousness of God, and this is what the Old Testament taught too
 - Paul explores the significance of this fact in the next chapter, so we’ll wait until then to deal with it
- So Paul is teaching that our solution to reaching heaven is by obtaining the righteousness of God
 - But naturally, the next question we should ask is *how* does one obtain God’s perfection, especially after we’ve already lived a life of sin?
 - How is this even possible?
 - That’s what Chapters 4 and 5 explain, but for now Paul summarizes the answer in Part 3
 - In v.22 Paul says God’s righteousness is revealed to us through faith in Jesus Christ

- Pay particular note of Paul's choice of preposition: through
- The preposition "through" emphasizes the word "manifested"
- It explains how we came to know we obtained God's righteousness
- In Heaven, God grants a person His righteousness as an act of His grace and mercy
 - Then His heavenly decision was manifested (i.e., made known, revealed) THROUGH a person's faith in Christ
 - So then faith becomes the instrument through which we come to know God's righteousness
- Theologians refer to this process as imputed righteousness
 - The word imputed means to attribute to an individual the actions or qualities of another individual as a result of the other's actions
 - For example, when a child is adopted, that child is imputed with a new family name
 - The child received the quality of the parents because of an action taken by the parents
 - The child did nothing to acquire the parents' family name
 - But by the actions of the parents, the child was imputed a new name
 - And so it is for those who receive God's mercy
 - God imputes His righteousness to us
 - God assigns us His spiritual nature (i.e., His righteousness) because of an act of another
 - We didn't obtain that righteousness for ourselves; it was given to us
 - And the act that made it possible wasn't our own either; God acted to bring it about
- So once God imputes His righteousness to us, how do we become aware of it?
 - Paul says the righteous of God has been manifested to us *through* faith in Jesus Christ

- Paul never teaches that we obtain righteousness *because* of our faith in Jesus Christ
- Saying that would imply that our action of believing is a “switch” that lead God to impute His righteousness to us
- If we say we are saved *because* of our faith, it puts our faith in the driver’s seat of a process which God then responds to
- And that flip of the narrative of scripture suggests we initiate the process of our own salvation
- It would be like saying that an adopted child first took for himself a certain family name, which then lead that family to adopt the child
- Remember, Paul has already established from scripture that we are all lost, without an understanding of spiritual truth and do not seek God
 - So if the process of our salvation did depend on us taking the first step, no one would ever be saved
 - Because by our fallen nature, we have no inclination to take that step
 - It would like offering a comatose patient the cure to his condition...he can’t respond to the invitation
- So Paul says righteousness comes through (or sometimes Paul says “by”) faith to indicate that faith is the means God uses to deliver us His mercy
 - Like a man who receives a telegram announcing he has received a large inheritance on the occasion of his uncle’s death
 - The man became an heir the moment his uncle died
 - But it waited for the arrival of the telegram before the man became aware of that grant
 - So we could say that the uncle’s grant of inheritance was manifested or revealed through a telegram message
- Now Paul moves to Part 4: This grant of salvation is for all who believe, there is no distinction
 - Paul’s emphasis in Part 4 is on the word “all”, meaning both Jew and Gentile

- God's plan of salvation will be manifested in everyone by the same means: belief, that is faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- The Jews didn't receive one way to heaven while Gentiles received another
- All saints, whether Old Testament or New Testament, have always been granted God's righteousness through the same means
- And this makes sense, Paul says in v.23, because all (both Jew and Gentile) have the same problem
 - All people have sinned and therefore all have fallen short of the mark required to enter Heaven
 - Once again, Paul says that the standard for entry into Heaven is to share in the nature of God
 - It's not enough to say we have no sin; we cannot even have a nature to sin
 - We must be as perfect as God is perfect, and anything less is to fall short of the glory of God
- If all men are in the same predicament, then all men need the same solution
 - So God's manner of saving men from their sin has never varied over time
 - What has varied is the degree of that plan that God has explained in His word
 - In early times, the need for God's mercy and a provision of His righteousness was evident
 - But what was unknown was exactly how the Lord would make that provision for us
 - But now that plan is fully known, as the writer of Hebrews explains:

