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Okay, we're going to resume now, and once again, Paul is saying, where is it that the Jew excels? What's the value of circumcision? And he says, primarily, the value is having the oracles of God. You've got a start on being able to please God, because you've already got His word right there. He's going to give a fuller list of these advantages over in chapter 9. If you just glance over there, he starts chapter 9, almost resuming this point.

He says, I have sorrow, unceasing anguish in my heart. I wish that I were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race. In chapter 9, verse 4, he says, they are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

To them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, God who is over all, be blessed forever. But it is not as though the word of God had failed. And he kind of picks up the thread of this argument that he started to launch in chapter 3, and he's going to digress for the next six chapters.

Then he's going to come back here in chapter 9 and pick this thread up. I grieve over Israel, because they've got all of these, quote, advantages. They've got this value in circumcision, this plus from being Jewish.

And yet it looks as though the word of God has failed, which is what he starts addressing in chapter 3. What if some were unfaithful? Did that nullify the righteousness of God? It doesn't. Because God demonstrates his justice in judging his own people for their unfaithfulness. And if we don't get anything out of this first paragraph in chapter 3, this is the thing to remember.

Paul is going to argue, look, if God takes his own people and judges them for their unfaithfulness, he's certainly righteous in judging the world. This is what he goes on to say in verse 6. Let's work forward from chapter 3, verse 4. He says, We saw in Psalm 51 that this is in the context of a believer that has failed before God. And David says, As a believer, as a member of the people of God, you're righteous when you judge me, because I have sinned, I have screwed up.

And so he says, If our wickedness, in verse 5, serves to show the justice of God, what shall we say? Is God unjust to inflict wrath on us? I speak in a human way, by no means. And then in verse 6 he says, If it's wrong for God to judge his own people for their sin, because they're his people, then how can God judge the world? If God can't judge his own people, how can he judge the world? Here's people that God is demonstrating his righteousness, his faithfulness is demonstrated, even in the faithlessness of his people. And when his people sin, God judges them.

How much more people that have no relationship with him at all? It's sort of a reverse a fortiori argument, if you will, arguing from the lesser to the greater. God even judges his own people

when they sin. How much more do you think he's going to judge people that rejected him outright? And conversely, if God is righteous in judging the world, when they reject the revelation of his truth, like we saw in chapter 1, that same principle applies to anyone who rejects the truth, even his own people.

Even the people of God will have to stand and be held to account before God when they reject his truth. It's a principle that applies across the board. And this is the thing that Paul is trying to do.

He's trying to show the consistency in the plan of God. God has certain principles that apply across the board. If you reject the truth, you're going to be judged, whether you're an unbeliever or a believer.

There is obviously a greater penalty in rejecting the truth of Jesus Christ because you're going to the lake of fire for eternity. What Paul is trying to get across is, look, God judges his own people when they malfunction. And so God is not unjust to inflict wrath on us because if he can't judge his own people, how can he judge the world? These are people he's got a relationship with.

If he's not going to judge them, how can he judge the world? Then he says in verse 7, But if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? This is another of these questions that he's asking. He says, okay, if I as a member of the people of God am false, I'm unfaithful, I do like these people up in the earlier part of the chapter, and by that God's truthfulness abounds. When he judges me, his faithfulness, his righteousness and justice are demonstrated.

Then why am I condemned as a sinner? Why do I suffer condemnation? And why should I not be able to continue in sin and continue in evil so that God's goodness will be demonstrated even more? This is a false conclusion that people put in Paul's mouth. He says, This is what some people slanderously charge us with saying in verse 8, Why not do evil that good may come? He says, people that charge us with this and twist our arguments to say this, their condemnation is just. Their condemnation is just.

They have rejected the truth. And you see how this turns back on itself. He says, look, God is just when he judges, and he judges everyone.

God is the judge of the just and the unjust. He's going to judge his own people, he's going to judge the world, and he's righteous when he does it. He judged King David, from whom Jesus Christ himself is descended, and after whom the covenant that puts Christ on the millennial throne is named.

God judged him. God spoke against his sin. And what Paul is getting across here is he's talking to people who are trusting in their religion and their deeds and thinking that because they are Jewish and because they're circumcised and because they observe the feasts, that that's

righteousness in God's sight.

And Paul is saying, look, God judges the unbelievers when they reject the truth. God is going to judge you when you reject the truth. You're trying to go out and teach others, teach yourself.

