

The Gospel That Makes A Gospel Community Part I

a sermon in the series
A Gospel-Oriented, Mission Driven, and Community-Centered Church

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Romans 1:16-32

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, 21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. 26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. 28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

What is the Gospel that forms the Gospel Community?

Last week, we saw the Gospel community called the church finds its origin from the Gospel and therefore must be sustained by that same life—the life of the Gospel. We said the church is a Gospel community of believers called out to proclaim the Gospel to one another and the world. What then is the Gospel they are to proclaim one to another and the world? It's most important we understand this because, as Paul showed us last week, that's how we grow. We grow by

speaking this Gospel to one another in love, therefore it ought to be every believer's task to understand the Gospel deeper than they have ever understood it before.

In these three messages on the Gospel, I pray God will help us to go a little bit deeper and also widen our understanding so that we will have the tools necessary to exhort, encourage, and edify one another through the Gospel. Thereby we will grow up into the headship of Christ and not be a shriveled small body attached to this normal sized and excessively good Head—Jesus.

According to verse 16, the Gospel is the power of God to save all who believe and that's all that's required—belief. *What about repentance?* Well, you don't believe God and not repent. They go hand in hand. Anybody that believes God believes he must turn from his sin and turn towards God. If you will trust Jesus not only for your sins and past but your present and future, giving Him the commitment of your life, you are saved.

As we read at the beginning of this service, God does not require of you any great feat, He does not require some religious work, He doesn't even require you to change your life. But if you will trust in Him, the power of God unto salvation will be given unto you. This is the power that will change your life and God will give it to you freely.

In verse 17 we see that the Gospel is the revelation of God's righteousness as well as how He makes us righteous, for in it—the Gospel—God's righteousness is revealed. This perfect standard that God requires of you if you're to get into heaven is revealed in the Gospel. We don't minimize the standard of God; there is a requirement of you. Do you want to go to heaven? Well then, you have to be perfect just like God. The problem is none of us can do that. So God in His mercy and great love provided a perfect substitute to stand in your place and qualify for you. However, it's not just a rescue plan. These days salvation is preached as merely a rescue plan but it's more than that. It is also a plan to do something with us. This is often a problem of modern Gospel technicians. They see the Gospel in a negative and not positive position. I use the word *negative* not meaning that they see problems with the Gospel, but they see the Gospel only dealing with our problems: sin and hell. But the Gospel does more than deal with those problems, it addresses the positive things that we need in order to live a fulfilled and satisfied life. These Gospel minimalists, as I like to call them, declare the Gospel delivers from the negative, which are the problems that sin creates, but they do not preach to the fullest extent the positive purposes of the Gospel, that God does have a plan for you and that that plan is exceedingly above all that you could ask or think. According to this power of God, which is the Gospel, God can do something with you. The Gospel not only removes sin but also adds many positive elements to the believer. The power of electricity requires both a positive voltage as well as a negative. You've got to have both. This Gospel doesn't just take care of the negative effects, it also deals with the positive, and there's the power.

But after verse 18 the Apostle does not give us any positive information about the Gospel until Romans 3:21. Why does he do this? He's like a great novelist; he sets up the story of the Gospel with a dilemma. A screenplay writer said 99 percent of Hollywood movies use the same plot line.

You have a character who has a problem who meets a hero who provides a solution. Of course the hero is Jesus, but before Paul can tell us what Jesus has done and we appreciate it, he must tell us why a Savior is needed. He has to prove the problem requires a Savior. Paul reveals that man is his own problem. No matter what man does or where he goes, the problem goes with him. Paul gives us the plot line that all humankind has rebelled against the Creator and now is in dire trouble.

Therefore, Paul's explanation of the Gospel starts with the negative and moves toward the positive. He first shows us what sin and its consequences are, and by doing so we clearly can see we need a hero to save us. I can't save me.

It's like Lois Lane being kidnapped, imprisoned, and under threat of death if the Daily Planet and Editor-in-Chief Perry White doesn't meet the ransom demand. But Superman saves the day by finding Lois Lane with his x-ray vision and defeats the criminals and rescues Lois Lane. The only problem though, in our case, is that we're not just the ones in prison and under threat of death, we're also the bad guys. We have put ourselves in this predicament.

So Paul lays out a salvation that takes care of the predicament from beginning to end. Besides that, he also teaches us that the Gospel not only saves you *from* something but *for* something. He saves you *from* the negative *for* the positive.