Heb. 1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

Heb. 1:2 in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

- The next question we might ask Paul is how can God grant us His righteousness just because we believe in Jesus Christ?
 - How can God overlook our sin and wipe the slate clean?
 - Paul's fifth point answers that question in v.24
 - We are justified as a gift of God's grace because Christ Jesus has redeemed us
 - Let's look at three important theological ideas in that verse
 - First, we are justified
 - The word is a legal term meaning acquitted
 - To be acquitted means to be declared innocent, as when a defendant is acquitted by a jury at trial
 - Remember, to be acquitted doesn't mean we are actually innocent
 - Rather, it's a declaration made by a court
 - And the effect is to relieve the person from paying any penalty
 - That's why our judicial system declares a person "not guilty" rather than innocent
 - So God's means of assigning us His righteousness begins with God's court rendering a verdict of not guilty for us
- Secondly, Paul says this verdict is a gift given to us by the grace of God
 - Notice that the gift of God is a declaration of our innocence
 - The gift is not the opportunity to be declared innocent
 - The gift is a declaration already made for us
 - So that the decision to enter that verdict was a decision God made as a result of His grace toward us
 - Grace means undeserved favor, with an emphasis on the word undeserved
 - God's favor toward us was not triggered by anything we said or did

- God determines to declare us justified simply as an act of His grace
- Like a defendant appearing at trial only to learn that the judge has already decided to acquit him
- Furthermore, justification is an act, not a process
 - A defendant is declared innocent (or not guilty) in an instant, and there is no process for bringing this to pass
 - The declaration is true instantly, and forever remains true
 - Never again can the decision be revisited
 - Our jurisprudence includes a concept of double jeopardy which finds its source in the biblical idea of justification
- Finally, God's actions to acquit are valid and lawful because another has redeemed us before the Law
 - Paul says Jesus has redeemed us
 - Redemption is also a legal term and it means to have paid a ransom to free one in bondage
 - So a slave could be redeemed from a debt owed his master
 - Or a prisoner could be redeemed from prison by payment of a bond to the court
 - Similarly, all men and women are under bondage to sin, in debt to God's court for our lifetime of sin
 - That debt must be paid or else a verdict of innocence would be a miscarriage of justice
 - We know God is perfect, without sin Himself, and therefore He can only declare us innocent of our sin should our debt be paid
 - Paul says our justification is legally possible because Christ paid our price redeeming us from the penalty we rightly deserved
 - Speaking personally, all believers should say the following:
 - God declared me righteous, not guilty of my sins, apart from anything I've said or done, merely because of His grace

- And He was able to do so because Jesus Christ was willing to pay my price for my sins
- What was the payment? Paul explains the payment in part six of his summary found in v.25
 - The payment God required was a blood sacrifice to satisfy God's justice
 - The Biblical word for this concept is propitiation, and it's a very important concept in our faith
 - The idea of propitiation is found all across the Bible, and it's one of the most prevalent concepts in the Old Testament
 - Remember, I asked how can God be fair in erasing our record of sin and assigning us His righteousness?
 - Isn't that unjust, by definition?
 - If justice means the guilty are punished and the innocent are set free, than wouldn't it be unjust for God to set us, the guilty, free?
 - Yes it would, unless a satisfactory payment is made on our behalf
 - If a payment were offered that satisfied the Judge's demand for justice, then the Judge could be just in allowing the guilty to go free
 - Imagine if you were guilty of failing to pay taxes, but as you arrive for your day in court, you learn that a neighbor has paid all your back taxes and even the penalties for you
 - Since the demands of the court have been met, the judge could set you free justly
 - And that's where Christ's propitiation comes in for us
- Paul says God publicly displayed Christ as a blood sacrifice, or propitiation
 - The penalty God decreed for sin was death