You're talking about how great the law is, be educated by the law. By the law comes the knowledge of sin, and you need to recognize that even as a believer, you've got sin. It's judged by what's in your heart.

That's the thrust of Paul's argument here, and in all of his convolutions, that's the main point. Paul is comparing the unsaved to the saved. He's comparing what, in the Jewish mind, this is Gentiles and Jews, but that's not really the thing.

And he's saying, look, get away from this religious, unreligious attitude or this Jewish-Gentile attitude. Look at what God does. Focus on God rather than on people.

God judges those who have been given the truth on their response. If they reject it, they get judged, and it doesn't matter if they're saved or unsaved. If they're unsaved, the judgment is severe.

They're going to the lake of fire. If they're saved, he's still going to judge them when you reject the truth because you think you can justify yourself by works. So now, when he gets to verse 9, he says, okay, what now? We've concluded that the primary advantage in being Jewish at all or being in organized religion at all is that you've got the words of God there, and that's the object of faith.

And if you're unfaithful to that, if the Jews as a whole had the oracles of God and didn't exercise faith in it, it doesn't change the system. Righteousness still comes by faith, and God judged his people. They dropped in the wilderness, and through their falsehood and through their unfaithfulness, God demonstrated his righteousness.

So the focus here is on God. God is righteous. God is faithful.

It doesn't matter what the people do that are entrusted with his word. What then? And this next phrase here in verse 9 is weird Greek. It's a hapoxlegomenon.

It's the only place in biblical, not just the New Testament, but even in the Septuagint, even in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, this word, proekamatha, does not occur. And there are five words here in Greek. It says, tioun, proekamatha upantos, and nobody knows what it means.

If you want to just boil it down, it can mean, what then? Do the Jews have an advantage? It can mean, what then? Are the Jews at a disadvantage? No one can figure out what it means. So we figure out what it means by going to the remainder of the verse and working backward. Whatever the question is, the answer is, no, not at all.

We know that much. Whatever the question is that Paul is asking, and it's a single word question, *proekamatha* is the question, which means, where's the benefit? Or what's the result? Where's the value? It's some sort of a question like that. And it can mean, well, what then? Are the Gentiles better off? Are the Jews better off? He's asking some sort of question.

The greatest Greek scholars in the world can't figure it out. I certainly can't. But we can work backward and figure it out.

So what then? Some question, and the answer is, no, not at all. For I have already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin. This is the point.

Whatever the question is here, whether it is, do the Gentiles have an advantage? Do the Jews have an advantage? The answer to all those questions is no. There's no benefit in being Jewish. There's no benefit in being Gentile.

The point is, Jews and Greeks are all under the power of sin. This is the point at which Paul is going to now start arguing from the standpoint of salvation. We started at the beginning of the book talking to believers in the church at Rome.

And the point there was, Paul wants to get something across to them about the Christian life and about how to live it. It's the same essential message that occurs in the other letter that he wrote at this time, which is the book of Galatians. You can learn a lot about Romans by reading Galatians.

You can learn a lot about Galatians by reading Romans. What's the big thrust of the book of Galatians? You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Do you think that after being saved by grace, your experiential righteousness is going to come by keeping the law? God forbid. Heck no, is the answer.

That's the book of Galatians in a nutshell. The same issue is in Paul's mind when he's writing Romans. But he's going to greater lengths.

He's talking to an educated audience, people that have been around for a while. They've got some sophisticated rationale for going back to the law. So he's going to give them a sophisticated response.

And what he starts out doing is he says, look, look at the unsaved world. You can look at their acts and you judge them. You say their condemnation is just.

But what's the real basis of their condemnation? When they knew God, they didn't glorify him. They weren't thankful. They became vain and their hearts were darkened.

And God turned them over to all of these things that you see. But that was all a result of their rejection of the truth. And in chapter two, he says, you then believer who are busy judging the world and looking at all of these evil deeds and saying, oh, God ought to throw those unrighteous

boogers in the lake of fire.

You're doing the same thing. And he's trying to get their attention away from works. In the back of Paul's mind all this time is this Judaism thrust in Christianity.

Christianity at its early generation is in danger of becoming a warmed over Judaism. Righteousness by works. And Paul says, look, you're busy establishing your righteousness by works.

You're doing the same thing as these unbelievers that you condemn because you're rejecting the truth. And the truth says it's not what you do, it's what you think. And so Paul is going to now go back to salvation.

And he's going to say, look, how were you saved? And this is where he starts here in chapter three. He starts out to address this advantage of being a Jew. And he's going to drop this thread of the argument and pick it back up down in chapter nine.

