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Romans 3:25b-31

"How To Be Right With God" (Pt 2)

January 19, 2022

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Romans 3:25 as we continue our study through Paul's masterpiece of the gospel according to grace.

We have spent quite a bit of time doing the setup, if you will. Paul spent sixteen verses introducing himself to the people he had never met in lieu of writing a recommendation letter for a lady that was moving to Rome from the Corinth area. But what started off as a recommendation letter becomes, really, just the most amazing book on salvation by grace and through faith alone.

Paul spends the better part of chapters 1, 2 and 3 - to chapter 3:20 - making really one argument, and that argument is we need a Savior. And he really comes at it from literally every point of view. He begins by saying that what we can know about God has been available to us, both in the creation around us and in the conscience that God has placed in every heart. And so for us to not respond to that input but rather, because of sin, to turn away from God, leaves us in a place where God's judgment is just and justified. And so he takes us, in chapter 1, through how bad sin can go if left to itself - where it will ultimately take you or any society - and it's pretty gruesome. But not everyone is a perverted sinner that carries itself to the end. Some are very respectable sinners. They're sinners, though. That's the common denominator. And so, in chapter 2, Paul talks about the sinner who is acceptable to society, who does all of the things well, who seems to have his life together, who condemns sin in others but doesn't see it in himself. And that alone makes him guilty, I guess, because he can see it in somebody else. And then finally Paul turns to the religious man, the one who has the law and the sacrifices and circumcision and everything else that went along with the Jewish life, if you will, at the time. And Paul said even they need a Savior; their religion won't save them. And so Paul belabors the fact, for three and a half chapters, to say everyone is a sinful person. No one is righteous. There is none, no, not one. And then, as we get to verse 21 in this kind of hopeless condition, you read the word, in verse 3:21, "But.....but."

And then, for the rest of the book, really, Paul presents first God's plan to save sinful man and then, as we get a little further in the book, God's plan to change sinful man into a godly life. But first the salvation that God wants to bring.

And so we started in verse 21 last week, and Paul's points were seven in all on how to be right with God. And if you weren't with us, I hope that you'll go back and listen to the study because it is foundational for every Christian to know why the salvation that God gives to us through His Word is unique from every religion and every creed and every practice of man, that God's idea is the best and is the only.

But he said to us last week, in verse 21, that righteousness - or that which was right with God, standing with God that is right - can come to man apart from his performance, apart from the law. That it is God's plan, and has always been God's plan, to make man righteous by faith. And so that is today. You can be right with God through your faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. It's the only way to be made right with God. We read in verse 22 and verse 23 last week that that salvation that God has provided is available to all men that would believe, to everyone. It is provided freely by God's grace. You don't earn it; He gives it to you. It is accomplished by redemption. In other words, the price had to be paid, and the price for sin is death. And so the redemption price that God paid was an atoning sacrifice of His Son's death and His shed blood. It is the hope for everyone who believes, and it is God's promise to everyone who says to himself, "I am a sinner, and I do need some help." The answer is straightforward, is very narrow, and it is the only way that you can go for life.

Tonight we want to finish those verses down through verse 31, towards the end of the chapter, and focus on God's plan to put His righteousness into your account through His Son. And, like I said, if you weren't with us last week, go back and listen because I really think you need to be able to articulate clearly to people who aren't saved why you have to be saved and what God has done to be able to enable you to be right with Him.

The most controlling, obvious, I think, characteristic of man, in his sin, is self. Right? Self-righteousness, self-gratification, self-fulfillment, self-help. The typical worldly man is absorbed with how he feels and what he wants and his possessions, his personal welfare, my personal choices. You can even see it creeping into the life of the church and into evangelical circles where faith has been defined, unfortunately, by some very aberrant teaching like the health-and-wealth gospels, that as long as you have faith, it's a great gain for yourself. You can sit on the throne of your life and really order things up from the Lord like just put a quarter in the slot and pull. Just pray the right prayer and say Jesus' name, and you get what you want. And it is turning the gospel, if you will, to self-interest.

