



The Glorious and Only Gospel

Series: A Divine Antidote to Heresy

Romans 3:9-26

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Introduction: It is just simply impossible to overstate the importance of the cross of Jesus Christ. Without the cross there is no Christianity, period. The cross of Christ is the very essence and heart of our faith. The cross is more than just an event that took place 2000 years ago; it is the centerpiece of history. It is the heart of our faith. The Cross demonstrates God's sovereignty. The Cross demonstrates God's love and justice. The Cross demonstrates God's holiness and hatred of sin. The Cross displays God's wisdom and power. The cross of Christ is the center of everything. It is our greatest need as sinful human beings. Paul shows us that in this glorious text that we are looking at this morning. Martin Luther called this section of Scripture the "marrow of theology." Another has called this section the "heart of the Bible." And it is. It shows us first of all:

1) Mankind is thoroughly and undeniably unrighteous before God. (Rom 3:9-20, 22b-23)

Paul has just shown that Jews and Gentiles are all guilty before God of sin – the pagan, the moralist, and the religious, all guilty. He has shown that over the last 2 ½ chapters and now brings it to a head saying: **What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, (Rom 3:9)** Natural man is under sin. He is under the guilt of sin, the power of sin, and the pollution of sin. He is under the authority, under the dominion of sin, under the control of sin, under the reign of sin. That is what the phrase "under sin" means. This is the fundamental statement regarding all of mankind. Now this is tough for us to hear. Everyone wants to believe that they are basically good and a great many psychologists, counselors and preachers continually reinforce that thought. But to do that is to miss the point of the gospel.

The greatness of the "good news" is that God saves the ungodly and the sinful through the sacrifice of His Son, at great cost to Himself, completely apart from any merit in any of us. It is vitally important that we understand this and believe this before the rest of the gospel can be understood as the remarkable, unspeakably joyful, gracious, awe-inspiring, Christ-exalting, God-

glorifying truth that it is. We don't deserve any of this. We are under sin, and Paul describes that nature completely.

"None is righteous, no, not one; (Rom 3:10) From God's point of view, the only point of view that matters, no one is righteous. Righteousness, as it is used in the Scriptures, is to be completely blameless with regard to God and His law and His character. **...no one understands; no one seeks for God. (Rom 3:11)** Paul is saying that mankind is lacking in his understanding of truth, in his understanding of the spiritual reality of things. They may have a secular, carnal kind of knowledge but he cannot understand the truth about God, cannot understand the truth about himself, cannot understand sin, his own sinful nature, cannot understand the precarious position that he is in before a Holy God, no concept of God's wrath, no understanding of God's way of salvation, no concept of true joy, no concept of the eternal. For that reason: **"No-one seeks for God."** The word "seeks" is word **"ekzeteo"** which means "to crave, to seek out, to worship." To seek after God is a desire for God – to know God, to enjoy God, to worship God, to seek God in prayer. Man **does** seek after a god, but not the God of the Scripture – not on his own. Man looks for a god that they can worship, a god they can agree with, a god they can manage, a god they can live with. Every man has a god. But not every man has God. Paul continues, **All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." (Rom 3:12)** Everyone has gone his own way, departed from the path of God. Since the sin of Adam, every man has deliberately gone the wrong way, departed from the narrow way of God to embrace the broad path that leads to destruction. For that reason, everyone has become worthless, ruined. That word that is translated "worthless" is a word that means to become rancid, like sour milk.

"Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." (Rom 3:13-14) What's the point? Well, what does an open grave do? It reveals the decay of the death that is inside of it. That is what the words of mankind do according to Paul. The gossip, the falsehood, the false flatteries, the lies, the venomous words, the words of death and hatred, the cursing, the bitterness, the reproachful language, the backbiting and wickedness all reveal a soul that is dead and decaying. **"Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known." (Rom 3:15-17)** Man is a destroyer, quick to kill for his own gain. That is why we have wars and strife. That is why we sanction abortion. Ever since the fall, man is inherently a destroyer of things, not a life giver. Sin always destroys...character, lives, love, joy, hope, beauty, truth and the human soul. Paul finishes up by taking us back to the beginning of His argument and summing it up for us in one phrase,