He's now going to go back and talk about salvation. And he's going to essentially make the same argument that he makes over in Galatians. If you were saved by grace, what makes you think you can establish your righteousness by works? It's still by grace through faith.

That's how you were saved. That's how you should walk. So he's going to go back and talk about salvation for a bit.

And he says, look, are the Jews any better off in God's eyes? Not at all. I've already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin. This is the status when you come up to salvation.

As it is written, none is righteous, no, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God.

All have turned aside. Together they have gone wrong. No one does good, not even one.

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. Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery and the way of peace they do not know.

There is no fear of God before their eyes. This is the place in Romans where people like to come to establish total depravity. Everyone is depraved.

Nobody can do righteousness and so forth. And that's true, but that's not the emphasis that Paul has here. Those things are true, but what's the context? Paul starts this paragraph off by saying, so what shall we say? Both Jews and Greeks are under the power of sin.

That's the point that he's going to establish with these quotes. He doesn't say everyone is totally depraved. He says, look, you can't make a distinction between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to salvation.

There's no salvation advantage in being Jewish. There's no salvation advantage in being a Gentile. We all stand equally under the power of sin before God.

When it comes to experiential righteousness, which is what he started to talk about at the beginning of the chapter, if you're Jewish, if you're in the circumcision, you've got a leg up because there's the oracles of God. You've got the word of God. What a great apostle to the Gentiles Paul made because he had grown up a Pharisee.

He's got the oracles of God. He's got the word of God. There's a plus.

You're on the fast track to understanding the Christian life if you've got the words of God there for the Holy Spirit to work with. But that doesn't apply to you at the salvation stage because none of that stuff can be absorbed. The carnal mind can't understand the things of the Spirit.

There's only one issue at the point of salvation and that's sin, righteousness, and judgment, God's plan of salvation. So in experiential righteousness, in spirituality, what advantage is there in being religious? For example, let's think about this in our day. People always talk about the advantage of a Christian home or the plus of a child that grows up in a Christian home.

And from the standpoint of operating as a believer, if you've grown up in a Christian home and you've learned the Bible stories and you've memorized verses, that can be a great resource to draw on at the point that you become a believer and you start wanting to live in a way that pleases God, right? If you've got all these verses memorized, the songs, the hymns, you're familiar with things that you've seen in terms of missions and ministry and all those things, that's a plus. That's an opportunity. It's a place where you've got a built-in leg up, as it were, in terms of having things to draw on because you've got the oracles of God.

If your parents trained you up, even if you don't get saved, quote, unquote, until you're 18 or 20, once you are entered into the fold there, you've got a lot of stuff in your soul that God the Holy Spirit can now use to advantage as opposed to starting cold and saying, well, let me see, what's the first book of the Bible, Genesis? You're having to start from scratch. So you've got an advantage when it comes to experientially operating. But is there a greater likelihood that a child who grows up in a Christian home is going to become a believer than someone who grows up in a non-Christian home? What advantage is there? Is there an advantage salvation-wise? No.

Everyone is under the power of sin. In experiential terms, when someone comes to faith in God, if they're a Jew, wonderful. They've got the circumcision.

They've got a built-in way to please God, worship God. They've got a lot of information there to

start with. A Gentile doesn't have that.

He's going to be operating on his conscience, the law unto himself. But that's experiential. That's a plus after salvation.

That's operational information that's helpful. What Paul is saying here in verse 9, are the Jews any better off in terms of coming to salvation in the first place? Not at all. I've already charged that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin as it is written.

And now he's going to quote these passages. And if we go to these passages, one of the things we're going to see is, for example, the first one here, this is from Psalm 14, and the same psalm is also found in 53, where it says that there is none who does righteousness. No, not one.

No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside.

Together they have gone wrong. No one does good, not even one. Let's look back at Psalm 14.

And you might also keep a finger in that and turn to Psalm 53 and see exactly what Paul is referring to here. Psalm 14. This starts out addressing a category of people in the human race, the fool.

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. Now let me ask you this, is every single person in the human race called the fool? They're not. We're going to see it right here in this psalm.

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt. They have committed abominable deeds.

Who is the they? It's category fool. There is no one who does good. The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

They have all turned aside. Together they have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one.

Now this is commonly taken to refer to the entire human race because of the phrase sons of men. However, that doesn't explain the rest of this psalm. What does it say in the next verse? Do all the workers of wickedness not know who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the Lord? Now we've got the other category of people mentioned, my people.

