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Romans 3:26-31:

The Detail of God's Good News, Part 2

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

We are talking about the good news of God. The word "gospel" means good news. Why is it so good? Well, that is what we have been looking at. If there had been no Jesus Christ, there would be no Christmas, no Christianity, no good news, no Easter. There would be nothing for man, no hope for mankind. Jesus Christ is the reason for all the seasons of our rejoicing.

Take the words "Jesus Christ." Jesus is the name that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John said the Messiah to come would be called. It is used 567 times in 550 verses in the four Gospels alone. Luke 1:31-33 tells us about when the angel came to the Virgin Mary to tell her about the miraculous conception. He says, "And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. [That would be His earthly name.] He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end." Jesus, the name that was given to the child that was born of the virgin Mary, the God-child.

Then look at the name "Christ." Christ in the Greek is a term that means the Anointed One. It is the name that corresponds to the Hebrew word "Messiah" that is found in Daniel 9:25-26. In fact, it is the word that is used in the Gospels to refer to the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. You see, Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah that the Old Testament said would come.

Now we know the Apostle Paul was a Jew. Philippians 3 says that he was of the tribe of Benjamin. We also know that there came a point in his life in Acts 9 when he was converted by the good news of Jesus Christ. He came to understand, as he says in Romans 7, "I was once alive without the Law, and the Law came and sin revived and I died." He began to realize that what he was using to

condemn others was the very thing that was condemning himself. He stood as much in need of grace as any man who lived.

He has a problem in writing Romans, particularly 2:1-3:20. He is dealing here with a Jewish audience of which he is a part. He has a tremendous love for the Jews. He says in Romans 9, "I wish that I myself could be accursed that my brethren could come to know what God offers to them in Jesus Christ." The problem he had was that the Jewish people had made a serious mistake when it came to the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah, a mistake that many are still making today. The mistake is the Jews understood that when the Messiah came, He would come to rule and reign. Certainly He will do that. But they overlooked the prophecies that said He must suffer and die for the sin of all mankind. Now this was a serious mistake because by not paying attention to the suffering servant, not paying attention to the sorrow that He would have to endure for our sake, they rejected Jesus Christ when He came to this earth. They believe He is yet to come when in fact He has already been here.

Jesus points to the problem in Luke 24. This was the morning when Jesus had resurrected from the dead. It should be a time of celebration. But remember, many of His followers, many of the disciples, still held on to the old idea that all He was going to do when He came was set up His kingdom to rule and reign. They could not understand that He had to go to the cross, suffer and die for the sins of both Jew and Gentile on this earth. So, they were very discouraged. Two of the disciples, Jewish followers of Jesus Christ, were walking on the road toward Emmaus.

Luke 24:13-27 says, "And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were conversing with each other about all these things which had taken place. And it came about that while they were conversing and discussing, Jesus Himself approached, and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him. And He said to them, 'What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?' And they stood still, looking sad. And one of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?' And He said to them, 'What things?' And they said to Him, 'The things about Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word in the sight of God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him up to the sentence of death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened. But also some women among us amazed us. When they were at the tomb early in the morning, and did not find His body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that He was alive. And some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just exactly as the women also had said; but Him they did not see.' And He said to them, 'O foolish men, slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!' 'Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

What did He explain to them that began with Moses and went through all the Scriptures that concerned Himself? Romans 1:1-2 says that everything about the good news concerning Christ has been prophesied and promised beforehand by the prophets. We know that He was prophesied in the Old Testament.

What prophecies did He explain? Let me just suggest a few of them to you. First of all, the Old Testament prophesied where He would be born. Micah 5:2 says, "But as for you, Bethlehem, too little to be among the clans of Judah, for you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His going forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." Little Bethlehem was where He would be born.

Not only that, the Old Testament prophesied when His time would be, when He would die and implied in that is when He would be born. Daniel 9:24-26 mentions "seventy weeks." We know that is seven periods of seven. It must mean years because it has to do with the Messiah and the Messiah, at that time, had not come. So it is seven periods of seven years which would total 490 years. Daniel 9:24 says, "...have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place." Daniel mentions six things there. These things must take place within a period of 490 years.

What is going on here? Daniel is praying about his people. He is concerned about his nation. He is in captivity. This is when Judah, the southern two tribes, had been taken into captivity by Babylon. The angel appears and said, "God is not finished with your people. There is going to be 490 years involved in an eternal plan with your people." Then he divides it up.

Verse 25 says, "So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks (49 years) and sixty-two weeks (or 434 years);..."

What he is saying is, there is going to be 483 years until the predicted time of the Messiah. Now, if anybody would have just thought about what he said, all they had to do was take the decree, mark the day, and from that point on, 483 years would be something to do with the time of the Messiah. It says, "...it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. Then after the sixty-two weeks [this includes the 42 years of seven weeks, so it is 483 years] the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, [This speaks directly of His crucifixion] and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined."