"There is no fear of God before their eyes," (Rom 3:18) The basic problem of mankind is that they have rejected God. There is no awe, no worship, no fear, no reverence, no restraint because of his holiness. Mankind does not have sense of God's greatness, of His glory and of His sovereign majesty. There is no understanding of God's holiness as Judge, no realization of the last and final judgment and that God has the power not only to destroy the body, but to cast body and soul into hell. There is no fear of God before their eyes. That is the ultimate expression of it all. That is why Paul closes this section of his message with these words, **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. (Rom 3:19-20)** The truth shuts up our objections and drowns out our questions. We are all guilty, all accountable to God, all in desperate need. It is universally true. That is why Paul says what he does at the end of verse 22 and 23: **For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom 3:22-23)**

All of us are in the same boat. From God's perspective, from the only perspective that matters, we are all in the same condition. No difference between the prostitute and the housewife. No difference between the murderer and the social worker. No difference between the pimp and the pastor. No difference between the terrorist and the law-abider. There is no difference. We are all in desperate need. Until we see that we are all sinners, under the just condemnation of God, all deserving of his wrath, all deserving of the wages of sin which is death, until we see that we are lost and hopeless apart from God, we will never grasp the greatness of the gospel. We are all guilty, all deserving of God's wrath and judgment, all in desperate need. God made us to reflect His glory and yet God says to us: "You have missed the whole point for which I made you. I made you to experience companionship with me, to share my glory. You failed to receive that glory, you failed to glorify me, you failed to reflect my glory. You missed the whole point of life." We can do nothing to help ourselves, nothing to save ourselves, nothing to make ourselves acceptable to God – by works of the law; no human being will be justified in his sight. We are guilty before Him along with everyone else that has ever lived. Because God is holy – perfectly pure and without any sin, perfectly righteous, without any imperfection -- because He is gloriously holy and cannot look upon sin He must punish our rebellion against Him. The only way for any of us sinners to stand before a righteous God, to have fellowship with a righteous God, is to gain a righteousness that we do not have and can never earn, but the good news of Paul is that God Himself has given His own righteousness to those who believe.

2) God has provided a righteousness of His own for sinners who have no righteousness of their own. (Rom 3:21-22a, 24) What is Paul telling us? God has provided the way of life and salvation. God is the architect of this gospel and the accomplisher of it. Man is a rebel against God and our central need is reconciliation with Him. God is the one who provides the way for that reconciliation through His Son Jesus Christ. God's plan of redemption was planned by God the Father and performed by God the Son. God conceived the gospel, Christ performed the gospel and the whole object and intent of the gospel is to bring us to God. 1 Peter 3:18 tells us, **"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God."** There is a God-provided righteousness available to us.

The gospel of God in Christ was not an afterthought. It was not something that God thought of after the Law failed to redeem men. It was not a backup plan after the Jews failed to live righteously as the people of God. It was not even a response to Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden -- Jesus Christ is the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. The church was chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. It is because God had planned this salvation before the foundation of the world, that he was able to reveal it in the Law and in the prophets. When Paul says "But now, the righteousness of God has been manifested," he is telling us that great focal point of all of history has taken place, the Son of God, the Reconciler has come just as God said He would, just as God's plan promised in order to bring us to God. He has come to give to us the righteousness of God a righteousness that God, Himself, gives to us -- righteousness before God.

Here's the thing, beloved, salvation is not only the forgiveness of sins. The glory of God in salvation is not only that our sins are forgiven but that we are justified by God. We are made righteous by God. God's plan in salvation is to **justify** sinners. God's plan in salvation is to declare sinners to be "not guilty," but not only that, God declares sinners to be righteous before God. The great doctrine of justification by faith means that God not only forgives us, but He counts us as righteous. Two questions come to mind. Why would God do that and how does God do that? Paul tells us why:

3) This righteousness is a gift of God's grace alone. (Rom 3:24) Paul writes that we are **justified by his grace as a gift**. God forgives sinners because He is a gracious God; He is a giving God. God justifies sinners not because of us but because of Him. The word that is used here for gift is a Greek word that means "entirely without a cause." In other words this gift is something that is not motivated by any external compulsion of God, but is entirely of His own

free will. This is so different than the way that we usually understand the word “gift.” Usually when we give a gift, we do so because there is an external compulsion. We give gifts because it is someone’s birthday, or because it is an anniversary, make-up gifts, etc. On occasion we give something just because, but even then we give gifts to people who give us pleasure or who do something for us. That is our conception of gifts. Not with salvation, though. God gives the gift of saving righteousness apart from any outward compulsion at all but instead out of his great love.