Though it is a great gain for you and me to learn that we can be saved from death to life, that God will forgive our sins, that we will have an eternity with Him, you should know that, at least from God's standpoint, salvation is first focused not upon you but upon God. That the greatest interest that God has, first and foremost, is the glory of the Father; that everything that He's done to save you and me, He gets credit for; that everything He offers to you tonight as a child of God, thanks be to God. He's the One that stands to get worship from us. He's the One that we spent a half an hour raising our hands to and lifting our voices and clapping our hands because He's the One who has brought us to life. It is the foremost purpose of our salvation - to glorify God. When Paul wrote to the Colossians, in chapter 1:16, he said, "All things were created through Him," and then it says, "and for Him." Right? We exist, more than anything else, to give honor to the Lord, to our Creator, to our Savior. We read in Psalm 115:1, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your name give glory."

First and foremost, before you ever get saved and forgiven and placed in that position where you know what your future holds, God would like you to know that He saved you first for His glory. Right? So that His name might be honored. He's the only One who is the Lord. He's the only One who has a right to our worship. And it is because of who He is and what He has done that Paul, wherever we turn in the Scriptures, exhorts us to glorify the Lord in the smallest of ways, in every way. When he wrote to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 10:31, he said, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." God wants glory. Right? The church should be giving God glory. That's why we're here. That's why He made us. To honor Him. Our very existence is designed to glorify the Lord. And it's interesting because we who were once consumed with only self-interest, once we are saved, we now take great interest in His glory, not in our own. Right? That's why you're here. That's why you have a Bible. That's why you're lifting your voices. Because God is worthy to be praised.

David, very far from perfect, is called in the Bible "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22) because the majority of his life was lived in a way that sought to please the LORD and to honor Him. And he did so through obedience and through service. He risked his life for the sake of God's people when they could have cared less. He didn't lay his hand upon Saul when he could have killed his enemy and been done with the seven-and-a-half years of having to run, if you will. But he was willing to live his life in such a way that the LORD would get honor. He would write, in Psalm 16:8, "I have set the LORD always before me; because He is

at my right hand I shall not be moved." So he has this idea of living his life in a way that would honor the LORD.

So it is this spiritual, I guess, battle with self, due to sin, that Jesus came to deliver us from. And if you're not delivered from, if you're not letting the Lord get your eyes off of you and back onto His glory, you're going to spend a lot of your Christian life not doing what God would want you to do. You're not going to be witnessing to people because you'll be worried what they think of you. And you're not going to be involved in outreach because people won't always listen, and it's a lot of hard work, and it can be alienating. But if I'm interested in the glory of God, not in myself, then I can serve the Lord without being concerned about my own comfort because it is the Lord, after all, who saved me from my sin. We should know this for sure: Because of God's justice, no sin will ever go unpunished; but because of His grace, no sin is beyond His forgiveness. So there we are in the middle. The context, here, of what the Lord gives us is all about His willingness to save us and our willingness to acknowledge that it is Him.

It was in the summer of 1865, I think, that Hudson Taylor was burdened in his heart by the Lord for China. He was a pastor in Brighton, England. He did well in the church. It was a large church. He was a dynamic preacher. But he said he sat in the front of the congregation as they often did, and he said he looked out, and he saw pew upon pew of successful merchants and well-dressed wives and scrubbed kids who were trained to hide their impatience. And he said, "The thousands sitting before me rejoice in their own security while the millions across the world were perishing for lack of knowledge of who the Lord was." So that night, after evening service, he went out on the beach at Brighton (you can still find that place today) and got on his knees, and he said to the Lord, "Lord, if You'll give me 24 willing laborers to go with me to China, I'll leave this comfortable place and go." It became the birthplace of the Inland China Missions, where far more than 24 folks went. Today it still supports 100 million Chinese believers, both through the underground church and to the church that is identifiable. Hudson Taylor became most useful to the Lord when his focus went from himself to God and to His glory.

