

The Book of Romans
The Keynote of Romans, Part 3
Romans 1:16-17

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I invite you to turn with me to Romans 1, as we continue our study of what is a monumental passage in Paul's letter to the Roman churches.

Five years after Martin Luther became a monk, and two years after he began to teach the Bible at the University of Wittenberg, Luther was sent on church business to Rome. It was the year 1510. It was in Rome, on that visit, that a famous incident occurred which is recorded for us only by Luther's son. In the church of St. John Lateran in Rome, there is a set of stone stairs. There was in Luther's day; it remains there to this day. The Roman Catholic church claims that they were the original stairs that led up to Pilate's house in Jerusalem. And through both a misunderstanding of history as well as the biblical record, they mistakenly teach that they were the very steps that our Lord Himself ascended just before His crucifixion, during His trial. It'd already become a tradition in Luther's day, because of how those steps were thought to be and how they'd been venerated, (and by the way, this tradition continues to this day; I have seen it with my own eyes,) for pilgrims to climb those stairs slowly on their knees, pausing at each step to pray. There're also blood stains on a couple of the stairs, and supposedly those are the blood of Christ. So, worshipers will stop and kiss those steps today through the Plexiglas that covers them. And then they would pause and pray for a long time before continuing on up the steps. Now why would they do this? Well, in Luther's day, and in ours, the Roman Catholic church promises that for all who climb the stairs in this way, God will shorten their time in purgatory.

So Luther, as the pilgrims of his day did, and as it continues to this day, visited the church of St. John Lateran in Rome, and he began the journey up those steps on his knees. As he ascended the stairs, the words that he had been studying in Romans 1:17 overpowered him. His son records that as he mounted each step, as he continued up the steps, the words seemed to grow louder in his mind with every step: "The one who is righteous by faith shall live." "The one who is righteous by faith shall live." Eventually, the words became so loud, and the truth that they contained penetrated his soul to such an extent, that he realized how much those words stood in antithesis to the very thing he was doing. And he stood up on those stairs, and he shook himself from the superstition in which he'd been engaged, and he walked down those stairs never to do it

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again. It was really at that moment the Protestant Reformation was born, even though it wasn't until seven years later on October 31, 1517, that Luther would nail his Ninety-Five Theses to the castle church in Wittenberg.

Luther later wrote of the doctrine of justification that he first saw in Romans chapter 1:17 in this way. He said:

It is the chief article from which all our other doctrines have flowed. If the article of justification is lost, all Christian doctrine is lost at the same time. It alone begets [or gives birth to], nourishes, builds, preserves, defends the Church of God, and without it, the Church of God cannot exist for one hour. It is the article by which the Church stands or falls.

What Luther meant by that was if this doctrine is not held to and believed, then the Church ceases to be the Church. It becomes something else.

Let's read together these magnificent verses in Romans 1:16-17:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'but the righteousness man shall live by faith.'

Now these two verses, as we've noted, establish the theme of Paul's letter to the Romans: it's the gospel of God, as he mentions in verse 1; it is the gospel that Paul preached. And of that gospel, Paul says in verse 16, "I am not ashamed." And in these two verses he explains why. As he explains his lack of shame, he also teaches us the reasons that you and I should never be ashamed of the gospel. So far we've look at five of the reasons that he gives in these verses.

Number one, because it is the power of God. It is God's power. When the gospel, this simple message, is preached, God is exhibiting His power in this message to accomplish His purpose.

Secondly, it produces salvation. Specifically, it is God's power to accomplish the spiritual rescue of individuals. God is in the gospel calling sinners to Himself to be spiritually saved, to be reconciled to Him.

Number three, Paul was not ashamed of the gospel because it requires no human work or merit. Notice, in verse 16 he says, "...it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...." In Paul's mind, believing was the exact opposite of working. And so he is saying by it is the salvation that accomplishes the salvation of those who believe, he means by that, you don't have

to extend any human effort, you don't have to have any human merit to gain what the gospel promises.

Number four, it is God's universal message for every person. Notice how verse 16 ends: the gospel is for "the Jew first and also [for] the Greek." "Greek" here stands in antithesis to everything Jewish, so it means "Gentiles." In other words, [it is] for every person on the planet. The gospel is appropriate for every person who has ever or will ever live.

