

Apart from the Law

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Date: 28 September 2014

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[0 : 00] I'd like you guys to open up your Bibles to the book of Romans, chapter 3.

We're continuing in Romans this morning, and we're right in the middle of chapter 3, verses 19 through verse 22. And as you turn there, as you find that in your Bibles, I know you just sat down, but I want to ask you guys to stand as we read God's Word together.

Then you can sit for a good long time while I preach, alright? Romans, chapter 3, beginning in verse 19. Paul writes, Now, we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it.

The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. Thank You for this Word, Father. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[1 : 22] You guys take a seat. You know, one of the things about talking to kids and having conversations with kids, which I do routinely in my home, is that you realize pretty quickly that they're not thinking on the same level all the time that we're thinking.

And what we might think of as a really practical solution or a practical answer to a simple problem is not at all the solution or the answer that they may come up with. In fact, kids really are, they're dreamers.

And that applies in a lot of areas of their lives. They will think of things that would just never occur to us. Just, for instance, ask, I don't know, five kids what they want to be when they grow up.

Ask them what they want to be and see how many of them say, you know, I think I'd like to be an accountant because there are always good jobs for accountants and, you know, good steady income and I could do that well.

No kids say that. They don't say that. No kids say, you know, I think I want to be a pastor when I grow up. They all want to be astronauts or professional football players or baseball players or something that just sounds really cool.

[2 : 30] The only problem with that is, is that very few people in the world are actually qualified to play professional football or be an astronaut. There are very few people.

In fact, I'm not sure, looking out amongst us, that any of us are qualified for either of those two jobs. Right? I'm sorry, Leslie. You could have played football if you wanted, right? You could have been the greatest kicker ever.

You just decided not to. Right? Yeah. None of us, though. I mean, we just, and yet our kids, and we say, oh, yeah, that sounds great. Go for that. Knowing in our minds, yeah, that's not going to happen.

That's not going to happen. And there comes a point in time where we start sort of trying to direct them as they get older to something that might actually be feasible so they don't spend their entire life being despondent and put out with things.

I mean, how many of you have ever met somebody who really believed when they were 16, they really, really believed that they were going to be a professional athlete or a professional musician?

[3 : 24] They were going to tour the world or they were going to play on this team or that team. And yet you knew that while they were better than all of their peers around them at those things, you knew that it took another level entirely to reach the point that they wanted to reach.

And as they grow up, they are disappointed. They're frustrated. They haven't attained all of their dreams and all of their goals. We see those sorts of things happen all the time.

I've known a number of people who were just never satisfied throughout their lives because they never achieved the unrealistic dream that they had when they were 16 or 17 years old.

There just aren't a whole lot of people who have the physical build, the athletic prowess, the ability to play professional football. There just aren't very many of them at all.

I don't personally know any of them that are capable of doing that. And yet we approach things oftentimes when it comes to spiritual matters in the same way that children and teenagers will often approach their career or their goals for their lives.

[4 : 29] We set out goals in front of us or we try to attain things. We try to accomplish things that are not doable by fallen, sinful people. They just cannot be done.

And the chief problem that you see in people all over the world from all different walks of life, if you begin to talk to them about spiritual things, if they will have the conversation with you, and this is true of people who are oftentimes in the church and outside of the church and adherence of various religions, various Christian denominations.

It is true oftentimes that when you begin to talk to them about what is your hope, or if you put it in another way, why do you think that you're going to get to heaven? Why do you think that you're going to have eternal life?

Why do you think that at the end of your life, God is going to grant you access into his kingdom? Oftentimes the answer will come back, well, because I've done X, Y, and Z.

Because I have been a pretty good person. Because I have tried my best to stay on the narrow path. I have tried my best to do these things. And there may be a list of things that they've done in their lives, or a list of things that they have not done in their lives.

[5 : 43] If you were to rewind back to the first century, to the days in which the Apostle Paul lived, and if you were to ask many of the Apostle Paul's Jewish kinsmen, what is the basis of your hope?

Why do you think that at the end of your life, you will be allowed entrance into the kingdom of God? There would have been two primary answers that you would have heard. One would have been simply because I'm a part of the chosen people.

Because I am a Jew. Because I belong to those who are called the circumcision, and I'm not a part of the Gentile, pagan, idol-worshipping world out there.

That would be one answer that you would frequently hear. But then sometimes coupled with that, or sometimes separate from that, you might hear, because I know the law of God. Because I have the law of God.