The Antichrist will come later on, but "the people of the prince to come" will destroy the city. We know that took place in 70 A.D. If you will look at the Scripture in the prophecies right there, it says when the time of Messiah will be. It predicts the time of His being cut off. If you will back that up, implied is the time of His birth.

Thirdly, the Old Testament prophets prophesied how He would be born. Isaiah 7:14 says, "Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." Immanuel means God with us.

But the Old Testament also goes on to predict His suffering for our sins. Isaiah 53, beginning in verse 1 reads, "Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth."

The Old Testament predicted His betrayal. In Psalm 41:9 it says, "Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against Me." Even the price of His betrayal is predicted in Zechariah 11:12: "And I said to them, 'If it is good in your sight, give me my wages; but if not, never mind!' So they weighed out thirty shekels of silver as my wages."

The Old Testament predicted His death. Psalm 22:16 says, "For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers has encompassed me; they pierced my hands and my feet." The Old Testament even predicted His burial in a rich man's borrowed tomb. Isaiah 53:9, "His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth."

These are just a few of the prophecies of the Old Testament. There are over 300 more that Jesus Christ fulfilled showing the fact that He is the promised Messiah that was given in the Old Testament. The key here is that Paul is having a significant problem trying to show his Jewish brethren that this good news of Jesus Christ is not just for the Gentile. It is also for the Jew.

You see, the Jews would have no problem seeing the Gentiles fault. Paul would have had no problem before he came to know Christ. He knew the Gentiles were doomed. As a matter of fact, in verses 22 through 32 of chapter 1, he gives a summary of how the Gentiles are guilty and what they do. It says in verse 29, "being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; fully of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them."

If Paul said that to a Jewish audience, they would say, "That is exactly right! They all need to be condemned. They are doomed. They are sinners. It is obvious." But in 2:1 through 3:20, it is a little different. Paul turns the tables and says, "Not only are the Gentiles guilty, but the Jews are guilty the same way. All men born of man and woman, whether Jew or Gentile, are guilty of sin before God." You see, Israel felt since they had the covenants and the commandments and the promises and the prophecies somehow they would never be judged individually. They were a part of the nation, Israel, which was a part of the covenant God made with Abraham. Because of that, they felt like they would never be judged individually. They automatically inherited the kingdom of God.

Paul is saying, "Hey, you had a great advantage. You know what the Gentiles don't know. But the standard you are using to condemn others is the same thing that is turning right around and condemning you." That is why Paul says in Romans 1:16, "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."

It is all summed up in 3:23: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Who would have the most difficulty hearing that message? Not the Gentiles living in sin. It would be those who are religious and proud of themselves in their pedigree. They prided themselves in their own self-righteousness. Paul is trying to get across to them, "You can't do that. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Like a prosecuting attorney, he has been stating the case that God has against all men, Gentile and Jew. He ends the case and says, "You are guilty, you are guilty as charged."

I want you to see the third and final point of the definition of the gospel, the good news. Why is it so good? I am accepted, I am acquitted, but thirdly there is one more thing involved in the good news that must be understood: my acknowledgement that my good

works are unacceptable before God is insisted upon by the good news of God. I have to understand my works are filthy rags in God's eyes. If we can do anything to dispel the false hope that people put into religion, that is what I am trying to do. That is what Paul was trying to do. He is saying it to the Jew as well as the Gentile. He leaves nobody out. There are only two people groups in this world, Jew and Gentile. We are all involved here. He says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

You see, there are people today who think that because they have done good things all their life that certainly they will get into heaven. I hate to tell you, but that is not right. You can't depend on your baptism. You can't depend on your church membership. You can't depend on your tithing record. I know we can't do that. You can't depend on these things. God is not impressed. I have to realize the unacceptability of my good works.

Look at what Isaiah said, writing to Jews, in Isaiah 64:6, "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away." That is why Paul says in 3:27-28, "Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." Paul is driving home the point of why the news is so good concerning Jesus Christ. To the Jew who seeks daily to live up to the Law and can't, to the Gentile who seeks daily to live up according to his moral conscience that God has given him and can't, there is good news from God. There is only one way. That is by placing my faith into what Jesus Christ has done for me.