And last time we began looking at the fifth reason that Paul was not ashamed, that we should not be ashamed of the gospel, because it promises righteousness. It promises righteousness. Now as we began to consider this point last time, we discovered that God's standard for human thinking and speaking and behaving is His own holy character. He demands of us nothing less than absolute perfection. Listen carefully: the only way anyone will ever gain heaven or enter into God's presence by his own righteousness will be through absolutely perfect obedience. God doesn't grade on a curve.

You say, well, what's the example of that biblically? Where would you go to prove that? Well, there're a lot of places. Let me just give you one example. James 2:10. James writes, "...whoever keeps the whole law...." Here, he says, "Imagine for a moment that someone could keep the entirety of God's Law, all of those commands." "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one." He says, "Imagine that somebody really could keep every command God had given us, but at some point in their life they failed in just one way." By the way, do you know what that one way is in the context of James 2? Prejudice. All you have to do is just show prejudice one time in your heart, once in your life, and what happens? He says, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become (what?) guilty of all." You see, the Law isn't something you can take piecemeal. Picture the Law as a link chain. Take out one link, and it's worthless, because the Law commands perfect love for God, and perfect love for others. And if you ever fail to love God or others perfectly even one time, you have failed in the essence of the Law

So clearly, there is no one righteous by that standard. That's why Paul will conclude in chapter 3:10, "There is none righteous, not even one." Nobody meets that standard. That's where the good news comes in. The good news picks up where the bad news leaves off, because the gospel promises us the very righteousness that God demands and that we so desperately lack. Look at verse 17: "...in it (that is, in the gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed." Paul was not ashamed of the gospel, because the gospel promises righteousness.

Now that immediately raises a crucial question. And that question is, what is exactly the righteousness that the gospel promises? Well, there're only two answers to that question. Let me start with the wrong answer. The wrong answer, the righteousness the gospel does not promise,

is what we could call "inherent" or "infused righteousness". Let me give you a series of descriptions that the New Testament gives of this kind of righteousness. We'll look at some of these verses in just a few minutes. It describes it as our "own" righteousness. That is, a righteousness that is of our own making, that we have accomplished, that is inherent in us. It's called a righteousness "based on [the] law." In other words, a righteousness based on keeping or obeying God's Law. But even without reference to God's Law specifically, Titus refers to it, this wrong answer, this wrong kind of righteousness, as "deeds [that] we have done in righteousness." You see that God never declares anyone righteous based on his own righteousness, based on something he has accomplished, something he has done. And yet, this wrong answer is always man's answer.

Now, sometimes this wrong answer is carefully wrapped in theological language to make it sound more palatable, more believable. For example, the Roman Catholic Church teaches in its doctrines in the Council of Trent: "The righteousness received in justification is preserved and also increased before God through good work". Sometimes this wrong answer is clouded in the theological language of what is called the "new perspective on Paul." Perhaps you've heard of it. It's a new theological idea that's sweeping across some segments of Christianity. Its major proponent, its great champion, is a British scholar and theologian by the name of N.T. Wright. N.T. Wright argues that when believers are justified (and he argues that will only happen at the final judgment) that when believers are justified (and by that he means when they are declared to be in, to be God's people) he says, "The righteousness they have will not be God's own righteousness." Instead, he says, "The final justification of God's people will be on the basis of their whole life." In other words, God will justify that person, He'll declare their end, based on how they live their life. It may be by faith to some extent, it may be by grace to some extent, but ultimately it will be upon, their justification will be based upon, their own life lived, their efforts, their work. So sometimes this wrong answer comes in the language of theology.

But frankly, most of the time this wrong answer is just how normal people think about God and about themselves. It's the common view of most people. According to a 2004 survey by George Barna, 54% of American adults believe that if a person is generally good or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn by those good works a place in heaven. I think that number's probably low, but at least 54% of Americans believe that. Ask the average person on the street on what basis he hopes to get to heaven (and by the way, most Americans hope to get to heaven) and you will hear something like this: "well, you know, yes, of course, I sin; I understand I sin, but I'm not really a bad person. I think when God evaluates my life, the good that I have done will certainly outweigh the bad." Understand, that's the wrong answer. This kind of righteousness is not the kind that makes us right with God, that give us a right standing before Him. There is, in God's standard, "none righteous." This is our own righteousness, and it will never meet God's holy standard. Let that sink into your head. God doesn't grade on a curve. He's not going to accept your less than righteousness as righteous.

So that brings us to Paul's answer. What is the righteousness that the gospel promises? Paul's answer is that it is an imputed righteousness, an imputed righteousness. I'll explain that word in just a few minutes. You see, in contrast to the wrong answer, Paul deliberately makes a contrast between the righteousness based on all human effort with God's righteousness that's received by faith. He contrasts the two. He does this often. I wish I had time; I have several references in my notes. Let me, in the interest of time, just show you one in Romans.