If we are to adequately speak the truth in love one to another and to the world, we need to know both the positive and the negative. We need to be capable and familiar with it as an experience of our own. If this is just theory and head knowledge you will never learn the Gospel as you ought to learn it.

There are three stages of salvation that Paul will lay out in front of us.

STAGE ONE OF SALVATION: DELIVERANCE FROM THE PENALTY OF SIN FOR THE PURPOSE OF KNOWING CHRIST

He didn't just save you from your sin and hell. That's not the reason He saved you. He saved you from that so you could experience and know Jesus and thereby have a relationship with God.

Paul begins with the negative and works from there to show us how great a Savior we have in Christ Jesus. He begins by explaining how the penalty of sin is the wrath of God.

I. The Penalty of Sin is the Wrath of God

“For the wrath of God is [present tense] revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.”

A. Man's Dilemma.

We are under the wrath of God already. Only those who have been redeemed by the hero, Christ the Savior, have been brought out from under the wrath of God and have a knowing, loving, intimate relationship with Christ. They no longer abide under this wrath. But if you're not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and don't follow Him as He leads, then the wrath of God is not awaiting you, Paul says it's already on you.

John the Baptist said the same thing, "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

In Romans I the Apostle Paul shows how man got into the problem.

Man was the pinnacle, the height, of God's creation. He was the image bearer of God, which means man was the representative of God on earth. He was made to have dominion over the earth. This is so important to understanding sin and salvation. If you miss this, you don't get a clear picture of God and what He's up to in His redemptive enterprise. As God's representative, it was the responsibility of man to bring the will of God to bear upon the world. In order for man to do the work of God on earth he must know the will of God in heaven. This is why Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." God's purpose in creating man has not ceased. Christians are the image-bearers of God, sealed with His image, so that we might bring the will of God in heaven to bear upon this earth.

To know the will of God you must know God. You can't do God's will if you don't know God. That's why the lost man, as good as he might be—a great neighbor, great citizen, great dad, loving husband—if he doesn't know God he cannot know the will of God and implement it in his life.

Here's the problem, says the Apostle Paul, God revealed Himself to His representative and image bearer but man chose to reject that knowledge of God.

"because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." (Romans 1:19-20)

Not a human being alive that has the intelligence to understand that there is creation is without excuse, God has revealed that to all of us. It is the rejection of the knowledge of God that brings the wrath of God. It's not because you lie that the wrath of God is on you, it's not because you're deceptive or that you back talked your parents or you cheated on your income tax or you cursed or became intoxicated. These are not the reasons the wrath of God is upon you. The real reason is that you have rejected knowing God. You have rejected the knowledge of who He is and what He's like so that what He is can have no impact on your life.

Sin is always the rejection of the knowledge of God. Again, you need to understand that Paul is not talking about learning your Bibles. Remember, there are preachers who are unsaved and

preaching somewhere this morning who know the Bible. Knowledge of the Bible is not what Paul is talking about here. He's talking about the actual knowing of God. Not just information about Him, but a personal acquaintance, acknowledgement, and awareness of Him in your life. That's what man has rejected and that is a reason for the wrath of God. Sin is always a rejection of the knowledge of God.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness," (Romans 1:18)

Suppress what truth? The truth of who God is, what He's like, His character, His essence, His nature. What happens?

"because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened . . ."

What happened when man rejected knowing God? Something happened internally to man. Darkness entered. His thoughts become empty, vain, and illogical.

"...²² Professing to be wise, they became fools,²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things." (Romans 1:21-23)

Fallen man said that God was like a bug or like something that flies in the air. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge . . ." (Romans 1:28a)

To refuse to know God is to refuse to glorify God. How are the two related? Please listen, this may seem like technical stuff, yet, in one sense of the word it's as simple $1 + 1 = 2$. When you know God you will glorify Him. When you really know the truth about God and who He really is, it's not that you *have* to glorify Him, you *want* to glorify Him. Those who have recently been converted can testify that it is not difficult to glorify God. It is not something you must learn to do. No, not at all. All who are God's children can say that it was not hard to glorify God when they were saved. You couldn't keep from glorifying God. You even became a nuisance to people around you. They wanted to change your channel but the dial was broken. All you could do was say, "Thank You, Lord." "Praise You, Lord." "I love You so much." Why is this so? Because when you really find out who God is you are transformed by that knowledge. The very person of God is the power of the Gospel.

