

# “The Righteousness of God”

## Romans - The Gospel of God

Romans 1:16-17

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**Jeff:** Our gracious heavenly Father, we are thankful for this day that You have provided. We're thankful that You have provided life in Christ. And Father, we're thankful that we belong to You through Him. And by Your Spirit dwelling in us we have a deeper and fuller and richer knowledge of You, a saving knowledge. Father, as we gather together in this place we long to understand how it is that You saved us. And so as we now study the book of Romans we ask that You will bless us in our study; bless us richly. Father, uncover the gems of these riches for us as we turn one verse after another and one page after another and explore not only our sinfulness, but explore your redemptive work in the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the transforming power of that redemptive work as it manifests itself in a redeemed life. Father, we're thankful for all the things in this book and all the things in Your word.

We ask that You'll continue to bless us, Lord, not only so that we can have a better knowledge of ourselves but also so that we can be better instruments in Your hand. Father, we realize that we come into contact with people on a daily basis who need You. Help us to be instruments in that cause. Let us speak a word into their lives, a word in season, that they might find the hope that is in Christ and Christ alone. There are so many in our world that are hopeless and seemingly helpless. Father, we pray that Your enabling grace would show them the way.

Father, we ask that You'll bless our families. Lord, we are thankful to be here. Lord, we are thankful to be here, and we realize that You've sent us out of our homes early in the morning to be together to be in Your word. And we pray, Father, that what we're doing Friday by Friday, and especially Lord's Day by Lord's Day would have an impact on the way we deal with our wives and the way we deal with our children. Father, we pray that that would be for the good of Your kingdom, for the blessing of our families.

Father, we think about our brother Bruce. And we are thankful for his life, but also thankful for this opportunity for the Blessing Board to use his gifts and trophies and to honor him this way, but also that they might be helped in their group. And so Father, we pray that this fund raiser would be exceedingly helpful to that end, and that You would exceed their expectations. We're so thankful, Father, for Your re-planting of them in Shaler Township in the old K-Mart. And Father, we pray that that would be just a wonderful blessing to them, as it seems to be already. We pray, Father, that You would continue to enlarge their ministry. And Father,. We pray that You'll bless them as they catch the vision for that second greatest commandment—loving others.

Father, we also pray that You would bless Don and Kara who find themselves with COVID 19 in a foreign land and with little medical help. And so we pray, Father, that even now You would be comforting them, and that You will be bearing witness to their spirits that You are so near to them. And Father, we also pray—and importantly so—that You would be restoring them to health. Father, we ask that You'll do this not simply for their good but for gospel good, that they might continue their work as missionaries. And yet, Father, we know that they are often ancillary to the process and they are replaceable.

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And so we pray,. Father, for them in this regard and in this way. But we know that Your will is supreme. So we submit these requests, even these, to Your perfect and good will. Lord, we ask that You’ll bless us now as we continue to study the book of romans. And we pray that You’ll bless us in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen.

**Jeff:** All right. Well, let’s turn to Romans chapter 1. And we’ll read verses 16 and 17. And as you’re turning to it, I think in some ways that we have hit the pinnacle of the book at this point, because the rest of the book is just an elaboration of verses 16 and 17. So let’s look at 16 and 17 this morning. Let me just read these verses to you, and then we’ll tie into the text.

*“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: ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”*

Well let me think about this with you for just a minute. Now this is one of those texts that I think when you know the history of it, or the history that we went through together and the way in which God has used the book of Romans, and especially verses like these, you just can’t help feeling the deep emotional tie to a text like this one.

But I want us to just back up for a minute. And I want us to ask ourselves just a basic question. What’s the content of the gospel in these verses? What is the content of the gospel in these verses? Now when you look at that question, I know that we don’t have a tendency to answer it quite like it’s answered here for us. We oftentimes think about, well, the gospel is, and then we talk about the Roman Road, or we talk about the Evangelism Explosion answer to that question. These are ways in which we express the gospel.

But when we look at this particular text, these verses ask that question. How do we define the content of the gospel from these? Well, verse 17. *“For in it”*—in the gospel—*“the righteousness of God is revealed.”* That’s the content of the gospel that Paul is working with at this point.