Turn to Romans 9. The contrast will be very clear for you. Paul is arguing about why it is the Jews didn't embrace their Messiah, why they didn't believe the gospel. Romans 9:30:

What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness (that is, pursue on their own), attained righteousness, [and they gained]... the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness (that is, a right standing before God based on their keeping of God's Law), did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works.

Notice chapter 10:3. Here again you see the contrast between the wrong answer, one's own righteousness, with the right answer, God's righteousness. Verse 3:

For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own [righteousness], they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for... everyone who believes. ...[He] is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Now in verses 5 through 10, Paul continues to contrast these two kinds of righteousness. Notice first kind in verse 5: "For Moses writes that the man who practices (here's the first kind,) the righteousness which is based on law (that is, the righteousness which comes from his keeping the Law, from his own efforts,) shall live by that righteousness." In other words, he's got to continually live under that and keep it up. It's got to be perfect. That's one kind. The other kind of righteousness in verse 6: the righteousness based on faith. It doesn't say you've got to do something great. You don't have to "ascend into heaven." You don't have to "descend into the abyss." You don't have to do something magnificent, sort of journey around the universe; instead, verse 8, it's something that's "near you." Not something great you have to do, it's something "in your mouth and in your heart."

[This is the message] of faith which we are preaching, that if you [will] confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Do you see the contrast? There's the righteousness based on what I do, and there's the righteousness which comes from God, I receive by faith.

Let me show you one other text outside of Romans. Turn to Philippians 3. You have here Paul's spiritual autobiography. And notice what he says at the end of verse 8. He says, "I [wanted to] gain Christ," gain the Messiah. Verse 9, "[What I mean by that is I want to be] found in Him." Now watch the contrast again between these two kinds of righteousness: "...not having...." (This is not what I wanted, Paul said.) "A righteousness of my own..." (a righteousness that I derived from law-keeping. Here's the other righteousness: but rather, I want that righteousness) "...which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith...."

So understand, then, that the righteousness the gospel promises is not my own righteousness achieved by my own efforts, by my own obedience, by my own good works; but rather, it is the gift of God's righteousness received by faith. Or in the words of the reformers, it is an "alien righteousness". What they meant by that is, it is a stranger to me, it's not my own, it's outside of me. It's someone else's righteousness credited to my account as if I had owned it personally, as if I had done righteousness. It's the gift of righteousness God gives the believing sinner. So understand then, the righteousness the gospel promises is not a moral quality inherent in me. The righteousness the gospel promises is a right standing, a legal status, before God. So the gospel, then, is at its heart what theologians call "justification".

Now if I ask you to come up here this morning and stand here, and I'll hand you a mike, and you define "justification", what would you say? Ask most Christians to define "justification", and you're going to get an answer something like this: "Well, it means 'just as if I'd never sinned'." Well, that's kind of a cute saying, and it goes in the right direction. But justification is so much more than that. Let's look a little more carefully at this great truth. Let's take it apart. We're going to come back to it in chapter 3:21 and following, where Paul explains it thoroughly, but in honesty, it's going to be a few months before we get there. So, let's look at it. What is justification? Justification: in justification God makes two accounting transactions and one legal decision. Two accounting transactions, one legal decision. Let's look at them.

First of all, accounting transaction number one: God does not credit our sin to us, but to Christ. God does not credit our sin to us, but to Christ. Look at Romans 4:3. As Paul gets ready to defend justification as something the Scripture has always taught, in verse 3 he goes back to Genesis 15:6 and to the example of Abraham. And he says what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God...." Abraham, that idolater, that moon worshiper, he "...believed God, and it was, (notice this word), credited to him as righteousness." Verse 4: "Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but [rather, it is credited] as what is due." Now Paul here defines justification in financial terms. He uses the word "credit". In this sense the word

means “to post to a ledger, to put to someone's account.” Or the old word for it, it's a great word, is "to impute": to credit or to impute, to put to someone's account. Now in Romans 4, as Paul explains justification, he uses this financial word 11 times. The word translated "credit", as I said, is also translated "impute", so theologians refer to what Paul is teaching here as imputation. If you don't know that word, I hope after the next few minutes you're going to fall in love with that word. There's no truth more precious to us as Christians than the word "imputation". It's clear that imputation is at the heart and soul of justification.