And because I have tried, as best I can, throughout my life, to obey the law of God. And so on that basis, I hope, or I believe, that there will be a reward stored up for me at the end of my life.

[6 : 52] And the Apostle Paul says here in this passage, that's not possible. That cannot be done. Take a look at verse 19, where Paul begins to explain to us what function does the law, and by law here, he means the law of Moses, the law that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai in the wilderness.

That law. The law that we have recorded for us in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. What we often call the Torah, Genesis through Deuteronomy. That's what Paul has in mind when he says law.

He says this in verse 19. Now, we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law. Now, that makes perfect sense.

That's not confusing. Paul is simply saying that whatever the law of Moses says, it says that to the people who possess the law. That is, those who are literally in the law. The translation here says, under the law.

Well, who are those who are under the law? The Jewish people who possess the law. Look over in chapter 2. Down at verse 12. Where Paul says, all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law.

[8 : 06] And all who have sinned under the law. It's the same phrase. In the law, under the law, will be judged by the law. Verse 14. When Gentiles who do not have the law.

So what's the opposite? The Jewish people. Those who have the law. So Paul says, whatever the law has to say, whatever commandments were given through Moses, those commandments, those laws, God has spoken to the people to whom He has entrusted the law.

Those who are under the law. Those who are in the law. That makes perfect sense. But then he moves on another step further in his argument. And he says that the reason that the law speaks to those who possess the law is so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

He does not say whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law so that they might have a means of attaining eternal life. Whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law so that they might know what God wants them to do in order to enter into His kingdom.

That's not what he says. He says God gave the law to the Jewish people so that every mouth, that is, every human boast may be stopped and silenced and so that the entire world might be held accountable to God.

[9 : 26] That is, so that the entire world might on judgment day be called to account by God Himself for all that they have done and failed to do.

So that they might be guilty on judgment day. The law was given to show human sinfulness and human guilt. That's what the law is for.

The law is not a means by which sinners can earn a right standing before God. That doesn't mean that the law is a bad thing. It doesn't mean that there's anything wrong with the law itself.

In fact, the problem is with us. The problem is with those who have the law, whether you be Jew or Gentile. The problem is with us. You remember that Paul has just quoted from several places in the book of Psalms and one place in the book of Isaiah in verses 10 through 18 that we looked at last week.

And he quotes all of those verses to demonstrate that every single person is a sinner. That we are sinful through and through. He says, there is no one righteous.

[10 : 31] Not even one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. He says at the end that there is no fear of God before their eyes. That's how Paul describes humanity. Both Jew and Gentile.

The fundamental problem that we have is not that the law of Moses, the law of God, is inadequate. The fundamental problem that we have is that we, as sinful people, are unable to fully obey God's law.

And that's a major, major problem. In fact, I want you to hold your place in Romans 3 and turn over to Galatians 3 where Paul is talking about essentially the same basic issues that he's dealing with here in the book of Romans.

And in Galatians 3, verse 10, he says this, For all who rely on works of the law, that is, all who depend upon their ability to obey the law, all of them who do that, are under a curse.

Why? Why? Why would everybody who tries to obey, let's just single out the Ten Commandments and be simple and not worry about the rest of the law? Why would all those who depend upon their obedience to the law for entrance into God's kingdom, why would they be under a curse?

[11 : 50] What's wrong with that? What's so bad about trying to obey the Ten Commandments in order to earn God's favor? What's so bad about that? Well, here's the problem.

For it is written, Paul says, Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them. You need to underline all things and you need to underline do them.

Because, there's nothing wrong with the law. The problem is that sinners cannot abide by everything written in the law. We cannot do the law in its entirety.

We're incapable of that. We cannot fully obey God's law. And so, because of that, those who have received the law as sinners cannot use the law as a means by which they can get into heaven, the law only shows them to be guilty.

The law only calls them to account on judgment day. How does it do that? Notice verse 20. For by the works of the law, no human being will be justified.

[13 : 00] That is, no human being will be declared to be righteous by God. That's what justified means. It just means to be declared righteous in God's court. By the works of the law, no human being will be declared righteous by God since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

See, for sinners, and we are all sinners, for sinners, the law does not function to show us what to do to inherit eternal life.

Now, it could do that for someone who is fully righteous, who has no sin in their life, but that's not us. For sinners, the law functions to show us what sin is.