I've good news for my friends who aren't yet Christians. This is not about you trying to be like me or some other Christian. It's about you knowing God as He really is. So you like to pop a cork now and then, God can so change your appetites and desires that He can take that from you. If you think you have to stop all that before you come to know Jesus, you don't know Jesus. It's the

knowledge of God that saves. Again, this knowledge is not just information, although that's necessary, but it's information in the written Word *and* the Living Word—Jesus Himself.

Job said, "I've heard of You, but now I know You because I have seen You." What we need—this church and every church that I'm aware of and associated with—is an Isaiah 6 experience where God shows up as He really is and causes us to see who we really are. One of the most dangerous, subtle temptations to believers is spiritual pride. We believe that somehow we are better than what we really are. We take the grace of God and all that He's done positive for us and think that's what we did. The thing that brings you back to reality is to see Him as He is. You will always glorify Him as God when you know the reality of His person.

To reject the knowing of God is to bring yourself under the condemnation of God because He's your only hope. The wrath of God, as I said a moment ago, is not hell, it's not the future lake of fire, although that's part of it, but it is something that has already been released. What is it? God abandoning the sinner to the lie about God. That's what the wrath of God is now. God simply turns you over to the dominion of sin and sin now rules you.

The wrath of God is for God to simply stand back and leave you alone. It's the worst thing that could ever happen to us because without knowing Him there is no glorifying Him, without glorifying Him there's no salvation. You've got to have God in your life. You need God to show up. You need God to open the eyes of your heart, so I bid you right now to cry out to the Lord. Plead with Him to show you Christ. If you have no desire to ask God to reveal His Son to you then you are under the wrath of God and have been left to yourself. To have no desires like that in your heart, no inklings or wishing that God would do something in you, is the wrath of God.

"Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves," (Romans 1:24)

"... God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting;" (Romans 1:28b)

That's the problem. That's the dilemma. And, as you can see, it's one you cannot fix. You need a hero. Paul introduces us to the greatest Hero. He makes Superman look like a wimp. Batman is no more than a man in tights, compared to Jesus.

We've who have been saved have received His mercy. The Lord has said to us, "I don't want to leave You under my wrath. I don't want to leave you in the darkness of the futility of your mind so you don't know the greatest Person that's ever been—Me. I want to flood your life with the goodness that I am." So He came into my life one day when I had broken so much, destroyed so much, and He came and the glory of God showed up. I'm telling you the truth, I looked for a crack to hide in the hardwood floors but in the glory and power of that holy presence was a love I had never, ever experienced before.

God saves *from* His wrath and the penalty of sin. But how does He do that? If salvation is real then it has to be deliverance from that, right? God can't save you and keep you there. He's done something for us.

II. Salvation Must Be Deliverance From the Penalty or Dominion of Sin

A. The Penal Substitution of Christ for Us.

I know it's not in our text except in verse 16 when Paul names the Gospel and how it's the power of God unto salvation, and he won't fully explain it until he gets to chapter three and verse 21 and following. Regardless, I want you to see that God has delivered the believer from the penalty of sin. The problem with chapter one has been answered and all you have to do is go to Romans 6. Paul is dealing with people who were wondering, *OK, now that we've been saved from the power and dominion of sin and its wrath by grace, is it possible we can continue to sin and there's no problem, no repercussions?* Paul answers in verse two,

"Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"

This is what's happened to everybody who has believed in Jesus. You've come out from the power of sin. It doesn't mean you're perfect, and we'll deal with that in the next message, but God is still working. The point I want to make right now is that you are as much saved at this moment as anyone in heaven. But on the other hand, you are not completely saved yet. It's the New Testament the Gospel has a tension called *now but not yet*. You have been saved but you still need saving. Why? Because we still sin. There's still remaining corruption. We'll deal with that in a future message, but what I want you to see today is that through the cross you have been as delivered from sin as you'll ever be delivered. The penalty has been removed.

"Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him (meaning the person you are as a sinner under the wrath of God, that person has died), that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. ⁷ For he who has died has been freed from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Roman 6:6-11)

B. What is True About Christ is True About Us.

When you put your faith in Jesus Christ, resting in what He did, the Bible says something happens so amazing that only God can do it. He so identifies you with His Son that everything Jesus did it is as if you did it. Whatever is true about Him is true about you. Whenever He died on the cross, He died to sin and its dominion once and for all and so did we who believe. We're no longer under its power, no longer under its sway. I'll never be under the devil's dominion ever again. All

of my sins—not in part, but the whole—were nailed to the cross, even the ones that are yet to be committed. They're nailed to the Lord and He has suffered sufficiently for them.

Therefore, since God has justified us, who is he who condemns? Who can bring a charge against the elect? A charge against God's elect is an accusation against Jesus. Do you think an accusation against Jesus will stick? No. Then it won't stick against you! Satan cannot persuade God to change His verdict about you. It would be an accusation against Jesus because you and Jesus are so identified. That's why I'm asking you to trust Him for right now. That's all salvation is—to believe that is so, not just with your head but with your whole life.

That's the negative, let's move now to the positive.

III. Salvation Must Be For the Knowing of Christ

To be saved from my sin, though great as it is, is not the best thing for me. To rescue me from hell is not the best thing God can do for me. It's wonderful, it's a great prospect, but it's not the best thing. The best thing is knowing Jesus, knowing Jesus is real and be able to experience Him.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” (Romans 1:16-17)

The question is, what is the righteousness of God? We know it's His perfection, His rightness, but did you know the Bible is very clear that that righteousness has a name? That perfect has a personification? A personality? It's Jesus.

A. The Knowledge of Christ.

To know Christ Jesus is not referring to only the knowledge of information about Christ but the personal acquaintance and relationship with Him.

Paul says the Gospel tell us how to be in right relationship with God.

¹⁷ “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed . . .”

In Romans 3:21-22, Paul begins the positive explanation and benefits of the Gospel, what He saved you for.

“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets (In other words it was testified and preached in the Old Testament), ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;” (Romans 3:21-22)

In fact there is no difference between sinners at all. Big sinner, little sinner, great sinner, small sinner, it doesn't matter because anybody who believes in Jesus is redeemed, salvaged, rescued, delivered.

"But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God--and righteousness and sanctification and redemption--" (1 Corinthians 1:30)

Righteousness is Jesus. So when someone asks if you're saved and what that means, you can say, "It means I know Jesus personally. I know Him. He is my righteousness!"

"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3)

B. The Gospel Tells Us How to be In Right Relationship With God.

This relational knowledge comes through faith. You don't have to have faith in order to learn the Bible and about God. That doesn't require faith. Anybody with a brain can do it. But do you know what I mean by relational knowledge? Relational knowledge means you've met someone, you're acquainted with them, you interact with them, you have dialogue with them, communion with them. Relational knowledge can only come by faith.

¹⁷ *"For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'"*

Why salvation by faith? The answer is that the act of faith is the true opposite of the act of sin. You never disobey until you distrust Him. I don't sin against God today until I distrust Him about something. The act of sin is to believe a lie about God. *They exchanged the truth about God for a lie (v. 25).* Therefore, to sin means I've been convinced that whatever I thought was true about God isn't. Go back to the first temptation. Isn't that what Satan cleverly and masterfully did with Eve? *God is not good to you, he whispered. You should have the ability to decide what's good and evil for yourself, and this tree will do it and you'll be just like God.* And Eve believed the lie that Satan said about God. And let's not get down on her because every sin you've committed you've done the same thing. Therefore, if man is to be restored to God, the sinner must know the truth about God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and believe it.

We've got to know the truth about God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and believe it and commit our lives to it. This is the opposite of sin. If you believe the truth about God's perfection and holiness you would say, "I'm doomed before I get started. There's no way I could be that good. I believe He's that good, that perfect, that morally excellent and holy, but I can't be that good." On the other hand, if you believe you can satisfy God's sense of righteousness and that He'll measure your good deeds against your bad deeds—and hopefully you the good outweighs the bad—He'll let you into heaven—you believe a lie about God. You believe the lie that says His righteousness is no better than yours. That's why you're doomed. That's why

the wrath of God is upon you even if you're a good person, because you're not glorifying God. Every good deed you do for yourself and your own credit and glory, you don't do it for God. If you really knew the truth about God you would know He's worthy and you couldn't do one good thing apart from Him.