So let's look at this first accounting transaction: it means that God does not put your sins in your account as if you had committed them. Look at verse 8. As Paul is explaining and defending justification, he cites David in Psalm 32. Verse 8, he says, from Psalm 32, “Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.” “Take into account” is the same word "to credit". Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord doesn't credit to him. That's the idea. He doesn't put those sins that he's committed in his account. 2 Corinthians 5:19 puts it this way: “...not counting [not crediting] their trespasses against them....” So God doesn't credit our sins to us as if we had committed them, but instead, He credits our sins to Christ. This is the message of Isaiah 53. Again and again Isaiah makes that point. For example, in Isaiah 53:5, he says, “...He was pierced through for our transgressions....” Christ died paying the penalty for our acts of rebellion. God credited our transgressions to Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21: “[God] made [Christ] who knew no sin... sin on our behalf....”

You see, what happens is truly amazing. Instead of crediting your sins to you, (think of the sins you've committed), God, in an act of grace, instead of putting those sins in your account and treating you as if you had committed them, instead, puts them in Jesus' account as though Jesus had committed those sins. And then on the cross, He treated Jesus as if He had committed every one of those sins. That's transaction number one: He doesn't credit our sins to us, but to Christ.

Accounting transaction number two: He credits Christ's perfect righteousness to us. Look at chapter 4, verse 6. Again, as he's talking about David, He says, “David... speaks of the blessing on the man to whom, [now notice this], God credits righteousness....” And He credits righteousness, notice, “...apart from [the Law].” That is, apart from his obedience to the Law, apart from his own efforts. Again, the word "credit" is a financial term meaning “to post to a ledger.” In other words, this righteousness is not our own; it is entirely the righteousness of someone else that has been deposited by God into our account. It's the same as what He did in imputing our sins to Christ. When God imputed our sins to Christ, Christ didn't become a sinner, God treated Him as if He were a sinner. The same thing is true when it comes to righteousness. God does not declare us righteous because we are righteous, He declares us righteous because He has imputed righteousness to us. This is crucial. Justification has nothing whatsoever to do with any righteousness infused into me, wrought in me, even if it's by grace and by faith. My standing before God has nothing to do with anything I have done. It is an alien righteousness, it

is the righteousness of another credited to my account.

You say, whose righteousness? Well, we'll get there later in the book, but let me just give you a preview. 1 Corinthians 1:30: "...Christ... became to us... righteousness...." Christ became to us righteousness. 2 Corinthians 5:21: "[God] made [Christ] who knew no sin... sin on our behalf, (there's the first transaction), so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." It's God's righteousness, yes, but it is the righteousness of God in Christ, adhering in Christ, and because of our connection to Christ. It is, I will argue when we get there, it is the righteousness Christ earned in 33 years of perfect obedience on this earth. He lived the life you should have lived, and God, in an amazing act of grace, credits that life to you.

So there are two accounting transactions. And on the basis of those two accounting transactions, God makes one legal decision in justification: He declares our sins forgiven and us to be righteous before His Law. It includes not only forgiveness, it includes righteousness, a right standing as though we had perfectly obeyed God's Law. Look at chapter 4, verse 5: "But to the one who does not work (who doesn't rest on his human merit or efforts), but [simply] believes in [God], (now notice this) who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." Notice the ungodly person who simply believes in Christ, God justifies him. That is a crucial word. The word "to justify" is a legal word. It's used in the context of the courtroom. In Scripture it is always the opposite of the word "to condemn" or "to pronounce guilty". It means "to declare right," with reference to the Law. So on the basis of crediting our sin to Christ and crediting Christ's righteousness to us, God renders this legal decision: he is forgiven for his offenses, and he is righteous before My Law. What a great truth.

Now, my favorite illustration of what God does in justification happened to me years ago. And I share it often, and I make no apologies for that, because it was in this moment that I really came to grasp justification in a personal way. One month I received my bank statement, just a monthly bank statement. And I was going through it, and I noted that there was a deposit of \$200 that I knew I had not made. Now in those days \$200 was a lot of money, and you didn't just accidentally end up with \$200 deposited that you didn't know you'd put there. I asked Sheila; she hadn't put it there either. This was not our money. And, of course, as a believer, I felt impelled to go to the bank and try to correct this. Now I thought since it was in my favor, it would be easy to convince the bank that this was their mistake. I was wrong. I dropped by the local branch, (and) explained what had happened. They said, well sir, we really think this is your mistake, but if you think that's true then here's a number you need to call. So I called the number, spoke to several different people after remaining on hold for some, long time. Finally, I got a person, and they said, "Well, you need to put this in writing."