So, make sure that's on your list of things to understand. Your salvation is, first and foremost, a way of bringing God honor. Marvelous as your deliverance from hell is and your eternal life is, it is secondary to God being glorified for His saving work. Jesus, when His ministry life was over, and He was headed to the cross, said to the Father, in His prayer down in the valley there (John 17:4), "I have glorified

You on the earth. I have brought You glory. That's been My life, is to give You honor." Paul would write to the Philippians the same thing, that "God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.....and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11). That's really what God's interested in. So you and I are here tonight saved so that God might be honored. Good thing that we're gettin' saved. Praise the Lord, my sins are gone. Thank You, Lord, I'm goin' to heaven. My name is in the Book. But more than that, praise the Lord for who He is, that He hasn't left us in the way that we could have been left and frightened.

So, here in our final verses tonight, in this basic-Bible-truth section of justification by faith alone in response to God's mercy, Paul will speak about how salvation glorifies the Lord. And I'll give you four things that you can write down if you want. He will say that the cross of Jesus shows us the righteousness of God; that the cross of Jesus brings exaltation or honor to His grace; that the cross of Jesus reveals that God's appeal to life for man is universal; and the cross of Jesus confirms God's law.

Now let's read, beginning in the middle of verse 25. And we had gotten to the point where we had read, "whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith," and we had stopped right there. So, speaking of the cross, we read, "to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Now I want you to notice at the middle of verse 25 and again in verse 26, the Lord says twice "to demonstrate God's righteousness" or His doing what God did in saving us was right, that the cross was a demonstration of God's properness in dealing with our sin. The word "righteousness" - without fault, without error, without questionable motive, appropriate, acceptable, holy. God was able, through the cross, to do a couple of things: He could offer us salvation and forgiveness of our sins and yet, in so doing, He doesn't violate His own holiness and justice. That was tricky. Right? The Lord's holy. He is without sin. You've sinned. He's made you. He wants to have fellowship with you, but sin has popped up. And He's made a rule, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Now He could change the rules, but that wouldn't be right. "Oh, Lord, I see You want everybody with You, but they've all sinned, they're all gonna die." "Oh, man. I'll change the rules. If they sin too much, then that'll be it." No. God is holy. So it was at the cross

that God showed us, by His judgment, that He hated man's sin. But yet, at the same time, He loved man. And so He sends His Son to bear our sins, and He's willing to pay the cost to redeem us from them.

If you look at the history of religion, you will find, without exception, that man makes his gods in his own image. And the only difference between man and the gods that he makes is the presumed power of his god. Who has the most authority? In fact, most all gods portrayed by man's religion are portrayed as unpredictable, they are routinely accused of being unfair, they are inconsistent, they are morally deficient most of the time. The gods are not really even gods that you would look up to, like, "Man, I want to be like that." Because we can't. And why shouldn't they be like that? Look at the people who created them. Most gods in the world are just larger-than-life images of their creators.

Unfortunately, it is often that same attitude that, when we come to Almighty God, we start to treat Him almost in the same manner. We start to question Him. Well, if God is so good.....or if God is so holy, why would He let people suffer? Why would the wicked prosper? Why would the innocent have such difficulty? And we begin to question the God who we should know to be good. There are many things - from a purely human perspective - that may leave us feeling that God is not so righteous. If you read your Bible, you might say to yourself, "Well, why did Abraham have to wander for his whole life in a land that he was going to inherit if the LORD wasn't going to give it to him? Why should he bother?! He had to wait 400 more years before anyone in his family would ever see it. Why did the nation have to suffer in Egypt for so long? Why did He use the wicked to chastise His own when the punishers were worse than those who were being punished?" And we begin to ask the questions. Malachi wrote, in chapter 2:17, "You have wearied the LORD with your words; yet you say, 'In what way have we wearied Him?' In that you say, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,' or, 'Where is the God of justice?' " People begin to ask about the goodness of God. They presume they know as much as He does, and yet we are told that His ways are beyond our finding out (Romans 11:33), and He does everything well (Mark 7:37). Hard to balance those things when we see God.

And yet we know - even read here - God demonstrates what He did was righteous, acceptable, by the rules, fulfilling and being faithful to who He is. God would give us full proof that He is righteous, that He judges righteously, by looking at the cross. Paul will say here that even those at the cross - the most unjust act of man

- who put to death the only sinless Man that ever lived, the most unjust act, God not only allowed, He planned for so that He could make it the foundation for saving us and doing it righteously. If it was at the cross that He took payment, He offered payment that was sufficient to remove our sinfulness and to satisfy His judgment against sin. But in order to do that, He'd have to kill His own Son. And we're all guilty for that; we're all sinners, and we needed a Savior who would give His life for our sin.