Now we could say any number of things. For instance, we could say things like well, the gospel doesn’t begin with man; it begins with God. And we know that. You guys know that after having been under Bruce’s tutelage for so long, knowing the God-centered way in which Bruce has taught this Bible study. It’s no surprise to us. Those kinds of things I think are just givens.

But I want you to think about this text in another way today. What I want us to do is to take these verses and just pull them apart a bit, to take them and hold them up in the light and see them in the way in which they glitter and glisten. And the first thing I want to do is that I want to ask the question that has to do with the ambiguities of this verse. In other words I want to ask the question about the subject/object problem.

How do we identify the subject/object problem? Well, I’m going to get to the verse in just a minute. But what do I mean by this?

Well, we oftentimes think about the subject meaning I, and the object meaning that table in front of me—the subject/object problem. How does the subject relate to the object and the object to the subject. But let me give you a way in which we might think about the subject/object problem as it appears here in the text.

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Let me give you an example. For instance I might say, “The love of God sustains me.” There is an object and there is a subject in that statement. The question is, how do they relate to one another?

Let me give you an example of what I mean? Am I saying that a love from God sustains me? Or am I saying that my love for God sustains me? You see how either one of them can be in that statement. The love of God sustains me. Is it a love from God that sustains me, because that would be the love of God—the love that God possesses that sustains me? Or is it my love for God that sustains me? That’s the question.

Now when you look at that you basically see one thing that’s dramatically different. In the first one something is given to me. And in the second one nothing is given. It is my love for God that sustains me. In the first one it’s the love that comes from God, the love from God that sustains me. In one of these something is given; in another one it’s not given. Okay?

Now let’s look at our text. Is the righteousness of God an attribute that characterizes God? Or is the righteousness of God a righteousness that comes from God?

Now in some ways this is huge. Why is this huge? Let me just pause for a minute to talk to you about why this is huge. It’s huge because when we think about the gospel we think about the active and the passive obedience of Christ, right? We think about the active and passive obedience, and we think about Christ dying on the cross. That’s what we describe as the passive obedience. He comes under the curse. And because he comes under the curse and takes the curse upon Himself for us, we have what? We have the forgiveness of our sins.

But there’s an active righteousness that we oftentimes forget. In fact, we’re often guilty of truncating the gospel. We’ve talked about this. We say, “What did Jesus do for me?” Well, He died for my sins that I might be forgiven. But we forget about the first thing that He did. And that is that He actively kept the whole law. And in actively keeping the whole law what do we get out of that? We get the imputation of what? His righteousness—His righteousness to our account.

This is the ledger example. I was in debt; He is rich. He took His riches and gave them to me. And when He gave them to me, now I’m rich. With what? His righteousness.

So when we think about the gospel we think about Him as the curse-bearer, and we being forgiven in Him. But we also think about the ledger example. We were poor; He was rich. He gives His riches to us, Him taking upon Himself our sin and giving His riches to us. What are the riches? His righteousness.

Now do you see why this is so important? This is important because in 1:16 and 17 the question that we’re dealing with is this. Are we dealing with a righteousness that God in fact gives, imputes?

Now let me tell you why this is so historically important. When you think about the Reformation, Martin Luther did not see this text as a righteousness that God gives. He saw it as a revelation of the attribute of God’s righteousness. In other words, “I am a righteous God, and I will judge you. And if you do not measure up then I will judge you according to My righteousness.”

And remember what Luther said. He said, “I hated God.” Why? Because God was like an angry parent who said, “You will do this. And if you don’t do this, then you will be punished.” And Luther kept saying, “I can’t do what You require of me.”

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But when he had this tower discovery, when he understood that the righteousness of God is not the revelation of God in this attribute kind of way wherein God says, “You must be up with My righteousness, or else!”--when Luther understood that the righteousness of God was something that God gives freely by faith, all of a sudden Luther understood the gospel. And he understood that it wasn’t incumbent on him to obey, and to obey enough to get by without getting punished. Now he understood that God freely gives righteousness, that he might be saved by faith. You see, that’s the big deal. That’s the reason why this is so important.