That's stage one. God saves you from the dominion of sin so that you can know Jesus and knowing Christ is really salvation. It's to be in fellowship with God. I wish I had the ability to describe fellowship with God. I wish I could grab some angel from above and say, "Here, I'm going to sit down, just tell us what it's like to be in the presence of God. Unmitigated glory. Unreserved power, holiness, and love." I can't do that, but I can tell you in my own feeble way that I've never known anything to be better than when I know I'm in the presence of God and His love is being poured out on my soul.

IV. Examples of the Gospel Working in the Gospel Community

I need to do one more thing before we stop. This is all great, it is the Gospel, it is the good news, but how do we use what we've learned today to preach the Gospel to one another so that we can all grow up into the Head and be mature?

Now, how does this first stage of the Gospel work in our church and without which this body will stay shriveled? Let me give you a couple of insights.

Do any of you struggle from time to time thinking you're just not good enough, or you're unworthy, or that God marks your sins against you? Even though you know that's not true, you feel it and it doesn't matter what you know if what you believe is how you feel and what you practice.

A. How You Can Encourage One Another Against Legalism and Condemnation.

When you struggle with condemnation and you feel like you have sinned for the hundred-thousandth time and a supernatural voice preaches convincingly to you, "Here's why your life is not blessed and why the favor of God is not on you, and here's why God cannot use you, and here's why maybe you're not even a Christian..." How do you deal with that voice, the voice of Satan?

There's only one way. It's not by doing better, as we said last week. It's not spending time in the penalty box. It is to preach the Gospel to the enemy and to your own conscience. You preach what you've heard just this morning. *I can't do what you just did. That's why you're the preacher and I'm not.* Oh, this book is for you too. These truths are not just for preachers; they're for you too. I've broken them down simply and you can get a CD or go online and hear this message again for you to rehearse this until you've got it, but this Book is for you.

That's how it can encourage you against legalism also, but what about another brother and sister that is under this legal condemnation? How can we encourage them? You preach what you just

heard. To do that all you need to do is to ask Gospel-oriented questions. “How many sins did Jesus die for?” That’s all you’ve got to do. Just ask the question. “Did Jesus die to the power of sin once and for all? If He did, and you’re trusting that, then doesn’t the Bible declare you right with God? Isn’t that what the Gospel says?”

You may respond and say, *That sounds like you’re being soft on sin and I don’t want to be soft on sin because I know God isn’t soft on sin.* Exactly right. The Bible says He took out His vengeance on our sins on Jesus. God is not being soft on sin and neither are you. When you preach the Gospel, you’re not being soft on sin; you’re magnifying the grace of God in the death of Christ. And to not believe that is insulting to God and His Son, the Savior.

Let me give you another example.

B. How You Cease From Criticalness and Forbear Saints and Sinners.

I know nobody has this issue. I know you’ve never been critical of another person and you’ve never found any fault in anyone, so you can take a quick nap until we’re through. But for the couple of us in this room that this does apply to, I would advise you to stay awake just a little bit longer and then we’ll go.

How do you cease from being critical? We all acknowledge this is true about us. You laughed because you know this is true of you too. If you had no idea what I was talking about it wouldn’t have been funny to you. What does God say about being critical of other brothers and sisters or even sinners?

I’m reading this out of the Holman Christian Standard Bible because it uses the word *criticize* and that speaks to the way we act.

*“Don’t criticize one another, brothers. He who criticizes a brother or judges his brother criticizes the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?”
(James 4:11-12 HCSB)*

Let me first say what this doesn’t mean. James is not saying there is never to be correction, reproof, or instruction for righteousness because we know there are too many verses that say we are to correct one another. When our brother sins (s-i-n-s), meaning he actually violated the word of God, then yes, in certain situations the Bible says we are to confront them. But most of our criticalness is not about s-i-n-s, it’s often second-guessing what we think the person is doing or what is in their hearts when they say something or do something we don’t like. Most of our criticalness is over the motive we attribute to the other person and it may not even be remotely in their thoughts at all. Most judging is about appearances not sins.

James is saying that when you criticize a brother you're not criticizing that brother, you're criticizing the law of God. What does He mean by that? He tells you in James 2. In James 2:8 he says, "The royal law is this, love your neighbor as yourself." When you are critical of a brother or a sister, you are taking the command to love your neighbor as yourself and saying that command doesn't take care of this situation so we need something better. I need to fix this. I need to deal with this. Therefore you become a judge over the law of God because you find the law of God to love your brother inadequate for the situation.