It points out the sin in our lives. It shows us in detail sometimes just how sinful we are. Turn over to Romans chapter 7 where Paul talks about this in more detail.

Romans chapter 7 verse 7 he says, what shall we say? Is the law that the law is sin? Well, by no means. Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin for I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said you shall not covet.

[14 : 20] but sin seizing an opportunity through the commandment produced in me all kinds of covetousness. So, when the law comes into contact with the sinner, far from producing the righteousness necessary in order to enter into God's kingdom and be declared righteous by God, far from doing that, the law, when it encounters a sinner, produces more sin and shows us the sin that is already there.

That's what the law does in sinners. If we didn't have the law, we would, to a certain degree, be ignorant of our sin. It doesn't mean that we wouldn't be sinners.

We would still be sinners. In Romans chapter 1, we've seen that Paul lays out the sinfulness of the Gentile people largely on the basis of the fact that they have rejected the knowledge of God that He has revealed through creation.

That in itself is enough to earn God's wrath. But now, on top of that, when the law comes in, it shows us more of our sin, shows it in greater detail, shines the spotlight on our sin.

We're already sinners, but the law magnifies our sinfulness. I can remember when I was a kid, we didn't have car seats and booster seats and all those things.

[15 : 38] Maybe somebody had them somewhere, but the trial cell certainly did not have them. I don't think that they had been invented yet. We just didn't have them. And so I can remember being small enough to stand in the front seat without hitting my head on the ceiling of our car and just standing there while we went down the street.

Not when we went down the interstate or anything like that, but while we were just kind of doing errands around town, I could stand in that seat. I mean, I'm not sure exactly how safety conscious my parents were.

I know my dad was not safety conscious at all. I think there was oftentimes some sort of compromise going on there between the two of them on the level of safety. I can remember that my dad, at one time when we were really young, he bought an El Camino.

Anybody remember the El Caminos, right? They're the cars that aren't fully a car. They're half pickup truck and half cars. You really just have the front part of a car and then you have a bed in place of the back seat and the trunk of the car.

My dad got one of those and we thought it was the coolest thing ever. I've seen a few of them since then driving down the road and they're not cool. But they were cool then and we loved those cars.

[16 : 48] And I can remember since the car didn't have a back seat and we were a four person family, that meant that my brother and I had to go somewhere. And I think the compromise must have been, I think my mom probably said no to sticking us in the bed of the El Camino.

I mean that thing has a side on it that's this tall, one bump and we're gone, right? And so they would tuck us down behind the seat. So we're between the glass and the seat just kind of sitting there.

And we thought that was awesome. We thought that was the coolest thing ever. I'm sure that we were not safe back there. We were safer than say in the bed of the El Camino, but we weren't all that safe.

Now today we have all sorts of laws about where kids can ride in the car and how, you know, how old they have to be and what weight they have to reach before they can move from this kind of a car seat to that kind of a car seat.

It does not mean that today riding between the glass and the front seat of an El Camino is any more dangerous today than it was 35 years ago. It's just as dangerous.

[17 : 53] And yet now we have laws that sort of try to protect us from some of those dangers, laws that point out the dangers, laws that make parents feel guilty for putting their kids in certain places.

I think we've broken most of the car seat laws in the last 10 years at some point in time. But the laws are there and the laws remind us that sometimes we don't act in a way that protects our children as best as we can.

But that's always been the case. No parent has ever perfectly protected their child from danger in a car or anywhere else. That's always been the case. The law of Moses functions in much the same way.

We've always been sinners, but the law comes in to show us in more detail exactly the danger that we are in, exactly the degree to which we have deviated from God's ways.

The law does not function for sinful people to show us the path to eternal life. The law functions to show us as sinners how far from that path we are.

[19 : 00] And so what hope is there for us? If Paul says in Romans 1.18 that the wrath of God is being revealed against all unrighteousness. And then he says that there's no one who is righteous.

And now he comes along and says, don't think that the law is the way that you're going to escape that sentence of unrighteous. It's not going to make you righteous. It's just going to show that you're unrighteous.

If that's the case, if he has now cut off that avenue of escape from the wrath of God from us, what hope do we have?

Well, he tells us in verse 21. He tells us specifically, but now. So now we're going to find out some new information. But now something new.

Now something different. Now a word that you need to hear. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law.

[19 : 59] This is now a different kind of righteousness. If you ask someone, how do we know what righteousness is? The easiest answer would be to say, look at the law of God.