So, this greatest act of God....and notice in verses 25 and 26 that Paul wants to say God demonstrated it, His right behavior when it comes to our salvation. He did it, and "in His forbearance," verse 25, "God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time" (specifically) "His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." If you add to the death of Jesus this act of God's grace, that He enhanced His grace by the word "forbearance," verse 25, it means that God put on hold what was justly due us. That's what it means. Right? God put a timer on. "You sin, you deserve to die, but I'll wait a while." God, in His goodness, approached us with a forbearance as He also gave His Son for our salvation. It was not a sign of injustice; it was just a sign of patience. A loving God who wants man to return to Him, who waits upon us to just listen and, hopefully, to respond. "God is not slack concerning His promise," Peter will write (2 Peter 3:9), "as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." And this word "forbearance" means just that. God wants to give us time to repent. You might remember back in chapter 2:4, where the Lord says, "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

If you look up the word "forbearance," the best definition I've ever read is the willingness to stand next to a door that's spring-loaded, and you have your hand on it. If you take your hand off, it's going to swing shut. But God, in His forbearance, before your judgment in sin, is going to hold the door open for you. He's going to offer you eternal life, but He's going to wait. He's waiting because He's righteous. He's paid the price. He's not lettin' you off the hook. He's paid so that you could get off the hook. So, like I said, no sin will ever go unpunished but, by God's grace, no sin is beyond His forgiveness. And the context of God's forbearance here is His willingness to withhold what we deserve for a time - a temporary passing of sin's reward - so that you and I and every man, for that matter, might receive the righteousness which He purchased by the blood of His Son. God puts what you

deserve on a.....when people go, "Well if God's so good, why does He let that happen?" God is just waiting. God is good. That's not unrighteous; that's more righteous. That's having a solution and then giving you some time.

I remember, years ago, Pastor Chuck. We were in a study on a Sunday night, and he said....maybe in the late 70's or early 80's....but he said, "How many of you got saved this decade?" And most of us raised our hands. He said, "Wouldn't it have been horrible if the Lord had come in 1965 or in 1970?" Oh, yeah. Glad He waited. Some of you are probably glad He waited! Oh, you might have come around to the Lord during the Tribulation, but, boy, what a hard route that would have been taken. But isn't it good that God stood by the door and kept it open?

That's what this word "forbearance" is. God demonstrates His righteousness - what is right in everyone's sight - He's holy, He's good. He does that by sending His Son to the cross to pay for the sins, and then He holds back what we rightfully deserve, for a time, so that He might offer us life. God's forbearance. It's a great picture. A permanent solution for our sins. Even after the fall. Think about it. God could have easily destroyed Adam and Eve. It wouldn't have been hard to destroy the entire race; there were two of them. Just start over. "Maybe the next set will listen to Me a little better. Stay away from the tree. What's wrong with these knuckleheads? I thought this was going to work." (Pastor Jack hits his hand down on the podium.) Bam. "Didn't work!"

No. God held open the door for a time. In the days of Noah, 120 years building the ark, the world, in itself, didn't want anything to do with God. But God was holding the door open. Left eight souls to get into that ark and to survive His judgment, to survive to the next generation. Not because they were perfect but because they were willing to listen to Him. So He kept the door open for them.

In the subsequent judgments of God that you read in the Bible, they were not all universal. In fact, they will not be until we get to the book of Revelation. They are judgments that are specific to individuals, sometimes to small groups, even to entire nations. But they are matched with His patience where He holds the door open to us. Asaph would write, in Psalm 78, as he kind of rehearsed what God had been doing in the nation for years, and he writes, in verse 38, "But He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, and did not stir up all His wrath; for He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again."