Now the question is, what is it?

**Ted Wood:** Jeff, can I just stop you?

**Jeff:** Yes; go for it.

**Ted:** I would say it’s both. *(Jeff laughs)* Both are true.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** The righteousness of God. “I am an angry God at your disobedience and self-deification.”

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** Therefore it has to be resolved by the gospel. I mean, it’s almost like one follows the other. It’s two things going on at the same time.

**Jeff:** Yeah. See, I agree; we’re going to agree. *(Sighs and laughter)* Oh, come on; we agree a lot! *(Laughter)* The question is, is the book at this point saying that? Are verses 16 and 17 saying what we’re saying?

**Ted:** Okay.

**Jeff:** Okay. Is the righteousness of God an attribute that characterizes God? Or is it a righteousness that comes from God that’s in view? All right, that’s the question of 1:16 and 17.

Now does the Greek help us? If we look at the Greek language, does it help us? Well, let me throw some translations up here for you. The ESV, the KJV, the New King James and the New American Standard all translate it one way. The NIV is the only different way, where it says, “*a righteousness from God is revealed.*” The NIV translates it as a righteousness revealed for us. The ESV, the KJV and the New American Standard translate it as if it were simply an attribute. In other words they don’t see it the way Luther sees it. The NIV sees it the way Luther sees it.

**Jim Hamilton:** Good for the NIV. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Thank you, Jim. We want to say what the NIV says: 1:17 reveals a righteousness from God for us. That’s what we want it to say—that a righteousness of God was revealed—not just in an attribute or a character-type way, but in a way that is revealed for us, in a way that’s given to us, because we want to be righteous in Christ. And this is the only way for that to happen.

Now the problem is that the exegetical evidence is sparse here for that sort of interpretation. What do I mean by that? Well, I just want you to think about it with me for a second. If you look at the cluster of verses, look at the cluster of verses and look at the way other constructions similar to this one are translated. I’m going to just throw them up on the board.

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1:16; look at 1:16: *“the power of God.”* *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation.”* That is not an attribute transferred to me; that’s an attribute revealed.

Or how about verse 17? There’s *“the righteousness of God.”* We’ve been struggling with that one. Or how about verse 18: *“the wrath of God?”* *“For the wrath of God has been revealed from heaven against all ungodliness.”* That is not an attribute transferred to me; that’s an attribute revealed.

Or what about 1:19? *“For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them.”* Now think about that verse. That is not a transferrable attribute or a statement about the transference of attributes. It’s simply about a revelation; this is who God is. God has made what is known about Himself plain.

Well, you could easily say that the righteousness of God has been made plain to those who are unrighteous. I mean, if you really look at that verse, look at what it says. *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.”* In other words, we’re fundamentally unrighteous. He is righteous, and He has demonstrated His righteousness to us.

In other words, you can look at this cluster of verses as if it were saying that this isn’t anything transferrable. This is God revealing who He is: a righteous God, and He’s going to judge our unrighteousness. That’s the way it looks when you look at just those verses themselves.

Now again, why is this important? Why is this text important? Well, I think it’s important that we handle this text properly. And I think we have to go where the evidence leads. And I think the evidence leads, at least in 1:16 and 17, to its being an attribute that is revealed, and not something that is transferred.

Now you would have to say something like this. Well, what about the NIV when it says that the righteousness of God is revealed for us? Well, I think that what they’re doing is that they are anticipating what’s to come in the book of Romans. They’re doing what Ted did, and doing what Jim wants to applaud the NIV for doing, and doing what we all want it to do—that is, we want to see the righteousness here as something that is transferred. And Paul says, and it’s as if he were saying, “I’ll get to that; I’ll get to that. I know God is righteous. And He is going to transfer that righteousness to us in Christ. But I haven’t gotten there yet.” And that’s what he’s going to do. Yes, Don?

**Don Maurer:** So what you’re saying is that from 1:17 all the way till the middle of chapter 3 it’s talking about God’s attribute of righteousness. And then in chapter 3:21 and following it’s talking about what He gives us.