How can I be righteous? The easiest answer might be, obey the law of God. That's a very simple answer. But if you say to someone, you can't obey the law of God, how can you be righteous then?

We need another answer. We need another avenue. We need another path to righteousness that's not laid out by our own feet.

We need another way. And Paul says, now there is another kind of righteousness from God. There is a righteousness that is apart from the law.

It is not like the righteousness that can be described as obedience to the law. This is another kind of righteousness. righteousness. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, even though the law and prophets witness to it.

[21 : 06] The law and the prophets talk about this righteousness. The law and the prophets point us to this righteousness. What kind of righteousness is it? Verse 22 tells us the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

faith. There is righteousness that comes through the law. That is, righteousness that comes through obedience to the law, which sinners don't have access to.

We don't have access to that. But now, there is righteousness that comes to us not through the law, apart from the law, without the law. Now there is righteousness that comes to us through faith in Jesus Christ.

A new kind of righteousness. A righteousness that God gives to us on the basis of our faith in Christ. So that now, if we ask the question, how can I, on judgment day, be declared righteous by God?

How can I be justified before God on judgment day? Now the answer comes to us. Not by works of the law. Not by obeying the law.

[22 : 20] But instead, through faith, in Jesus Christ. So that now, when we trust in Christ, God credits to our account a righteousness that is not our own righteousness.

It's not the product of our obedience to God's law. Now there is a righteousness available to us that is not our own righteousness.

We often call it, in theological language, we call it an alien righteousness. righteousness because it's not my own. It comes from outside of me. It's foreign to me and yet it becomes mine through faith in Jesus Christ.

There is another kind of righteousness that we can now have. And that's the gospel of Jesus Christ in a nutshell. The gospel is that though you are a sinner and though you deserve God's wrath and though you are unable on your own to attain a right standing before God, now through faith in Christ, He will credit to you, He will gift you as a free gift the standing of righteousness.

Righteous and holy and blameless before Him on judgment day. Freely through faith in Jesus.

[23 : 40] Not by works of the law, apart from the law, but through faith in Jesus. And that is the only righteousness available to sinners.

There is no other way but by faith, by grace, alone. So what do we do with that message?

How do we think about that? How do we come up with that? How does that happen by the way? How do we get righteousness before God?

Does God just decide on a whim? I am just going to say that they are righteous because they believe in Jesus even though they are not righteous? How does this happen?

How does this work? We are going to see in the coming weeks but I want to give you a preview. I want you to look down to verse 23 where it says that all stand and fall short of the glory of God.

[24 : 43] And then we are told that we are justified as a gift by His grace. Okay, that is what we are talking about. It is free. He gives us the righteous standing before Him freely.

But here is how. Okay? Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation to be received by faith.

faith. There is an exchange that takes place here. We are justified freely by grace because God has redeemed us. He has bought us out of our sinful condition by pouring out His wrath.

That is what a propitiation is. It is God pouring out His wrath on another who sacrifices themselves in our place. So that Jesus has taken the wrath of God that is and ought to be revealed against all unrighteousness.

He has taken that for us. But it is more than that even. It is one thing to say all my sins are forgiven because Jesus has made a way.

[25 : 49] Because Jesus has taken the punishment that I deserve. But it is far more than that. Not only has Jesus been willing to take upon Himself all of your sin and all the wrath that your sin deserves, but He has also performed all the righteousness that you need to stand before God.

Jesus has not merely died for our sins. He has lived for our righteousness. He and He alone has fully obeyed the law of God.

He has done all that the law requires. He has fully kept it and does not in and of Himself fall under the curse. He takes the curse upon Himself in our place and He gives to us His perfect righteousness.

And all of that happens by faith in Jesus Christ. It's as if the kid who dreams of an NFL career finds himself at 35 years old, having done nothing professionally in terms of sports, despondent and disappointed.

It's as if the greatest linebacker in history hands him all of his Super Bowl rings and scribbles his name and his place in the record books and in the Hall of Fame.

[27 : 09] It's counted as yours. You get the rewards. You get the rings. You get the place of honor. Not because you deserve it, but because one who does deserve it has given you His place instead.

He has earned it all. He has done it all. And He offers it to us freely when we trust in Him.

Freely. And yet so often I think we fall into the trap of thinking that's something I already believe.

I know that. I was taught that. I've been taught that I'm not saved by anything that I do. I'm not saved by good works. I've been taught that. I believe that.