God was forbearing. And He does it in your life and mine. You've been saved for I don't know how long, but I bet you've sinned quite a bit still. Isn't God good to just wait? Right? He washes us, He seeks to sanctify us (which will be the last part of this book of Romans), to set us apart, to make us more like Himself. But in every step, He holds the door. Get that picture in your mind - God standing at the door that just wants to close. I don't know...I grew up in a house that had one of those doors, and my dad would yell at us if we just let it go because it would slam. You know? Bam! The door shut. Well that door doesn't have to shut when Jesus stands next to it. When Paul was speaking to those philosophers on Mars Hill in Acts 17:30-31, he said to them, "Those times of ignorance God" (winked at) "overlooked" (is the word that he used), "but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." God has winked at, God has let it go by, He has let it pass over. Why does God do? Well, God's waiting for those to be saved because that brings Him honor, and that brings Him glory.

The real challenge for salvation, according to the Bible, was not getting sinful men to a holy God; the real challenge is bringing a holy God to accept sinful man without violating His own righteousness and justice. That was the issue. Right? That was the difficulty. And at the cross, God provides a just redemption for sinful man. The cross demonstrates that God is both supremely just and supremely gracious. It is the ultimate vindication of His righteousness. He's a holy God. He didn't sweep your sins under the rug; He paid for them. He didn't look the other way; He died on your behalf. The most unfathomable of all spiritual mysteries is that a holy, just God would provide redemption for a sinful people and, in that gracious act, not violate any of His own attributes. He didn't, like I said...He still brings Himself glory. In His forbearance, He waits for all of us to come.

When I repent and come to the Lord, I'm saved; He's glorified. When Achan was caught there at Jericho stealing the stuff that he was supposed to give to the LORD - because God gave the victory and the battle wasn't theirs, really, it was God's, to His honor - when he was confronted by Joshua, for his sin, Joshua said to him, in chapter 7:19, "My son, I beg you, give glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession to Him." Recognize who God is. Honor Him. Probably could have escaped the judgment had he just spoken up, but he did not.

So we read here, in verse 26, that the cross demonstrates to every generation, and notice those words "at the present time," God's just plan to redeem unjust man. And in so doing, in waiting and waiting, He becomes just, and He's also the justifier for everyone who, during that waiting time, turns in their faith to His Son. So the time to act is now, while the door is still open. Because He could let it go. I mean, the Bible certainly says at some point you get in your life where the Lord just says, "Just have what you want. Go back to chapter 1. Have it your way."

Secondly, not only does the cross reveal God's righteousness, it also exalts His grace. Verse 27 says this, "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." The cross proves the utter futility of man trying to come to God on his own or in his own power or with his own accomplishments. Imagine....I think I said it last week, but imagine that God would send His Son to die so that faith in Him would be only one option for man, that the other option would be, "Or, in your self-righteousness you could try harder." That would be brutal. Sends His Son to the cross as an option, a door #1, door #2. But that's not what it is at all. God sends His Son because the cross says we need God's grace.

Because the power of salvation is in the cross alone, man has no claim to self-congratulations or self-satisfaction. None of you is here because you said, "Well, and then I met the Lord. I figured it out. Now I'm saved." God brought you here. He opened your eyes. He provided a Savior. No way are you going to be boasting in your faith. You maybe have heard people give testimonies, and they'll say things like, "Oh, and I was broken, so I prayed for six hours, and then I broke through." "I fasted for two days, and finally the Lord answered my prayer." All of that is nonsense. It's all nonsense. Because it's not about you; it's about Him. A life that is broken by the cross doesn't talk that way. Paul wrote, in chapter 2:8-9, to the Ephesians, that "by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

Even your hope and your trust in the Lord was motivated, formed, and encouraged by the Lord Himself. Glad to be saved. But boasting, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, early on in chapter 1, "If you glory, make sure you glory in the Lord." And, boy, did the Corinthian church need to hear that. I wrote under 1 Corinthians 1:31, "We are believers, not achievers. We are believers, not achievers." Forget stressing your achievements. Stress your believing and who you believe in. Only the focus....often

in churches you find, when you hear sermons, that the focus to congregations is, "Here's what we should do for the Lord." And Pastor Chuck, years ago, taught me, and it sits well with me, when we get together, we should be talking about what the Lord's done for us because that's to His glory. And if you really realize what God has done for you, you'll be motivated to serve Him. Out of your gratefulness and awe, you'll do whatever it takes to make Him happy, to walk with Him. It isn't about what you're going to do for the Lord. Look what God has done for you. The cross brings glory to God because it's the only way. We can't boast. Salvation is a work that God alone has brought. Salvation is by the law of faith.