So I wrote a letter and said, you know, "this is really not my money. This is your money." And all along every stage of this attempt, what I was hearing was, "Sir, sir, you must be mistaken.

This can't be our mistake. You must have deposited this and simply have forgotten that this was your money. It's your money, sir." So I just gave up and spent it. But at the time I remember thinking, if I can get somebody else's deposits, maybe somebody else can get my bills.

And then in a flash of illumination, it occurred to me. That is exactly what happens in justification. Jesus gets all of my bills and He pays them in full, and I get all of His deposits. The gospel is a magnificent exchange. Christ gets the blame for my sin, and I get the credit for His obedience. He gets the declaration of guilty that I deserve, and I get the declaration of righteous that He deserves. He suffers the punishment for my sin, and I received the reward for His obedience. On the cross, God treated Jesus as if He had lived my sinful life, so that forever He could treat me as if I had lived Jesus' perfect life. No wonder Paul couldn't find it in himself to be ashamed of this message. In the gospel, God describes how He acted to provide us with the very righteousness that He demands and that we are so desperately lacking. Christian, don't ever lose the wonder and amazement of this reality. And live under a constant awareness of this truth in your life. If you have repented of your sins, if you have believed in Jesus Christ, there is nothing you can ever do that will improve your standing before God, because you stand at this moment in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, there is nothing that you can do that will ever undermine your standing and God's declaration of you as righteous. When God declared you righteous, He knew every sin, past, present, and future, and He said, "Righteous."

Now this isn't an excuse for sin. Paul's going to say, "Shall we sin so that grace may abound?—of course not!" True believers don't even think like that. This is instead an impetus to holiness. But, Christian, it is crucial that you live in light of this reality. Many Christians don't. They don't enjoy the freedom that they have in justification. It reminds me of one of my favorite cartoons. It's a Herman cartoon in which, you know, the defendant, who's been accused, is standing before the bench of the judge. And, you know, the trial has obviously gone on; it's the time for the pronouncement of the verdict. And the accused is standing there, and the judge says, "I find you not guilty. But, I'm going to give you a couple of years just to be on the safe side."

You see, some Christians don't enjoy what God has done and the reality of it, because they think God is like that judge. Listen, you will never stand before God and find yourself condemned for your sin. Romans 8:1: "[There is therefore] now no condemnation [to] those who are in Christ Jesus." That word "condemnation" is used three other times in the New Testament, and it's always used in a judicial context to describe the opposite of justification. "Condemnation" refers to a guilty verdict and the penalty that guilty verdict deserves. And Paul says, for the one in Christ, there is not, never will be, a guilty verdict, and never the punishment that that guilty verdict deserves.

Paul concludes the judicial aspect of his argument in chapter 8. Look over at chapter 8:33: "Who will bring a charge against God's elect?" Who can make anything stick against the ones

God has justified? “God is the one who justifies....” Who declares righteous. Who can bring a charge against you when God has said righteous? “...Who is the one who condemns?” Who passes a guilty verdict on you and says you're going to pay the penalty? Because “[Jesus Christ] is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God....” And He is the one who's interceding for you. Really? You think something can overturn God's judgment, His decision? Can't happen. Paul says, the righteousness the gospel promises is that righteousness outside of me, the very righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to my account.

That raises another question though, and that is how does the righteousness the gospel promises become ours? How do we come to enjoy this wonderful gift of a right standing before God? It's a gift, but how can I receive that gift? Well, Paul explains in the rest of verse 17. Back to Romans 1:17: He says, “For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.” Literally, out of faith into faith. This is a strange expression. It's a Hebrew expression. A similar kind of usage occurs in 2 Corinthians 2:16, in the Greek text. What Paul means here is that righteousness starts with faith and ends with faith. It's entirely faith from beginning to end. He's emphasizing that nothing but faith and faith alone can give us the status of righteous before God. Now Paul proceeds to drive home his argument with a quotation from the Old Testament. And in quoting the Old Testament passage, Paul shows us that receiving God's righteousness by faith has always been God's way.