I don't have a problem with believing that when I was saved, I was saved by faith alone. My problem is that I struggle now. My problem is that I'm stumbling and falling now.

[28 : 17] I need help now because even though I have His righteousness as a gift, I want some of my own righteousness. I want to do good. I don't want to keep falling into the same patterns of sinfulness.

I don't want to keep walking down that road and doing those things. I don't want to keep fighting with my spouse. I don't want to keep going to those internet sites.

I don't want to do those things. I don't want to be a lazy worker. I don't want to be known that way, but I am. And that's frustrating to me. I believe in Jesus.

Great. But I'm frustrated with who I am still. I'm still frustrated with who I am. And I'm trying. I'm doing all the things that I'm supposed to do.

I read my Bible as often as I'm able. I pray regularly. I'm here at church. I participate in Bible studies when I can. I'm doing all the things that I need to do and I don't seem to be getting any better.

[29 : 17] I'm still the same. I still don't like what I see in the mirror. I'm the same sinner. I'm grateful that I don't enter into heaven based upon my own righteousness.

But I wish that I had some righteousness of my own for the claiming. We feel that way often. We think that way often.

I want you to turn to Galatians again. Galatians. Because. I fear that our failures.

In walking the Christian life are often due to a fundamental misunderstanding of how the gospel is supposed to function for us.

Take a look in Galatians chapter three, verse one. Paul says to the Galatians, Oh, foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Who has tricked you? Who has fooled you?

[30 : 18] It was before your eyes that Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this. Did you receive the spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

The obvious answer is hearing with faith. I was not saved by works of the law. I know that. I was saved by trusting in the gospel that I heard. Hearing. With faith.

And then he says, are you so foolish? Having begun by the spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain? If indeed it was in vain, does he who supplies the spirit to you and works miracles among you, does he do so by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

Now, pause right there. Notice that the ongoing, continuing work of God in your life, he supplies the spirit, he works miracles, not by works of the law, but also by faith.

The gospel is not merely the means by which we are initially saved and justified. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the means by which we live and walk the Christian life.

[31 : 30] It's not that God is unconcerned with us producing good works. It's not that God is unconcerned with the lives that we now live after our conversion. In fact, in Ephesians chapter 2, Paul tells us that we have been saved by faith, through faith and by grace, for good works which God prepared in advance.

God's not unconcerned with the production of good works in the life of a believer. It's just that those good works are not produced by going back to a law-based mentality.

Those good works will never be born out in your life if you pursue them by simply trying to check off the list of things to do and not to do.

Of all the things that I must do, of all the ways that I must think and behave and act in order for these things to happen, they will not be produced in that way.

Paul says, you began by faith, you must continue by faith. Because at the end of the day, all of our good works, all that we might do as Christians, as those who have been justified by faith, all that we might do is in the end still a product of the work of the Holy Spirit.

[32 : 52] Not a product of our own striving. Not a product of our own strength, of our own abilities. It's all a product of the work of the Spirit. God prepared those works in advance for us to do.

We don't come up with them. We don't dig our heels in and figure out how to do it. God prepared them. And it's by the Spirit of God that those things happen. And the Spirit of God works through faith.

Through faith. So that when faced with a besetting sin, with a particularly challenging sin that continues to rear its head in your life, the solution to that problem is not simply to knuckle under and come up with a list of things that you can do that will fight off that sin.

The solution to present sin in the life of a believer is the same as the solution to the problem of sin for an unbeliever. It is faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

so that when sin rears its head, be it in the form of lust, be it in the form of unwarranted anger, in the form of gossip, in whatever form it might take, when sin begins to rear its head, we don't begin to work harder, we begin to trust more.

[34 : 30] Trust in the power of God's Spirit to deliver us. Trust in God's power to work in us all that pleases Him.

And by faith, God will begin to work miracles in our lives. By faith, God will begin to cause us to walk after Christ.

By faith, the Spirit of God will so empower us that we will finally find some freedom from the besetting sins of our lives.

The Gospel is not merely the means by which we get saved and move on. The Gospel is the means by which God keeps us growing.

now a righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law to which the law and the prophets bear witness.

[35 : 32] Now a righteousness of God has been manifested and it is entirely through faith in Jesus Christ. And now a means of sanctification has been manifested.

manifested. A way in which the Spirit works in the hearts of those who trust in Christ and it is through faith in Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.