Not even Abraham, who was the father of the chosen people - the Jews, could be justified by God by his works. In fact, when we get to chapter 4 - by the way, today I worked on chapter 5:1-11, the eternal security of the believer; so if you ever wonder about whether you can lose your salvation, I'll just give you a preview: no, you cannot; but be here in chapter 5 - but in any event, in chapter 4 we're going to look at Abraham's life and how God used his life to teach us that ever since God began to communicate, this has always been the way that God has promised to bring us to Himself. Not justified by your works. The attitude of faith is exemplified, I think, for us in the tax collector in the Temple, there in Luke 18, where he's stands afar off, and he doesn't lift his eyes to heaven. And he beats his breast, and he says, "Lord, I'm a sinner, be merciful to me!" That's really what faith's all about. Right? I don't have anything to offer. God has everything to give me. And the greatest lie in the world, and that's common to all false religion, is that by a certain set of works, man is able to make himself acceptable with God. And here's the deal: the cross makes that premise impossible. Either God's wrong, or you're wrong because He declares that the cross is the only way of life.

Notice that verse 28 declares that saving faith is completely detached from our works. It is, by definition, resting in the completed work of Jesus who became the scapegoat - a Lamb without spot or blemish - by whom He could save us in love and make us holy still.

Now there're a lot of things, if you go through the Bible, that define what saving faith, real faith, honest faith, the kind that God responds to, is not. Because, notice, it is by faith apart from the works of the law that we could be saved. And there're a lot of things that people give credit to, but it isn't necessarily salvation at all. For example, there're a lot of people that are visibly moral, but you can be outwardly moral, just not be saved. You know, in fact, some unbelievers put

believers to shame by their diligence and their morality and by their generosity, by their selflessness, by their honesty. I've always admired Mormon missionaries traveling for two years on a bicycle. How many of you would do that for Christ? Leave your job, live with nothing just so that His name could be exalted. Now they're not serving the God of the Bible, but they are certainly morally visible. The rich young ruler, when he came to Jesus (Matthew 19, Mark 10, Luke 18) - and he wanted so much to have the life that he knew he didn't have but he saw in the Lord - when the Lord began to speak to him about the law, he was able to brag that much of the moral law in human relationships, he was absolutely good in. And the Lord didn't say, "You weren't." He was very proud of his moral life, if you will, and yet he only balked when asked who his god was. Because his outward life would have put to shame many, I think. A rich guy on his knees, in the dirt, in front of an itinerant preacher. He was willing to humble himself. He didn't have what he wanted. But he also didn't want to leave his god. So visible morality, that doesn't make you saved.

Intellectual knowledge of God isn't salvation either. Right? It is possible to know much about God and not be saved. Go read Matthew 2, when the wise men finally come to Herod to find out where He that is going to be born the King of the Jews should have been born. And Herod doesn't know for nothin'. And he turns to the scribes and the Pharisees, and he says to them, "Well, where is this Messiah's birthplace?" and they go right to Bible prophecy, and they tell him about Bethlehem. And Bethlehem is only three miles away. So if they were at all hungry to know God, they might have gone, "Let's go with you. I'd like to see if He's there! It's right here in my Bible." Their heads were full of information; their hearts were empty.

Religious involvement is certainly no proof that you're saved. If you read through the Old Testament - Isaiah 1, Ezekiel 20, Malachi 1, there're a thousand verses like that - the Lord will go out of His way to chastise His people for having a religion without a heart for God. They're religious. So religious involvement doesn't mean you're saved.

Actively involved in ministry doesn't mean you're saved. That's no proof. Judas was actively involved in ministry for 3½ years. You see Jews everywhere going, "There's one of Jesus' disciples, here's one of His inner group"? But he never was intimate. Demas traveled with Paul (Colossians 4) for years. Demas said hello to the Colossians. He was a part of the team. He traveled much with Paul, yet in 2

Timothy 4:10, we read, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world," and he's gone back to the world. Really don't know what his outcome would be. We don't know. We can't say. But that's no guarantee.