**Jeff:** All right. Well, I guess I can skip over these next nine slides and go right to that. *(Laughter)* Yeah; I mean, sure, Don; thanks. *(Laughter)* So, you know, I was going to say that this isn’t the only text in Romans. I was going to say that Romans 1:16 and 17 is just the title verse. It’s going to unfold what we all know to be true, what we’ve been talking about. And so the title doesn’t say everything in the text. The more you read, the more you understand the book. I’m just going through these slides really quick, Don; thanks a lot. *(Laughter)*

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But I do want to pause here for a minute. And I want to pause here for a minute because I think this is important. I think it’s important for us even though you may not be familiar with some of the theological discussions that go on. But one of the theological discussions that does go on is one that says that the imputation of Christ’s righteousness is a redundancy when you think about union with Christ. Why would you talk about imputation if you’re united to Christ?

I think that another kind of argument coming from the same crowd would say that imputation is sort of like a gas being passed from one person to another in a courtroom setting. It’s not real; it’s a fiction. So why have it?

And so on the basis of this verse they say that Luther taught that righteousness was transferred on the basis of this verse, and it clearly isn’t. And so if it isn’t, then maybe we have to re-think our understanding of the gospel.

And so that’s the direction where certain groups go, and want to get rid of the whole “I was poor in my ledger and Christ was rich in His ledger. And He took my poorness and gave me his riches. In Christ.” And they would want to say that is not what the gospel is really all about. And we’ll talk about what they say that the gospel is really all about when we get to the idea of faith in this text, because it plugs right into what they say.

But the reason I make a big deal out of this is because it is important. There are some who are taking this verse and other verses and are saying that there is no transference of righteousness that has to do with the gospel.

And I want to tell you something. If there is no transference of righteousness, we’re in big trouble.

**Bishop Rodgers:** That’s right.

**Jeff:** And let me tell you why I say that. Let’s just say that I’m forgiven of my sins. It’s like this.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Jeff erases what was on the board.

**Jeff:** The forgiveness of my sins is like this. But what is left in its place?

**Sig Tragard:** Nothing.

**Jeff:** Nothing. I mean, in order to stand before God do I not need to be righteous, as the Scriptures say? But if I’m just forgiven of my sins that does not mean that I’m righteous. You see, the gospel is both the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness. And the imputation of righteousness is grounded upon my union with Christ.

**Ted:** That’s right.

**Jeff:** But my union with Christ doesn’t provide me with righteousness.

**Ted:** Why doesn’t it?

**Jeff:** Because there are constituent elements of my union with Christ that provide me with different things. And one of the things that it provides me with is imputation. Another thing it provides me is sanctification. Another thing is adoption, and so on.

**Ted:** Well, that’s why I think that this union with Christ is so critical. And what we’ve always talked about is that when you receive Christ into your heart you receive the imputation of His righteousness.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

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**Ted:** However, it’s a much bigger picture than that. I mean, actually what you do is that you receive Christ. And that brings the imputation of righteousness and a lot of other things.

**Jeff:** Yes, it does. And so we would take a verse like this: *“For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

**Ted:** Right.

**Jeff:** *“So that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”* But it’s in chapter 5 of Romans where we get the imputation of righteousness, right? So imputation is grounded upon our union with Christ. Go ahead, Don.

**Don:** So do you believe then that Martin Luther was wrong in his understanding of Romans 1:17?

**Jeff:** You know, I knew that Don was going to ask that. *(Laughter)* Well, I think that Martin Luther was looking at the book of Romans as a whole. And I think he was anticipating—just like we all do—what’s coming. So I think that Luther got to the point where he couldn’t read 1:16 and 17 without understanding what was to come in—what was that verse? 3:21, Don?

**Don:** Yes. *(Laughter)*

**Jeff:** Yeah. But I think Romans 1:16 and 17 reveals the character of God. It tells us why it is. I mean, let’s put it this way. Romans 1:16 and 17 really does unfold for us why it is that we need this righteousness transferred to us.