Gen. 2:16 The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely;

Gen. 2:17 but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

- The penalty of death God decreed for sin was spiritual death, which means eternal separation from God

- When Adam brought all mankind into sin, he brought us all under this penalty
- We may escape this penalty by God's grace manifested through our faith in Jesus, but still the wrath of God must be satisfied
 - Wrath is the Bible's word for a holy God's just response against that which is not righteous
 - To remain just, God's holy wrath against sin must be satisfied
 - And since the penalty for sin is death, God demands a substitutionary payment of death, a propitiation
- But the death that substitutes for us cannot be that of another sinner, since then their death would merely become payment for their own sin
 - No, our propitiation must be someone who was innocent of sin
 - They can neither share in our sinful behaviors nor even in our sinful nature
- Jesus Christ is the One God prepared to be our propitiation
 - Scripture testified that Jesus shared neither our nature nor our record of sin
 - The gospels tells us Jesus was born of a virgin
 - Which was necessary to ensure Jesus was not a descendant of Adam and therefore He didn't inherit the sin nature of Adam
 - And therefore Jesus never participated in the rebellion of Adam
 - Paul will explain more about Christ as the new Adam in Chapter 5
 - And as a result Jesus was innocent and undeserving of the penalty of death, and yet the Father displayed Jesus publicly as a sacrifice for us
 - Christ's public suffering and death satisfied the wrath of God for sin
 - Notice Paul adds again "through faith"
 - The application of that payment to our heavenly account is made known to us through our faith

- You can know that you have been justified before God in the court of Heaven because you possess faith in that payment
- Finally, we come to Paul's seventh and final point in his summary in the second half of v.25 and into v.26
 - Paul says God has made belief in Christ's substitutionary death the necessary means of salvation, so that God's justice could be understood
 - Notice at the end of v.25 Paul says that in forbearance, God passed over the sins previously committed
 - Forbearance means delaying a response
 - God delayed His judgment of humanity for their sin, passing over generations without bringing a final judgment upon the world
 - Of course, the Lord was forbearing because He knew the time had not yet arrived to bring His Son into the world to make His payment on the cross
 - While he waited, Paul says He passed over the sins previously committed
 - Passing over doesn't mean forgiving
 - Passing over means not having acted to bring an end to sin
 - But when the time was right, God manifested His grace publicly as Christ gave Himself as our payment
 - And furthermore, God established that faith in that payment would be the means by which He manifests His grace at the present time
 - So today the world may know that God is still at work declaring people righteous on the basis of Christ's propitiation
 - And the evidence of God's grace is seen by a person's faith in Christ
 - The point in this exercise is to ensure the world understands that God has remained just through this process even as He justifies sinners
 - We can see how God is connecting the dots
 - He made a payment on a certain day, a payment that satisfies His wrath for sin

- And then God assigned that payment to men and women as a matter of His grace alone declaring them justified, innocent
- As we receive His gift of justification, we manifest His grace through our faith in that payment
- In that way the world can see that God is just in His forgiveness as He justifies sinners
 - It's often called the Great Exchange
 - Christ took our penalty
 - And we were assigned credit for His perfect, righteous, nature
 - Our Heavenly account is credited with Christ's righteousness
- That's how we receive the righteousness of God
 - Our account of sin is wiped clean and we are credited with Christ's work because God by His grace grants it to us
 - That grace is manifested through our faith, which demonstrates to the world that we trust in Christ's payment for our sake
 - And in that way, we testify to the world that God has remained just in justifying us
 - This is the one and only true Gospel
 - It explains our predicament, the need for a God-provided solution and how we may obtain it
 - It offers explanation for how we find spiritual truth despite our fallen nature
 - How we can receive something we don't know about and weren't seeking
 - It explains how we might merit heaven when we are sinners
 - But we've only touched the surface of these concepts, and so Paul will spend the next two chapters delving into these seven points in greater detail
 - And then there are a host of other questions that come to mind
 - For example, how can one man's death be enough to pay for the sins of millions of people?

