

ROMANS BIBLE STUDY

Romans 3:21-31

Lesson #7

Introduction

Last week we finished the section of verses where Paul had systematically laid out the biblical description of humanity. It spanned across three chapters, and left us with a very different picture than the one we hear from secular society, and from much of what calls itself the church. By far the most prevailing idea is that all humanity is basically good at heart; and no matter what religion or god you choose to worship, if you live a relatively good life you will be accepted by God and brought into His eternal kingdom. It's easy to see how this idea could be so popular. It kind of makes sense, and it opens the door to every group and religion, and we think that's what God is ultimately trying to do. It makes the gate to heaven nice and wide and unrestricted, so nearly everybody can just cruise right on in. This thought makes us happy, and it makes us feel benevolent and tolerant and loving. We get upset if anyone challenges this, and we call them bigots or fanatics.

But we don't get this idea from the scriptures, we get it from our own heart's and mind's. And that's what Paul has just spent 63 consecutive verses explaining. That mankind cannot trust their natural heart and mind, because these are damaged from our birth. Our hearts have an innate propensity for sin, and our minds have the desire to carry out those innate propensities. Our conclusions are doomed to error, because our reasoning faculties are misaligned from birth.

God told the human race: *8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts.*

Isaiah 55:8-9 (NASB)

For this reason, and for others, God has given us the holy scriptures, to adjust our thinking and to show us our errors. If we care about what is actually true, rather than what makes us feel good, then we will use those scriptures to guide our reasoning and formulate our conclusions. In the verses we just quoted from Isaiah, God told us straight out that we don't think like He thinks, and our ways are not His ways. Therefore, our natural conclusions will generally be at odds with His, this is what He's already told us. And Paul has told us that what we call righteous in our perspective, is anything but righteous from God's perspective. If you'll indulge my foolishness, it's like our internal "righteous-o-meter" is tilted out of square, so every time we apply it our result is crooked. It looks and feels right to us, but God sees the error, because He has an undamaged meter.

Because we have innately faulty diagnostic tools, we derive faulty conclusions. For instance, that God really doesn't demand perfection for entry into His heaven. That's impossible we surmise, if that's the case then nobody but the Triune God will be there. Close has got to be good enough, there's no other possible way. This seems to be good logic in our eyes, but just as God told us, He doesn't operate like we operate. He doesn't do things like we do things. The only way to come to the right conclusion is to study His word on the issue. How does God say that He makes judgements and determines who does and who doesn't get into His eternal kingdom? Did He leave us to guess, and to devise our own opinions, or, did He tell us in clear and certain terms just exactly how He makes this determination? You already know the answer to this question don't you, the only thing that remains is whether or not you're willing to accept it, because it runs contrary to your natural thinking, as God already said it would in the verses we quoted from Isaiah 55.

Surely and truly the principle that Paul is about to describe is higher, nobler, wiser, and altogether different than anything man could or would ever devise. How does God accomplish the impossible feat of saving some lost and guilty sinners, and at the same time preserve His own perfect righteousness in the process? We can all understand that simply ignoring the sins of some while punishing the same ones in others would not be just, it would not be righteous. Now, just to be clear, this would not exceed God's authority, since He is creator of all, but it runs contrary to His divine and holy nature. And to the eternal gratitude of all creation, God is by nature holy and righteous. Imagine what existence would be like if He were otherwise, a frightening thought to be sure.

What we're about to hear from Paul is not a new concept just being introduced into scriptures, it is the fulfillment of earlier prophetic words that God spoke to Abraham. From the very beginning God has asked mankind to believe Him, not just to believe that He is, but to believe what He says. And justification in God's eyes is based on precisely that.

Justified By Faith Alone

*21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that **He would be just** and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

31 Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

Romans 3:21-31 (NASB)

Verse 21:

21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

Paul makes the transition from his long treatise on human depravity, and the universal sinfulness of humanity with the statement “But now” which begins his explanation of the manner in which God attributes righteousness to a remnant of humanity. Paul says that now the righteousness of God has been manifested. The righteousness of God had been told to Abraham several thousand years before, but now it has been manifested. What would this mean? Most likely that there had been some visible demonstration, some manifestation of what God had previously said. And what manifestation would that be? Is there any question that this manifestation of the righteousness of God was His Son, who was the express image of His likeness, and nature? The tangible incarnation of Jesus Christ, with His perfect sinless life, and substitutionary death, and bodily resurrection were the visible manifestation of the righteousness of God. In what way one might ask?

Well, firstly, in as much as Jesus Christ was Himself perfect and sinless, something Paul has made clear is not of human capability. But, it’s what Jesus did that really manifests the righteousness of both Himself and His Father. Even though sinless Himself, He voluntarily bore the necessary retribution for sins that were committed by others. (2Co 5:21) It would violate God’s character to simply issue random pardons for sin to some and not to others without any punishment for those sins. So, Jesus voluntarily paid the full price for those sins, to the last cent, for all who believe that He is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. The sins of men were paid by Himself, but even more, the perfect life that He lived was credited to the account of those who believe in Him. This is the manifestation and demonstration of the righteousness of God. In that He did not allow any sin to be unpunished, and that He will accept absolutely none into His eternal kingdom but those who are clothed with the perfect imputed righteousness of His beloved Son, Jesus. Although seemingly simple, this is a profound concept. It is by this means that God maintains His own righteous nature and character, and at the same time punishes all sin, every sin, without exception. Every sin ever committed will be paid for, either by that sinner, or by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. There are no cosmic pardons, where the legal consequences of sin are simply overlooked. There are only two choices, either Jesus pays for our sins, or we pay for our sins, there are no other options, and there is no such thing as us paying for some and Jesus getting the rest.