Think about it like this. In 1:16 and 17 God introduces Himself as the righteous God. And then what does He do? He immediately follows up in 1:18 ff. all the way through chapter 3 with telling us just how fundamentally unrighteous we are. And all of a sudden, by the time we get near the end of chapter 3, we’re going, “Oh, man! We’re in Luther’s dilemma! God is righteous and I’m not. And what am I going to do about it?” And the answer is, absolutely nothing.

But then God introduces something else. And God expresses that righteousness to us in 3:21, just like Don said.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Romans 3:21, ESV. *“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it.”*

**Jeff:** And in 3:21, notice. The gospel is a righteousness revealed from God to us. *“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, (although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it), the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”*

So what we have here is that we have a righteousness of God revealed in Christ for us that is transferred to us. Why? Because God’s wrath is revealed against unrighteousness. That’s why we need the righteousness that’s revealed in Jesus Christ, transferred to us.

**Brave Man:** Do you know where Luther got the idea that he was kind of more worried about his unrighteousness? Was there a particular text or something that he got that idea from?

**Jeff:** Well, the bishop can correct me on this. But I think it comes more out of his background. I think that, for instance, he’s dealing with a nominalist background. And the nominalists taught this. Let me think. It’s the *ordinata* and the—

**Sig:** Couldn’t you just say it in English?

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**Jeff:** Yeah. So basically what they taught was this. They taught that there is a naked sovereignty of God. And then they taught that there is a covenantal, decretive contract that God makes. And what the Nominalists said was this. The nominalists said that in God’s naked sovereignty he judges anything in any way He wants to.

**Bishop:** Right.

**Jeff:** But God has leashed Himself with a covenantal leash. And that covenantal leash, said the nominalists, basically says this. They said that God basically asks us in this agreement for what I talked to you about at one point—*facientabus*—doing your best.

**Bishop:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** Offering God your very best. And so Luther said, “Okay. If I don’t offer God my very best, then I’m going to fall into the hands of this naked sovereign God, right? And who knows what will happen to me?, because if he needs a leash to be kind to me I’m in big trouble if I don’t keep up my end of the bargain. And my end of the bargain is to offer my best.”

Now the question that Luther asked—and you’ve heard these stories—he would go to Von Staupitz and he would say, “I’ve done this and I’ve done that.”

And Von Staupitz would say, “Look. If you’re going to come confessing, stop bringing me these little peccadillos and bring me something juicy. Bring me some real sins,” right? (*Laughter*) And there was a sense in which Von Staupitz understood a grace that Luther didn’t yet understand.

And so Luther is just basically saying, “But the theology of the day is telling me that I need to offer my best, and I’m in big trouble.” I think that’s where Luther finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. Do you want to add anything to that, Bishop?

**Bishop:** If God is righteous, then He must do righteousness. And Luther was unrighteous and he knew that he was unrighteous. It doesn’t make much difference whether you’re a little bit unrighteous or terribly unrighteous; you’re not righteous. And God is righteous. So the whole religion that he grew up in condemned him.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bishop:** As you say, he did not do his best. Well, who does his very best? I’ve heard that stinks.

**Jeff:** I know.

**Bishop:** And that’s true. And it’s true because God is righteous in Himself.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Bishop:** And as a Judge He must judge righteously.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bishop:** So where does that leave us?

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bishop:** Unless something strange happens, something new that nobody had articulated since the first century, right?

**Jeff:** Yes, absolutely. What you find is that Luther changes over time. In fact he does talk about covenant for a while afterwards. But covenant for him means something like Genesis 17, with God saying to Abram, “*Walk before Me and be blameless.*” So in a covenant there is reciprocal obligation. God says this, and He demands this from us.

**Brave Man:** Yes. Big works were imposed at that time.



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**Jeff:** Yes. And I think Luther misunderstands covenant at that point, because later he basically says, “I don’t even want to use that term. I want to use the idea of testament,” because there’s the idea that in the testament the One who dies bequeaths. And there is no reciprocity in terms of my obligation.