Look again at Romans 3:27. "Where then is boasting?" I think he is still talking to the Jewish audience. The word boasting is *kauchesis*. It means a prideful boasting. You see, there is a tendency to think that the more good things you do, the better off you are in favor with God. That is a fallacy. So he says, "Where then is boasting? Where is your pride? Where is your prideful boasting?" He appears to be saying to the Jewish mind-set that all boasting of one's righteous law keeping is excluded when the law of faith has come in. The law of faith puts all that aside because the law, not of works, but of faith puts our complete trust and our hope in what God has done for us. The term Law, *nomos*, seems to refer to a rule or a plan or a principle. The rule of faith in Christ applies not only to my justification, but to every aspect of my Christian life. We have to see this. There are dead works before the cross. There are dead works after the cross. My good works before the cross are just as dead as they are after the cross. God is not impressed by what we can do for Him. When will we understand that? He is impressed with what He can do in and through us. That is what Paul is saying.

The law of faith puts aside forever the energy of the flesh and the work of the flesh. It nullifies it. It puts it aside when we put our faith into what Christ can do, has done and will do. That automatically puts aside whatever we could have done or wanted to do for Him. You have to realize how unacceptable our good works are both before the cross and after the cross. All the works of man are dead works, whether Jew or Gentile.

Verses 28-30: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentile also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one."

What is Paul saying? He is saying if it is by living up to the law, then God is only the God of the Jews. He is not the God of the Gentiles. You see, this completely nullifies what He promised to Abraham. He said to Abraham, "Through you and your seed many nations will be blessed." Galatians 3 tells us that seed that He promised to Abraham is Christ. Now, if He is only going to justify people according to The Law, then He is only the God of the Jews. We already know He is not just the God of the Jews. He is God of both the Jews and the Gentiles. Paraphrased it could read this way. "Or is God the God of the Jews only as He must be if justification is by the law for only the Jews did God give the law. Is He not the God of the Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also since God is one in His being and a light to all nations. He doesn't have preference to people. And He shall justify the circumcision, Jewish believers, out of simple faith, not by their keeping Moses' law although they had it from God. And the uncircumcision, Gentiles, who had nothing but that which was written on their hearts through their faith." Paul says, "Hey, faith is the only way. Whether you are a Jew trying to work for it under the Law, whether you are a Gentile trying to do good works out of your conscience, it won't work. All men are guilty of never meeting the standard God requires. But by putting your faith into what Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament, did for us on the cross, by putting your faith into Him, that is the way that a man is acceptable and receives his salvation."

Paul continues to drive home the point that both Jew and Gentile are in need of salvation. Look at verse 31: "Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law." Now listen to what I am about to say because a lot of people don't seem to understand grace. You think you are saved by grace but kept by the Law. You don't understand what grace is. The main declaration of grace that they oppose is that our justification is apart from the Law, that the charges have been dropped apart from the law, apart from the works of the law, apart from ordinances. They oppose that kind of teaching because they say it overthrows the divine authority of God which is His law. "You can't just do away with it," they say. They say if you preach grace by putting your faith and trust into Jesus Christ, you have nullified the law and you can't do that.

The Apostle Paul says in verse 31 we are not nullifying the Law, we are establishing the Law by saying that you must put your faith in Jesus Christ. You say, "How in the world can you do that?" Well, there is a situation in the Old Testament that gives us a perfect example of what Paul is talking about here.

You know, the law was given to the Jews, not to be questioned but to be obeyed. The Sabbath laws were a part of that law. Exodus 31:14 says, "Therefore, you are to observe the Sabbath for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days' work may be done but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall surely be put to death."

In Exodus 35:1-3 he goes even further. "Then Moses assembled all the congregation of the sons of Israel and said to them, 'These are the things that the Lord has commanded you to do. For six days' work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy day, a Sabbath of complete rest to the Lord. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day.'"

Now how is that law established? The only way to establish a law is to carry out the penalty that it demands. Did they do it? Numbers 15:32 says, "Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on the Sabbath Day. And those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation and they put him in custody because it had not been declared what should be done to him. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'This man shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.' So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones just as the Lord had commanded Moses. And thus the law was established by executing the penalty it demanded."

Paul is saying, whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, when you realize you can never measure up to the standard of God, when you put your faith only into Jesus Christ, you have just established the Law, because Jesus carried out the penalty of the Law that it demanded. He took it upon Himself. He died at the cross for all man's sin. Therefore, when you put your faith in Him, you do not nullify the Law, you establish it.

We have to understand this. Grace is not based on how good I can be. I was not justified as a saint. I was justified as a sinner. By putting my faith into Jesus Christ and what He did on the cross the charges were dropped. I am accepted by God and God has good news for me in the plan of His gospel.

The Apostle Paul preached Christ crucified, that Christ died for our sins. John says, "Behold, the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sin of the world." That is what He came for. By His dying He established the law. It is good news. The good news is, I am nothing but a failure apart from God. Did you know that? Grace is what God did for me, not what I could do for Him.

The good news is the grace of God and the fact that when I put my faith upon what Christ has done and that alone, when I am willing to turn from my own works and depend on His for me, then I am accepted by God. I am acquitted of all charges against me because He paid the debt the Law demanded.