We justified as a gift by God’s grace. Grace is unmerited or undeserved favor. It is kindness and blessing shown to someone who is utterly undeserving. But God’s grace in salvation is even deeper than that. It is not merely a free gift to someone who has no merit in them, it is the free gift of eternal life to someone who deserves the exact opposite. The salvation of sinners is entirely an expression of the great and sovereign love of God. It is mystery of God’s majesty and sovereignty that we will never understand. It is God Himself, and He alone, who provides the way of salvation, the One whom we have defied, and disobeyed and provoked, against whom we have rebelled and sinned. It is His grace that reconciles us to Him, and this is the only way of salvation. But here is what we must understand and remember deep within our souls. Though salvation is given to us as a gracious gift, it doesn’t happen merely by God saying, “I forgive you.” For God to give this gift, it costs Him dearly and deeply. Because of God’s eternal justice and righteousness, because He must judge sin, something else had to happen before our forgiveness could become possible. Before God can justify us -- declare us not guilty and righteous before Him -- something has to happen. That something is the redeeming work of Christ. We must remember that

4) The work of the Lord Jesus Christ in dying in the place of His people, redeeming them from sin, has made this grace possible. (Rom 3:24-25) How does God justify sinners? Through the redemption and propitiation of His Son. Jesus Christ did not come into the world merely to announce the way of salvation. He came to accomplish our salvation. The first word associated with the way of salvation here is redemption. Redemption has to do with what Jesus did with respect to us. Redemption is a word used for the releasing of the bonds of a prisoner or of a slave by the payment of a ransom. By nature we are slaves of and we need someone to set us free from our slavery and captivity to sin. We are not able to pay the redemption price. God has declared that the wages of sin is death. The wages of sin is not a less fulfilling life, not a life of trouble, not a life of financial lack or lost purpose, but death. The price to be paid is death to redeem us from a slavery of our own doing. Sin demands death as its redemption price.

We are not able to pay the redemption price, but thank God, Another has come and paid the price for us. The Lord Jesus Christ came to ransom us, to deliver us; He paid the price and so the prison that held us has been opened and we who were slaves have been made free. He has purchased us from the power and consequences of sin. He has done it by paying the redemption price with His blood. That is why Peter writes, **“You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”** (1Pe 1:18-19) The greatest picture of redemption is found in the book of Hosea. God ordered His prophet Hosea to marry Gomer. He was told "Go," says God, "take to yourself an adulterous wife ...". This tells us that Gomer was known as a woman of questionable morals even before Hosea asked for her hand in marriage. By reading between the lines it appears that for a while everything appeared to be going well in the new home. Hosea and Gomer were blessed with the birth of a son. But the happiness, if any, did not last long. Gomer gave birth to two more children, but these were children of adultery. Gomer ran away. She became a prostitute. She pursued her life of adulterous harlotries until she was totally penniless and worthless. Finally, she was placed for sale in a slave market in Samaria. God sent Hosea to buy back his wife. Hosea 3:1-3 records the details of Hosea's redemption of his wife. **And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver (half the price of a slave) and a homer and a lethech of barley. And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you." (Hos 3:1-3)** This is a vivid picture of redemption. This is exactly what happens to us in salvation. We are Gomer, we are the adulterous wife sold on the auction block of sin. The world bids for us (with its many kinds of currency) to keep us in its bonds. But the Lord Jesus enters the slave market of sin and rather than paying 15 shekels of silver and some barley, He says in effect, "I bid the infinite price of my blood." And He takes us to be His own.

So in order for God to forgive us, a redemption price had to be paid – the blood of Christ. Why this price? Why is the blood of Christ the price required to redeem us from sin's penalty, power, and consequence? Because God requires a propitiation. This is the second key word – **God put Christ forward as a propitiation.** The word propitiation is a word that means a sacrifice that turns away or satisfies the wrath of an offended God. In ancient pagan religions, propitiation referred to what an idol worshipper did when he presented an offering to one of the gods or goddesses. But the propitiation described here is not like that. First, God's wrath is

not like the fickle, impulsive anger of the make –believe pagan deities. It is true wrath against sin, against ungodliness, against unrighteousness. God’s holiness demands that sin be paid for. Second, although propitiation means turning God’s wrath aside, satisfying His just wrath against sin, it is not a matter of human beings trying to appease God’s wrath by bringing some offering to Him. We don’t propitiate God. God propitiates Himself through His Son’s bloody death at the cross. We don’t bring the sacrifice that turns God’s wrath away, God puts Christ forward as that offering. Out of His great love for sinners, God Himself provides the way by which His wrath can be satisfied. Moreover He Himself is the way – in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. In order for God to forge a relationship with us, God had to deal with our sin, He had to judge our sin and remove it from us so that we could be made His children. The Holy God had to deal our sinfulness and rebellion that stood in the way of fellowship with Him and the only way to remove the infinite debt of our sins from us and remain holy was to judge our sins on a holy and sinless substitute and the only substitute whose sacrifice and blood could pay the infinite cost of our offense against God’s holiness was His own dear Son – the God-man Jesus Christ.