Now it wasn’t as if Luther said that there is no sanctification. I think this is why some of the Lutherans talk about sanctification as getting used to our justification, because I think that’s the natural bad consequence of going all the way in this direction, which says, “Sin boldly because I’m saved by grace”—that kind of thing. That’s not what Luther meant. But I think it’s construed that way in its worst sense. Does that help or not? Okay.

**Ted:** Jeff.

**Jeff:** Yes?

**Ted:** I’ve been thinking about this recently because I’ve been listening to some podcasts from the secular world. And I think that different parts of the gospel touch every culture. In Luther’s time the idea was the terror of God.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** I just quickly looked up some of the art work from that period.

**Jeff:** Oh yeah.

**Ted:** Death—the pains and the terror of hell and destruction and damnation are vividly portrayed in the artwork of this late Renaissance period. And so that’s what people were thinking about. Death was frequent and happened often.

**Jeff:** Yep.

**Ted:** In the movie “Luther” it portrays morality plays of that period. So they were terrified by death and the consequences of their unrighteousness. Today we don’t think about that. We have no terror of death.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** And as I said, just listening to some secular podcasts it’s not there at all.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** And our churches tend to convey the message that if your life is out of sorts, if you’re not happy about things, if you’re depressed, if you’re discouraged, if you have some life-threatening illnesses or whatever, come to Jesus and He’s going to comfort you, rather than “flee from the wrath to come.” So I think that it’s almost that you have to start from ground zero and say that there is a God who is righteous. And you should flee from that wrath that is coming.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Ted:** Luther’s age thought a lot about that. You can see it in their artwork and in their dramas, and things like that.

**Jeff:** Yes. And if you read the latter part of Romans 1, 2 and 3 you get that, right? This God is a righteous God who is going to deal—

**Bishop:** I was just going to say that it says in Romans 3 that God shows that He is just.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Bishop:** So Christ has to finally go to the cross for Him to forgive us and to restore us to Himself while remaining just Himself. He must be able to propitiate Himself.

**Jeff:** Yes. And you see that in the very first promise of the gospel. Remember that the first promise of the gospel—and we talked about this already—is that the serpent will

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strike at the heel of the Redeemer, and the Redeemer will crush the head of the serpent. And remember, the snapping at the heel is the propitiation that Christ needs to make upon the cross, right?

**Bishop:** Right.

**Jeff:** He needs to become a curse-bearer. Or when Abram goes into a deep sleep and God in the smoking fire-pot passes between the halves of the animals that he has just split apart, what is God saying? “I’m going to secure your blessedness.”

Now think about it. The servant who walked between those halves was saying, “If I transgress, may I be like these animals.” And God is saying, “No, I will secure your blessedness; I will be the One who bears the curse and be torn asunder like these animals.”

So when you look at Hebrews chapter 10 it says that in His flesh He was torn asunder like the curtain in the temple. Why would he say that? He would say that because it’s taking us back to Genesis 15, where God promised to be our blessedness, to secure our blessedness by becoming a curse for us. And so in the pictures that you find in the gospel throughout the bible you find God not only saying, “I’m going to bless you,” but “I’m going to bless you by becoming a curse-bearer for you. And in becoming a curse-bearer for you I’ll not only see to it that your sins are forgiven, but that righteousness is imputed to you.” Hey, Sig; I think the bishop wanted to say something

**Bishop:** I just wanted to say that the Lundisian theology does not have a real place for the righteousness of God. They so stressed the love of God that they lose the righteousness of God. It becomes a very different thing altogether.

**Jeff:** Yes, absolutely.

**Bishop:** That’s what Ted started out with. We’ve sentimentalized it in our culture. But it’s even in serious theology.

**Jeff:** Yes; that’s right.

**Bishop:** If you lose one of the attributes of God, you’re in trouble. We don’t want to think about them.

**Jeff:** Yes; that’s right. Was there somebody over here that you were heading for?

**Sig:** No, I was just checking the recording.

**Jeff:** Yes, it’s recording. Okay, so let’s run ahead a bit here. So we find that the righteousness of God is manifest through redemption in Christ, and thus righteousness is a gift. How can this be? Well, 3:24 and 25 says that a sacrifice is offered to compensate for an offense, and that sacrifice is obviously Christ.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Romans 3:24-25, NKJV. *“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed.”*

**Jeff:** And so here we find that what we say, coming out of good Lutheran tradition, is that God is both *“just and the justifier.”* He is the just One who also justifies.