The workers of iniquity are eating up my people like bread. Then there they are in great dread for God is with the righteous generation. Now where did this righteous generation come from if God's looking down and they have all turned aside, they've all become corrupt, there's none that doeth righteousness, no not one.

Then what are we talking about here with this righteous generation? There's category fool, there's category righteous generation. There's category fool, there's none that seeks, there's none that

turns, there's none that understands and there is my people. These are the two categories that God is dealing with here.

You would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted, but the Lord is his refuge. Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion. When the Lord restores his captive people, Jacob will rejoice, Israel will be glad.

Now the Israel and Zion and Jacob, my people, the righteous generation are set in contrast with the fool who says in his heart there is no God. That's not what Israel says, that's not what the righteous generation says. Those are the enemies of God's people.

Now this is amplified, this song is almost identical in Psalm 53, but there's one important difference. It kind of reminds me of the Star Spangled Banner and some of the other songs, we always sing the first verse and we always get that right, and when you get to the subsequent verses, it's like people start kind of mumbling along and humming with the words because we don't really know. These were songs, this was the hymn book of Israel and it's like the third verse of this song kind of got some people sang it one way and some people sang it another.

If you look at Psalm 53, when you get down to the third verse of this, it's a little different. It starts out the same way, the fool says in his heart there is no God. They are corrupt, they have committed abominable injustice.

There is no one who does good. God has looked down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there is anyone who understands who seeks after God. Every one of them has turned aside.

Together they have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one. Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge who eat up my people as though they ate bread and have not called upon God.

That's their problem. They have not called upon God. Romans chapter 1. There they were in great fear where no fear had been for God scattered the bones of him who encamped against you.

You put them to shame because God had rejected them. Different verse than we had in Psalm 14, isn't it? But God has not rejected his people, has he? Paul is going to make that clear in Romans later on. God has not cast off his people whom he foreknew.

His people have a different relationship to God than the fool who says in his heart there is no God. So don't let someone take this verse and beat you over the head with total depravity because that's not what this verse is saying. And Paul never uses it that way either.

There is no fool who does righteousness. There is no fool who seeks after God. The fools have become corrupt.

But there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And in the Old Testament, people who came to God and sought him early while he might yet be found, even when similar statements are made in the prophets, there's always a distinction between the people of God, the righteous remnant, and the people that have all turned aside and gone astray. So there is a category of people, all of whom fail to seek God, and that's category fool.

And that's why the psalm starts the way that it does. That's the first thing that Paul quotes. And these are people who are attacking Israel.

In Psalm 53, they encamped against Israel and God scattered their bones. So this is viewing out the Gentile world that is not Israel is what's in view. They say there is no God.

They don't seek him and so forth. They attack Israel who does believe in God is the idea. So this is a general sort of reference to the unbelieving pagan nations of the world.

That's the first thing that Paul quotes when he says that both Jew and Gentile are all under the power of sin, as it is written. And then he quotes this passage about the fool, these pagans that say there is no God. Israel is never characterized this way as saying there is no God, is it? Whatever else Israel's failures are, Israel never said there is no God, especially the Israel of God.

But what's the second thing that he quotes here? The next passage that we go to is in the early part of the psalms. In the Septuagint, it's Psalm 5, and it's the same in ours. Psalm 5, 9 is the next passage that is quoted.

So let's see who this is addressing. In Psalm 5, this is a plea for help from David to God. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God.

To you I pray. In the morning you hear my voice. I lay my request before you.

Wait in expectation. You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil. No evil dwells with you.

The boastful will not stand before your eyes. You hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies.

You hate all who tell lies. Bloodthirsty and deceitful men the Lord abhors. But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house.

In reverence, I will bow down toward your holy temple. Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies. Make straight your way before me.

Not a word from their mouth can be trusted. Their heart is filled with destruction. Their throat is an open grave.

With their tongue they speak deceit. Declare them guilty, O God. Let their intrigues be their

downfall.

Banish them for their many sins. For they have rebelled against you. Now these are domestic enemies of David.

People who have rebelled against the Lord are people who started out with the Lord and revolted. These are people that David rubs elbows with in the morning and during the day. Let all who take refuge in you be glad.

Let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them. For those who love your name may rejoice in you.

O Lord, you bless the righteous. You surround them with your favor as with a shield. So Psalm 5 seems to lean more toward unfaithful Israelites who their throat is an open grave and with their tongue they speak deceit.