Even if you're convicted of sin. That's really no guarantee, either. Lots of people feel bad about sin. Judas felt bad about his sin; felt bad enough to kill himself. Just not willing to turn to the Lord for forgiveness. So that doesn't work. The world is full of sinners and guilty people.

Even people that say, "Well, I know I'm saved." That's no mark, either. The world is full of people that are convinced in their minds that they're right with God. But yet you read through the Bible, and God is constantly saying, "Well, if you think you're right with Me, be sure that you are." Doers of the word, they're saved; not hearers only, deceiving themselves (James 1:22). Building their house upon the rock or upon the sand (Matthew 7:24). It isn't till there's trouble that comes that will begin to reveal your heart.

And so there are some things, certainly, in the Bible that would say to us those are not the places where you have real assurance of your salvation. And yet we are told by faith in Jesus, apart from the law, we find life. There are some real reliable proofs that you are saved in the Bible, that you can live with the certainty of the relationship and feel comfortable with where you stand. I think maybe the greatest one is that you have a tremendous love for God. Because an unbeliever doesn't love the Lord. No unsaved person has a love for the Lord or any desire to love Him. The believer is characterized by a love for the Lord. "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God" (Psalm 42:1). David wrote, "I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy" (Psalm 43:4). "Whom have I in heaven but You? I have no one on earth besides You" (Psalm 73:25). And so it goes. He's precious to us who know Him. So a believer is characterized by that great love for the Lord.

Most believers, by the work of God's Spirit, seek after repentance over their sin and hate when they sin. There's no comfort level when sin is a part of your life. Oh, you sin. Everyone does. But it isn't something that you settle for. And what accompanies real salvation and real faith is a hatred for sin and a desire for forgiveness. Because, in Matthew 6:24, Jesus said that you couldn't serve two masters; you'd hate the one and love the other. So you can't love sin and love God. It's too big of a dilemma. You can't survive that way. So if you truly know the

Lord, you'll be unsettled with sin. What did the LORD say through Solomon, there in Proverbs 28:13, when He said, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy." That's really an attribute of a true believer, that you cannot live with sin and feel comfortable with it. The true believer's going to hate sin, even when he falls prey to it. And Paul will talk about that when we get to chapter 7:16, where he says, "If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good." Paul said, "I don't want to sin, but I find myself sinning, and I grieve over it."

Another attribute of a real believer - true humility. Because no one can be saved as long as he trusts in himself. Just read verse 27 here. Salvation begins with an awareness of spiritual poverty. "Blessed are the poor in spirit...." (Matthew 5:3). And so, if you come to know the Lord, then you're willing to deny yourself and pick up your cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24, Luke 9:23). The prodigal son, when he came to his senses, went home, confessed his sinfulness with genuine humility, was willing to no longer be a son - even just a servant, "I just want to be in my father's house" (Luke 15:17-19). So true humility is borne out of a true relationship with God. You can't look at God and look at yourself and be cocky. You're just happy to be in and considered.

As we've been reading tonight, having a devotion to God's glory rather than to your own is a genuine mark of a believer. Paul, when he wrote to the Philippians, in chapter 1:20, mentioned that very thing. So that's something, I think, that we can look at. He said, "according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death." "I just want him to be honored." That's a characteristic of a godly man.

Here's something else that a Christian does. He prays. I don't mean the kind of prayers that everybody prays when they're in trouble. I mean the kinds of prayers that Paul said (Romans 8:15), "As God sends His Spirit into us, in our hearts we start to cry, 'Abba, Father.'" We start to develop a genuine dependency upon the Lord because He longs for fellowship.

Another sign of your true born-again experience: agape love, God's love. Most people, as we started saying, self is all about you and what you want. But you come to the Lord, and God begins to do things in your life that only He could do. John would write in 1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death to life,

because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death." "Here's a new commandment that I give you, that you love one another; like I have loved you. By this love, all people will know you're My disciples" (John 13:34-35). So that's a tangible proof of God's Spirit living with you. The person who does not sincerely care for the well-being of others, but only cares for himself, should wonder where he stands with God.