Now I just want to show you something really quick. In Isaiah 59 you notice something really fascinating. You can just see how the Old Testament plays into our understanding of the gospel in such a wonderful way. But of you go to Isaiah 59 it says that God *“saw that there was no man,”* (this is verse 16), *“and wondered that there was no one to intercede. Then His own arm brought Him salvation, and His righteousness*

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*upheld Him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and the helmet of salvation upon His head.”*

Notice that God goes to face the righteousness of His own law—a righteousness that the people could not uphold. God goes to uphold the righteousness of His own law. And what upholds Him? His own righteousness, right? It’s a fascinating thing when you think about it; it’s just great.

Anyway, we now see three things. We see what God is—God’s character; He is righteous--, what God did—He judged us because He is righteous,-- and what God gives—the status of righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. All three reveal the righteousness of God. God is both the Judge and the Justifier—just and the Justifier.

Now a controversial point is this. Is the righteousness of God what He gives? And you see in Romans 10:1-4 that the righteousness of God is what He gives. Let me just jump ahead to this; this is an important text. And then I want to go to the faith component here.

*“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayed to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness”—this is Paul talking about the Jews—“that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”* Now listen to this. *“For being ignorant of the righteousness of God.”* And what? *“Seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”*

Why is Christ *“the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes?”* Because He satisfied the righteous requirements of the law. The Just became the Justifier in that He satisfied the righteous requirements.

The Jews said, “Hey, we can establish our own righteousness before God.” The Gentiles said, “No, we can’t establish our own righteousness before God.” And some of the Jews said the same. But you get the idea that those who are righteous are those who understand that they are not righteous in themselves, that they can’t establish their own righteousness before God, that God has to establish righteousness in them.

Now to submit to God we would have to receive something from God through Christ. And I want you to look at Philippians 3:8-10. In Philippians 3:8-10 this is what it says. It says, *“Indeed I count everything as loss for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things. I count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”* Listen to this. *“And be found, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God that depends on faith.”* There it is again.

It’s beautiful when you see it in this way: *“not having a righteousness of my own, but a righteousness which comes through faith in Christ.”*

Now how do we receive this righteousness from God? Romans 1:17 says, *“from faith to faith.”*

Now let me just say this. Faith—*pistis*—has a range of meanings here. It can mean personal trust. It can mean a belief system. It can mean how a person acts. To put it differently it can mean personal faith, personal belonging or personal acting. That’s how you could construe the Greek here at this point in the text.

Now if it’s the last, then our salvation is up to us. In other words, if it’s our personal acting, if faith is something that we do, if it’s an obedience that we render, then salvation is up to us to some measure. In other words, there are some who say this. There are some

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who say that faith is an evangelical obedience. And so we’re justified by some sort of evangelical obedience.

And so here is what is often said. It’s an evangelical obedience. And it takes us back to Luther’s day. God knows that we can’t measure up to the law. So He accepts faith instead.

**Bishop:** No.

**Jeff:** Thank you. No, definitely not. The New Jerusalem Bible, a Catholic bible, says this. So listen to this. *“In the gospel is revealed the saving justice of God, a justice based on faith and addressed to faith: as it says in the Scripture,”*—here it is,—*“Anyone who is upright through faith will live.”*

We can agree with the first part of that translation. But that last part wants to put personal acting in our court. Okay?

In the second, the righteousness of God is not about soteriology; it’s about belonging; it’s about being in the church. And there is a group today called “The New Perspective” that wants to say that this is about personal belonging. It’s about ecclesiology; it’s not about soteriology.

Now that raises a lot of questions. But the question is how do we receive it? Well I want you to look at Habakkuk, and I’m going to wind up with this. Would somebody go to Habakkuk? I’ve got some places I want you to read.