These are more the domestic enemies within the land in Psalm 5. The next place that Paul goes when he quotes Scripture is to Psalm 140. Psalm 140. This is Psalm 139 in the Septuagint and that's the text that Paul quotes from pretty much verbatim here.

This is Psalm 140 and the specific verse is verse 3. But here, this is the Psalm of David and he says, Rescue me, O Lord, from evil men. Preserve me from violent men who devise evil things in their hearts. They continually stir up wars.

Now this makes us think more on the international scene again. We've got a war going on. They sharpen their tongues as a serpent.

Poison of a viper is under their lips. That's the part that Paul quotes. Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked.

Preserve me from violent men who have purposed to push at my feet or trip up my feet. The proud have hidden a trap for me in cords. They've spread a net by the wayside.

They have set snares for me. I said to the Lord, Thou art my God. Give ear, O Lord, to the voice of my supplications.

O God, the Lord, the strength of my salvation, Thou has covered my head in the day of battle. Do not grant, O Lord, the desires of the wicked. Do not promote his evil device, lest they be exalted.

And this goes on. It talks about the head of those who surround me. These are the generals of the armies.

This puts us in mind of the situation in 2 Samuel chapter 10, which we'll be looking at where the son of a king has replaced that king. Remember the king that wanted to gouge out the right eyes? Nahash, the king of the Ammonites. He dies and his son Hunan takes the throne.

And so David sends emissaries. He says, you know, whatever Nahash's other evils, he was kind to me when I was a fugitive, so I'll express kindness to his son. And the son humiliates the emissaries and his counselors all get together and say, David is just spying out the land.

He's going to conquer you and take you over. They speak all of these evil things about David. Then they go hire mercenaries.

They tell these mercenaries, here's this evil David. He's trying to spy out our land and subvert us and take us over. Come help us conquer this evil king.

And they're speaking all these evil things about David. And so all of these armies come marching against David from Syria and from Ammon and these other places. And David has to fight and subdue them.

And Joab goes out and has to fight a two-front battle because they're surrounded. Later David marches out. We'll see all of that in 2 Samuel.

But the point is this psalm was probably written on just such an occasion where these people are speaking poison about David. And this is how wars start. Wars didn't just spontaneously erupt.

People would have an axe to grind against a fellow king and say bad things about him and get a bunch of other guys and say, look how bad this guy is. Let's go conquer them. And that's what David's talking about.

So again, this one seems to orient itself more toward the Gentile nations that surround Israel. So you see what Paul is doing. He seesawing back and forth.

He quotes a psalm that talks about pagan people that are sinful. Then he quotes one that talks about domestic Israelites that are sinful. Now he's quoting Psalm 140, which talks about the pagan nations surrounding Israel and their sin.

Now he's going to go back the other way and quote another psalm that talks about Israelites. And this is Psalm 10. The next quote in Romans 3 comes from Psalm 10, verse 7. And if we look at this in context, we see some more clues that these are domestic Israelites.

The wicked boasts of his heart's desire. He says to himself in verse 6, I shall not be moved throughout all generations. I shall not be in adversity.

His mouth is full of curses and deceit and oppression. Under his tongue is mischief and wickedness. He sits in the lurking places of the villages.

This is not a pagan marching with an army. This is a guy that lives right in the village that has all of this deceit and is committing all of these sins of the tongue. He sits in hiding places and kills

the innocent.

His eyes stealthily watch for the unfortunate. He lurks in a hiding place like a lion in his lair. He lurks to catch the afflicted.

He catches the afflicted when he draws him into his net. He crouches and bows down in the unfortunate fall by his strength. He says to himself, God has forgotten.

This is somebody who knows who God is. It doesn't say there is no God. He's an Israelite.

But he says God's not paying attention. He's hidden his face. He'll never see it.

So, back and forth Paul goes. And how did he start this paragraph? He says, Scripture has concluded all under sin. The Jews and Gentiles alike are under the power of sin.

And he's using the Old Testament to document this. He says, look what David said. That's the thrust of his argument now in Romans chapter 3. And the final quote here in verse 18 that says, There is no fear of God before their eyes.

This is from Psalm 36. It's Psalm 35 in the Septuagint. It's Psalm 36.

Just take a look at that because this is a general psalm that covers all people. It doesn't restrict itself to Jews or Gentiles. Psalm 36.

Transgression speaks to the ungodly within his heart. There is no fear of God before his eyes. It flatters him in his own eyes concerning the discovery of his iniquity and the hatred of it.