What else? Separation from the world. We're called to be in it but not of it (John 17:14-18). Jesus prayed, in John 17 there, "I don't pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. Sanctify them" (set them apart) "by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world." We're not to be of the world, but we're in it to be a witness. And somehow Christians should separate themselves from it.

True born-again Christians grow spiritually. If you go back and you read the parable of the sower (Matthew 13), I think the main emphasis of that very long and explained parable is: which kind of heart do we need to have to bear fruit? And the only heart that genuinely bore fruit was the one who is open to the Lord and walking with Him. So, spiritual growth.

And maybe, lastly, obedient living. Christians obey the Lord or they seek to, they want to. It matters to them. It is a fruit of our salvation. "In this the children of God and the children of the devil are made known;" John writes (1 John 3:10), "If you don't practice righteousness, you're not of God, neither if you don't love your brother."

So the important truth that the cross exalts God's grace is that salvation is by faith, not of yourself; you can't boast. But the work of God should be shown in your life.

Thirdly, the cross will reveal God has a universal call upon every man. Verse 29 says this, "Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." Pagan religions invariably have many gods. Some are more powerful than others. Christianity has one God who says, "I'm God. Nobody else like Me." And the cross reflects God's salvation for everybody. Right? Jews and Gentiles. The Jews had plenty of

examples of that in their history. God put Rahab, a prostitute, in the genealogy; Ruth the Moabitess; Naaman the leper. God went out of His way to say, "These were people that were, by all accounts, religiously, set aside. But not by grace."

I remember the first time I went to church with a friend. I went to a....well, I shouldn't even tell you the church. I went to a church. Let's just go with that. And I had shorts on and no shoes....and long hair and a tee-shirt with, I think, Ozzy on it, Ozzy Osbourne. So I went to church like this on a Saturday night, and the usher said, "You can't come in here." "Why can't I come in?" And he said, "Look at the way you look." "I pretty much look like this every day." And he wouldn't let me in. I remembered that years later when I got saved. I went back and talked to the pastor about it, there. But that's not the way the Lord works.

The Lord has an open door to all because the cross says that God's call is universal. It is God's way to life for everyone who believes. Paul wrote this to the Corinthians, "For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:5-6). One God, one life, one hope. We're not saved by Jewish law. We're not saved by Gentile rejection of it. The Lord saves the circumcised and the uncircumcised.

And finally, verse 31, fourth point, the cross of Jesus confirms God's law. So Paul writes this, "Do we then make void the law through faith?" And he said, "Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law." Well, here's the line of thinking: "If we have to be saved by faith alone, why do we have a law at all? Why not just keep it? Who needs it? Maybe we've nullified it." And the answer is no. The gospel does not replace the law, for the law was never intended to be a means of your salvation; it was a vehicle through which you would prepare your heart for it. You would end up going, "Well, I can't do this!" and then, "Lord, I can't do this." And the Lord says, "Okay, then I've got a solution for you. I'll bring you by grace." The cross establishes the law in that it pays the penalty that the righteous law of God demands for sin. It doesn't destroy it; it fulfills it. The law said be perfect or die. That's not destroying it. The Lord said, "Then I'll die so you can be made perfect." The law calls all men to Jesus, who fulfilled the law and lived a life without sin and yet died so that we could live. So, even the salvation and the outpouring of God's Spirit upon us who turn to the cross is to provide strength for us to live lives that would honor Him. In fact, once you get saved, the law - which you couldn't do on

your own - you can begin to follow by God's help. And you become more and more like someone who follows the law. It's still God's best way of living. It still defines holiness in every sense of the word. It's just you can't get there on your own, so the law confirms God's Word. We need a Savior.

How's that for a mouthful?! And you can read about it. I think when we get to chapter 8, Paul will go over all of that, especially when he says, "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son" to us (verse 3).

Well, we're goin' to heaven. God has made us right. It's to His glory. You are to His glory tonight. Amen? And I tell you what. You tell everyone that wants to hear from you what God has done.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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