**Sig:** Habakkuk what?

**Jeff:** 2. And then go to 1. And then go to 3. *(Laughter)*

**Sig:** Hit it.

**Jeff:** You got it?

**Sig:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** Okay, 2:4. Read it.

**Sig:** Habakkuk 2:4?

**Jeff:** Yes.

**Sig:**

*“Behold, his soul is puffed up;*

*It is not upright within him.*

*But the righteous shall live by his faith.”*

**Jeff:** Okay. Listen. What does it say? Read that one more time.

**Sig:**

*“Behold, his soul is puffed up;*

*It is not upright within him.”*

**Jeff:** The one who is puffed up with pride is not upright; he is not righteous. Yet *“the righteous shall live by faith.”*

Now there are two truths contrasted in Habakkuk. Read Habakkuk 1:11.

**Sig:** 1:11?

**Jeff:** Yep.

**Sig:**

*“Then they sweep by like the wind and go on,*

*Guilty men, whose own might is their god.”*

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**Jeff:** These are those who are puffed up, those whose own might is their god. They establish themselves on the basis of their own merits. But then you get one like Habakkuk. Read what Habakkuk says in 3:18 and 19.

**Sig:**

*“Then I will rejoice in the LORD;  
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.  
God, the LORD, is my strength.  
He makes my feet like the deer’s;  
He makes me tread on my high places.”*

**Jeff:** Okay. Habakkuk is a guy who trusts in the Lord and does not establish anything on his own merit, but trusts the Lord. So here’s the difference. In 1:11 you have those whose might is their god. And they are the ones who are puffed up. But *“the righteous will live by faith.”* And who are the righteous? Those who put their trust in God, those who put their faith in God.

And so I think that when you look at the whole book of Habakkuk, it’s referring not to belonging, not to acting, but a personal trust based in Christ as Savior. And it is through faith in Christ that the righteousness of God is then transferred to our account. So I’ll just leave it at that. We’re five minutes over. Any questions or comments? Yes, Don? Sig’s on his way.

**Don:** It says *“from faith to faith.”* Does that mean that faith is what sustains us throughout our Christian life from beginning to end?

**Jeff:** Yep, from beginning to end. And this is about a personal trust in God.

**Don:** Okay.

**Jeff:** It’s not about our belonging, not about our acting, but about a personal trust in God. Bishop?

**Bishop:** It’s absolutely key that we do not make faith a good work. Therefore we have to say, as we read various points in Scripture, that it’s by the grace of God that we’re given the faith to receive the righteousness of God.

**Jeff:** Yes; that’s right.

**Bishop:** It’s still the work of the Holy Spirit through the gospel that awakens us, regenerates us and gives us a heart open to receive the gospel. Otherwise we would be trying to offer our best to God, who is saying that that will not suffice.

**Jeff:** Yes, absolutely.

**Ted:** And I would say that’s the difference between the Arminian position and the Reformed position. The Arminian position would assume that men have natural faith, and it’s assisted by God’s grace to believe and trust in Christ. However the Reformed position would say that there is no natural faith of a man that is sufficient. It has to be completely of grace.

**Jeff:** Yeah. You know, just as a wrap-up, if you think about this, this is why it’s this understanding that drove Paul to say that “I’m a slave to this.”

**Ted:** Yeah.

**Jeff:** It’s this understanding that drove him to say that this righteousness is revealed in the gospel concerning His Son—verses 3 and 4 of Romans 1. So all that we’ve been looking at in 1:1-17 is just densely packed. There’s so much more we could say, but we’re going to leave it. And we’re actually going to take a longer section next time and

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work through it. Tom’s a little surprised. *(Laughter)* But I’ve got to keep it movin’, Tom, or else we get stale, you know? We’ve got to keep it movin’. *(Laughter)* So we’ll do that next time.

Let’s pray. Father, thank You for this day and for the time You’ve given. Thank You for the book of Romans, for the refreshment that it is spiritually to us, Lord. Thank You that You not only are righteous, but that You reveal a righteousness that is not based upon our own merits, but thoroughly based upon Your own righteousness revealed in Jesus Christ, and that is ours through faith. We’re so thankful for that and we praise You for it. And we pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen. *(Applause)*