The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit. He has ceased to be wise and to do good. He plants wickedness upon his bed.

He sets himself on a path that is not good. He does not despise evil. And this goes on to talk about the faithfulness of God in contrast to the unfaithfulness of the wicked.

And that's Paul's whole point in this chapter. So as we finish up this section in Romans 3, what's the conclusion? Paul sums it up here in verse 19. We know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law.

This is the Old Testament scripture. These are the oracles of God that were given to Israel. And Israel's own scriptures point out the fact that there are Israelites that are unfaithful and that are under the power of sin.

There are Gentiles that are unfaithful and under the power of sin. Why? So that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God. The whole world is accountable to God for salvation.

The whole world is accountable to God after salvation. It doesn't matter if you're a Jew or a Gentile. It doesn't matter if you're religious or irreligious.

It doesn't matter if you're saved or unsaved. You stand before God and you're held to account for the revealed truth that Paul talked about in Romans 1. No human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes the knowledge of sin. And this is a universal blanket statement.

Jew, Gentile, saved, unsaved, it doesn't matter. God has a righteous standard. He's revealed it.

He's revealed it to unbelievers. He's revealed it to believers. You can't get saved by keeping the law.

And you can't be declared just as a believer before God by keeping the law. Works don't cut it. God has a consistent system all the way through that begins at salvation and goes all the way through life.

And it's by grace through faith. That's how we achieve righteousness at the point of salvation. That's how we achieve righteousness after salvation.

And what's this going to do to righteousness by works? It is excluded. That's the point that he makes in Galatians. That's the point that he's making in Romans.

Why is he making that point? He's addressing this Judaism righteousness where people say, well, it's fine that you believe in Christ. That's wonderful, but here's how to be righteous before God. Same thing that he was addressing in Galatians.

He's saying, look, it's not what you do that counts. It's what you think. And he's going to take them back to salvation and say, here's how you got saved and justified at salvation.

This is what faith did then. Faith is still the key now. What does that mean to us? We have to be careful for any system that suggests itself in the Christian world and suggests itself to us as a way of life as a believer that focuses on looking at other people.

It can masquerade in a lot of different ways. We tend to pick on the Experiencing God program because several of us are familiar with it, but that's what that does. Its premise is look around and see where God is at work and join God in His work.

And the implication is God is at work straightening people out. God is at work evangelizing. Go join God in evangelizing.

God is at work ministering and making people more righteous. Go join God in doing that. Get involved in a ministry that gets other people squared away is the idea.

And with the best of intentions and the greatest of sincerity, what does that do? We focus on the mote instead of the being. And Paul says, look, you've got to focus on your own life before the Lord. The rest of the world and what God does with you in that world is a good thing, just like the works of the law are a good thing, but they have to stem from what God has done on the inside.

That's the point that he's going to make, and he's going to labor it and he's going to attack it from five or six different facets, but he's always coming back to you're a believer, how are you living your life? We have been saved by grace through faith. We've been declared righteous before God by grace through faith. That's the mechanism by which we maintain righteousness in this life.

We shouldn't be judging other people. We shouldn't be worrying about other people and holding them up to a ruler of righteousness. We shouldn't be holding ourselves up to a ruler that says, I'm good, I'm in God's good graces because I'm doing these things.

That was the big plague that faced the believers in Paul's day, and it's the plague that faces us today. Listen to any Christian radio program, almost any Christian radio program. Read almost any Christian book.

There are aisles and aisles of them in the bookstore. What do they focus on? The externals of your life. Oh, you're codependent, you're subjective, you're hyper this and under that, and you need to be straightened out in the way you operate.

You need to change the way you behave instead of focusing on God wants to transform us on the inside. And that's the point that Paul is making here. If we keep a hold of that thread as we go through the next couple of chapters in Romans, Paul is going to bounce back and forth and say, remember salvation, apply it to your Christian life.

And he's going to go back and forth, talk about salvation, talk about the Christian life. And by the time we get to Romans 7 and 8 and 9, this will be very clear, and we'll see the application that he makes for spirituality in very practical terms. But we've covered more than enough for tonight, so let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank You for the truth that's contained in Your Word. We thank You for the power, the divine power that comes into our life through Your Spirit and through Your Word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us.

We pray that as we meditate on these things, Your purpose in communicating them to us will be fulfilled. We pray that we can have a worthy walk, that we can live in a way that pleases You and reflects Your glory in a positive sense, even as Your glory is reflected in Your discipline and in Your correction of us. We ask all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.