And that brings us to the sixth and final reason that Paul was not ashamed and that we should not be ashamed of the gospel. We shouldn't be ashamed of the gospel, because it has always been the only way of salvation. It's always been the only way. Look at verse 17: “...as it is written, 'but the righteous man shall live by faith.’” Literally, the text says this: but the righteous out of faith, or the one who is righteous by faith, shall live. Paul's quote is from Habakkuk 2:4. He quotes the same text in Galatians 3:11. The writer of Hebrews quotes it in Hebrews 10:38. This is really important. This little quotation at the end of verse 17, many see this as the Apostle's text, and the rest of Romans as his sermon on this text. In other words, Romans is actually a sermon on one verse from Habakkuk. I really like Paul, don't you? An entire letter on one verse. It's great.

Now to understand what Paul means here, you have to understand the context of this verse in Habakkuk. I'm not going to take you back there, but let me give you the context. In Habakkuk 2, the prophet is really struggling with what God has just told him. God has just said, because of the sin of Israel, I'm going to send Babylon. And Babylon is going to destroy the nation, and they're going to carry the remnant off captive to Babylon. And Habakkuk is devastated by this. He's, first of all, struck with how wrong it seems that God would punish unrighteous Israel with unrighteous Babylon. But he's also wondering what's going to happen to God's people. Would God really allow His people to be exterminated? Would it be the end of the Jewish people? Habakkuk responds to that with a resounding no, "the righteous by faith shall live." This word

“live” can refer to physical life, but it's most frequently used in Scripture to refer to the supernatural life that God gives, or as we would say, eternal life. Habakkuk is saying this: "This is not the end of God's people, those who are righteous by faith shall live eternally with the supernatural life that only God gives." Many of the Jewish people would die in the siege of their cities. Others would die in the hard, forced march to Babylon. But if they were righteous by faith, they would go on living through all eternity. That's God's point to Habakkuk.

F.F. Bruce, the great New Testament scholar, writes: “The terms of Habakkuk's prophecy are sufficiently general to make room for Paul's application of them, an application which far from doing violence to the prophet's intention, expresses the abiding validity of his message.” You see, in quoting Habakkuk 2:4, Paul wants us to know that it has always been God's plan to declare believing sinners righteous solely by faith. It was true in Habakkuk's time. It was true, as we'll learn in chapter 4, in Abraham's time, long before. It was true in David's time, as he'll also reference in chapter 4.

So let me wrap this all up. If you want to trust in yourself, if want to try on your own to gain a right standing before God, there's only one way. You have to meet the divine standard., and this is what it looks like. First of all, you've got to find a way to deal with your guilt and pollution inherited from your parents. Paul's going to deal with that in Romans 5. You are guilty because of Adam's sin, and it's been credited to your account. You've got to deal with that. But then, once you've dealt with that, here's how you have to live. You must never put your own desires or your own interests above that of other people. You must constantly love others and pursue only their good without a single moment of selfishness your whole life. From the moment of your birth until the second of your death, you must love God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength. You must obey Him perfectly in everything, because if you ever sin just once, your righteousness will tumble like a house of cards.

Now obviously, you can never gain a right standing with God by your own efforts. No one but Jesus Christ has ever lived that kind of life. But the good news is, the gospel tells us there's another way. The other way is for God to do something amazing in His grace. And that is, instead of crediting your sin to you, He credits it to Christ, and on the cross He treats Christ as if He had committed those sins and lived your life. And then He credits Jesus' 33 years of perfect living to you as if you had lived that life, and He treats you as that deserves. And then on the basis of those two accounting transactions, He makes one final, legal decision: that sinner is forgiven and he is righteous before My Law. That's the gospel. No wonder Paul could never be ashamed.

In the Lord's Table we celebrate our justification. We celebrate the reality that God did not credit our sins to us, but to Christ instead. And on the cross God treated Jesus as though He had personally committed your sins, my sins. That's the gospel. And this is a picture of the gospel.

Take a moment and prepare your heart in prayer as the men come.

Our Father, we thank You for the cup as well. Again, Father, we will never fully comprehend the reality we've studied this morning. We will never understand what would have motivated You to give up Your own Son for us, who were Your enemies. We will never understand the voluntary sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, who willingly laid down His life for each one of us who are His. Father, help us to live in light of our justification. Help us to glory in the cross. Help us to live understanding what You have done, not bearing our own guilt, knowing that it has been fully and completely born by our Lord Jesus Christ. And Father, I pray You'd help us to share this message with others. And in that light, Lord, I pray for those here this morning who still are trying to achieve a right standing before You based on their own righteousness. May You remove the blinders from their eyes today. May they see the filthiness of that righteousness, and may they cry out for the righteousness of another, even that of Jesus Christ. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.