On the cross God poured His fury and hatred of sin upon the head of His beloved Son, exhausting His wrath against the sins of those who would believe, on His Son, turning His face away and pouring the curse of our sin upon Him in our place. Christ is the propitiation to God for sin. He makes satisfaction to divine justice, for the sins of his people. God satisfies the demands of His own wrath, he pays His own redemption price in Christ so His love may go out to embrace and save sinners. That is why John writes in I John 4:9-10, **(1Jo 4:9-10)** There is no place where a person can look and more plainly see the wrath of God being poured out than on the cross. There is also no place where a person can look to see more plainly the love and mercy of God poured out than on the cross. Praise be to God that both things are true. When God looks upon the offering of Christ on the cross, when he looks upon us, he sees the blood of Christ shed for the covering of His people. The price is paid through Christ. He has done everything necessary for salvation. How then, is the salvation received? Paul tells us:

5) This righteousness that God has graciously given is received through simple faith. (Rom 3:22, 25) The righteousness of God is available to us only through faith in Jesus Christ. Some people trust in their works, in good deeds, in church attendance, in religious ritual, in baptism, in comparative righteousness. There are even those who say, "I believe in God," as if that only were enough to take them to heaven. But salvation depends on more than a vague, quasi-religious confidence in "the Man upstairs." In God's eyes, the only faith that saves is faith that is directed at his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

True faith is not an awareness of the truth, nor is it even an acceptance of the truth. True saving faith is not just believing that Jesus lived and died. True saving faith is believing that Jesus died for me. It is trusting that He has done all and only He has done all that is necessary to save us and to present us holy before God. It is resting all of your hope for eternity on Him as Savior and following Him as Lord. The command of the gospel is to repent, to turn away from your old life, and to believe in Jesus Christ. It is resting entirely on Christ as the author and finisher of our salvation. We are children of God, not because of any intrinsic righteousness, not because of anything that we have done, but because the righteousness of Christ has been given to us. He does it all. The reason for which God accepts us and pardons us is not found in us! It's not because we were good. It's not because we were better than others. It's not because God foresaw good works in us. It's not because God foresaw faith in us. It is not because of our performance. It is not because of us at all. It is all because of what Christ has done for us, His work on the cross. This is a glorious, radical truth that we cannot take for granted, forget or attempt to soften. God accepts and pardons those who don't deserve to be accepted and pardoned, declares righteous those who are unrighteous, declares accepted those who ought not to be accepted, and declares sinners in rebellion against Him to be accepted and in right relationship to Him through faith in what Christ did for us. That's how radical justification by faith is! This is a glorious gospel and

6) It is only by this gospel that God can remain just yet still declare sinners “not guilty”. (Rom 3:26) The cross is not a nebulous, indefinable symbol of self-giving love; on the contrary, the cross is the monumental display of how God can be just and still pardon guilty sinners. It is only in a right understanding of the gospel that God remains just in giving to sinners salvation. How so? This problem is solved through His plan involving the substitutionary sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross. God did not abandon His justice because His righteous wrath against sin was poured out on Christ as our substitute; and He accepted this sacrifice as full payment for sins. As a result He can forgive the fallen sinner and yet maintain His righteousness. God's holiness and justice is upheld—His Son has paid for every bit of our sin in our place and He can be gracious and in exchange give to us Christ's righteousness. He is both just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus. That's the glory of the good news of the gospel. With his justice satisfied and His love poured out, sinners are declared righteous through faith in Jesus. When God “passed over the sins previously committed,” He postponed His wrath until that time that it would be fulfilled by the bloody death of the Incarnate Son at the cross. He planned it and He executed it so that all of the believers in the Old Testament era might truly be eternally saved and we may be as well.

7) Think meaningfully about the cross.

Where are your sins? There are only two places that your sin can be -- Either your sins are upon you or they are on Christ. I am calling you faith in Christ today.

Are you clinging to Christ? Is He all your hope? I am calling to you today to cling to Christ and never forget His grace and love to you and your debt to Him. Cling to Christ and avail yourself of His forgiveness every day. Abide in Him daily. Cling to Christ and show your love to Him. Cling to Christ and meditate on Christ's sacrifice and the propitiation made by His death. Never be ashamed of Christ...

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