Listen to what Paul says,

"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." (Colossians 3:13 KJV)

Forbearing simply means we accept one another and tolerate their imperfections and, yes, even their sin. We don't go easy on sin. We're hard on sin, but easy on forgiveness. Even when others sin we must be careful to watch over our hearts and not be critical but forbearing. The Bible is very clear when you're to confront and when you're not to confront and what I find is that some of us like to play the Holy Spirit. We like to assume that role. We want to move in almost immediately, before the Holy Spirit has time to convince and be the Holy Spirit. How will that person ever learn to be led by the Spirit if they have to be led by you all the time? Some teach you don't have to forgive someone until they ask for it, but that is wrong. This command says you're to do it and it doesn't stipulate if they ask for it. That's what forbearance does, it forgives and accepts.

Paul says the answer to a critical spirit is the Gospel. The way to deal with a critical attitude is to remember the mercy you have received in Christ Jesus. Brother, I have received so much mercy, far more than I need to extend to my brother and sister. Whatever someone does to sin against me, is nothing compared to what I've done to God, and how merciful He is to me. If God can be this merciful to me, then certainly I can be merciful to another. The Gospel is the way you deal with this.

"accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive." (Colossians 3:13 HCSB)

I want to conclude with an illustration. I want to go back to Abraham. Before he was called Abraham, he was called Abram. God called this man, who is the Father of Faith, the example for every Christian. An Old Testament man is the example for every Christian today. Paul says if you trust Jesus you're a child of Abraham, so we better pay attention to his life and learn from it.

God called this pagan idol worshipper out of the city of Ur, in present day Iraq, to go to Canaan, the Land of Promise, and he does it. He obeyed God and before this he never knew of this God. But God spoke to him and revealed Himself to Abram, and well, you know the rest of the story. The knowledge of God transformed Abram and he obeys.

He does everything God told him to do up to this point, but then a famine occurred in the land. The Bible says Abram picked up his family and servants and herds and went to Egypt.

Here's my question for you: where in the Scriptures did God tell Abram to leave and go to Egypt? It is not found in the Word of God. This tells me God did not tell Abram to leave Canaan. Here's a man who followed God from his homeland to an unfamiliar land. The writer of Hebrews said he didn't know where he was going, he just trusted God step by step and God got him there. But when there was a famine in the land, Abram decided on his own that he must go to Egypt where there's bread.

But Abram feared for his life. He believed that because his wife, Sarai was very beautiful, that someone would kill him to take Sarai. Thus he told his wife, "Sarai, you're a beautiful woman. And if Pharaoh takes one look at you I know what will happen—my head will be gone because he'll kill me to get you. So just tell them I'm your brother." In other words, he lied. He was willing to let another man take his wife into his harem. That doesn't sound like a great man of faith to me. I can't even imagine that. I can't imagine I could let my wife go and be touched by another man. But this man of God did. Pharaoh paid Abram handsomely for Sarai. He gave him "sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels" (Genesis 12:16). Thankfully, in the providence and mercy of God, He spared Sarai. God plagues Pharaoh and on Egypt, and Pharaoh sent for Abram and said, "Why did you lie to me? Get out." He doesn't hurt him, doesn't harm him, just escorts him out. But what is a most remarkable thing is Pharaoh does not ask for his payment for Sarai to be returned. Abram leaves Egypt much richer than when he went.

It seems that God blesses Abram even though Abram did not obey God to leave Canaan and find refuge in Egypt, nor did he do right by his wife. What is the point of this? Abram is an example of a man living by faith in God, which means by the grace of God. Saved by grace through faith. God is showing us in this little story of Abram that God is merciful to us even when we get out of His will. That's not an excuse for you and me get out of the will of God and wait for somebody to pay us on top of that. What it is is a reason to say how great a Gospel we have, how great a God we have!

In the cross, I'm never again to be the enemy of God. He shows me the kind of mercies that He displayed to Abram. He even shows me much grace when I do not abide in His will. And if God can show me that kind of mercy why can't I show it to you when I don't like your decisions, or what you say to me, or even the way you behave toward me?

A church grows up to the full stature of Jesus Christ by the Gospel. Because we've been delivered from the wrath of God, we can surely be kind and merciful to anybody who may be unkind and unmerciful to us. That's the power of God unto salvation. Amen.