- And how does God's plan go beyond merely paying the price for our sin, to correcting our sin nature?
- And if God declared us innocent, why do we still sin and will our new sin disqualify us from Heaven?
- Paul answers these questions in the following chapters
- For now, let's look at how Paul elaborates on the first points in his summary: salvation is apart from Law having been witnessed by Law and Prophets

Rom. 3:27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.

Rom. 3:28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

Rom. 3:29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,

Rom. 3:30 since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

Rom. 3:31 Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

- Paul begins with a pre-emptive strike against any who might object that salvation is apart from good works
 - Because it makes sense to us that our path to holiness depends on our own actions
 - We must put away sinning and seek for doing good so that we might be like God
 - How can a plan to save us ask nothing of us?
 - That thinking conceals its source, because while it sounds generous and self-sacrificing, it's actually the result of pride
 - We prefer to be captains of our own ships, responsible for our own future
 - And then when we reach our goal, we can take pride in our accomplishment
 - That's what Paul is referring to when he mentions boasting

- But God will not share His glory with anyone, nor will He allow us to perpetuate our self-deception that says we play a part in His plan of redemption
 - First of all, we have no part because we could do nothing at all anyway
 - But more over, the plan God has constructed to save us excludes the possibility of boasting, Paul says
 - Had God devised a plan that required something of us, then we could rightly boast about our part
 - Such a plan would be a law of works
- But God devised a plan or law for salvation that excluded (prevented) such boasting
 - God has established a law (or means) for bringing men into righteousness
 - Remember, this law doesn't yield human righteousness
 - Rather it imputes God's righteousness to men
- And this law has only one rule or requirement – faith in Christ
 - And that faith is the manifestation of God's grace, so even it is not of us

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Eph. 2:9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

- God's plan leaves men with nothing whatsoever to boast about
 - Paul says clearly in v.28 that we maintain that men are justified apart from the works of the Law
 - "We maintain" means this is the Christian position; the orthodox view of Christianity
 - Such that should anyone try to change this precept, they are no longer preaching Christianity or the true Gospel (e.g., Mormons, Catholics, certain other factions)

- Any other view that introduces the requirement of human works according to any law as a means to righteousness has departed from Christianity
- For God is working in all mankind through the same means
 - Both as God of the Jews and as God of the Gentiles
 - He will justify both the circumcised and uncircumcised the same way
- Finally, Paul asks does salvation by faith nullify (i.e., make empty, void) the law?
 - He's addressing the question some might pose in light of salvation by faith
 - Does the plan of God render the law of God given to Israel in the Old Covenant meaningless or useless?
 - Has it any purpose?
 - To that Paul answers "on the contrary"
 - The true answer is exactly the opposite
 - When we acknowledge that we cannot meet the demands of the law and may only be saved by our faith in Jesus Christ, we're affirming the law
 - We're agreeing that the Law must be met AND that we can't meet it
 - Ironically, when someone (Nomianistic/Judaistic) attempts to follow a law they have already broken and continue to break daily, yet still expect to enter heaven, they are the ones nullifying the law
 - In following the law, they affirm that meeting its requirements is a necessity
 - But then when they break the law (as all men do), they still maintain that God will approve them and grant them heaven
 - They are nullifying the very law they claim to follow when they assume God will overlook their failure to keep it perfectly
 - So as Paul says, on the contrary, agreeing with a law of faith establishes (or affirms) the unyielding requirements of the law

- Because the Law is true and demanding and uncompromising, we must depend on faith in Christ
- Christ fulfilled the Law's requirements perfectly because we couldn't
- So we turn to God in faith rather than trusting in our works under Law