The life and accomplishments of Jesus Christ are the visible manifestation of the righteousness of God. His life was witnessed to by the Law, which He obeyed to perfection, and by the prophetic scriptures which were fulfilled by His life. This is what is meant by *being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets*, The Law of God witnessed to the perfect and sinless life of Jesus Christ, and all the things that the prophets had foretold about His coming were fulfilled in His life. He proved to be everything that God had said that He would be. And it is the Law and prophets that attest and provide witness to this fact. He, Jesus Christ, is both the Savior of the world and the means for displaying the righteousness of God the Father. From before the invent of linear time, God had planned that He would send His Son into the world to bear the sins of a fallen humanity. This has been the intended means of justification from the very beginning. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was not God’s plan “B” after Satan ruined plan “A”. Nothing ever thwarts God’s planned purposes. (Isa 46:8-10)

Verse 22:

22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;

This simple verse answers the multitudes of objections to the exclusivity of Christ as the only Savior. Since the problem between man and God is sin, and the only acceptable propitiation for sin is a perfect sacrifice, then there is a very small pool of choices. Paul has just spent some 60 or so verses making it clear that no such human has, or ever will exist, so our sacrifice must be of divine origin, not human. But if man cannot achieve this goal then how is that fair? How can God be fair and righteous if He puts the minimum level of performance intentionally out of our reach? This is what Paul is now explaining. That God has preplanned that His chosen will find redemption by acknowledging their own inability and looking to another with absolute dependence on Him for their salvation. When Jesus was preaching He said:

17 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18 "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3:17-18 (NASB)

In answer to the exclusivity objections, we have repeatedly the declarations that this salvation is allocated without any distinctions of race, or color, or ethnicity, or cultural preferences. Salvation is declared available *for all those who believe* and it's made clear that *there is no distinction*. Now, from this understanding there springs many conclusions. Once hearing this teaching, that salvation is by believing in Jesus Christ, and not by our own righteousness, then we assume that we simply choose to believe in Jesus and all is fine. Well, yes, but also no. Just like we cannot choose to be sinless and perfect in our lives, because the choosing might be present but the doing is not. In like manner, we cannot simply choose to believe in Jesus by an act of our own human will. We do not have this capability any more than we have the capability to live sinless lives. The desire might be present but the doing is not. And so we look at the next verses:

Verses 23-25:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.

Verse 23 is the conclusion of the same sentence that Paul started in verse 22. (Yes, I'm aware that early Greek had no punctuation, so there were no sentences as we punctuate them now.) But the point is that the thought being conveyed was that righteousness was by faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe, and there was no distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, and this leads up to his statement that *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. This statement puts every human being in the same sin pool. No exceptions whatsoever. And there is only one means of escape from this pool. And it is not by our own doings. It is not by our own doings specifically because God made it that way. God put salvation outside the reach of human capabilities because He intended from the very beginning to provide the only means Himself. You may or may not like this, but it is the teaching of the scriptures. God made us like He made us for a specific reason, and to accomplish a specific purpose of His own choosing. Pride and self-reliance are not going to be allowed in God's eternal kingdom. Man will be humble, grateful, and subservient, or he won't be there at all. (Isa 66:2)

Now that we understand that the mandatory righteousness of God is not acquired by our own capabilities but by believing in the One whom God sent to die on our behalf, we must look even deeper into what this means. We have seen that God tells us to keep His commandments, even when He knows we aren't capable of doing so, and it is His intention that those Laws lead us to the understanding that we must have a substitute Redeemer or we will surely perish. In a very similar manner, God tells us to believe in His Son Jesus, but at the very same time knows that our minds are damaged beyond the ability to really do this without His direct intervention. What it always comes down to, and what is so often offensive to humanity, is that God has kept the final say on the disposition of all created beings. All salvation, including the faith which affords it, is a gift of God given by His grace, to those whom He chooses. (V. 24) In another of his epistles Paul wrote:

7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Eph 2:7-9 (NASB)

Salvation is not a human decision, a human conclusion, or a smart choice, it is a gift of God by His grace, even though it does encompass all these elements as a byproduct of that gracious gift of God. If we believe, then it is because God has granted us belief, not because we have done so with our own capability.

Pride and boasting are clearly obnoxious to God, and He will have none of it among His children in His kingdom. It would appear that much of God's plan and selected means of salvation is for the purpose of preparing the mental condition of His eternal worshipers. A prideful heart cannot truly worship another, it is set upon itself as the object of worship. God has designed a plan that conclusively demonstrates to humanity that they are not self-sufficient nor self-righteous. We must be willingly submissive to His plan and grateful enough to worship Him with all our heart, all our mind, all our soul and all our strength. A tall order to be sure, because pride has a root in all of us.

This is the heart of justification by faith apart from the works of the Law. It is the understanding and public acknowledgment that we cannot meet the righteous standard of God, and rightly deserve His wrath and judgement. Because God knows this, He has provided a substitute who will meet those standards for us, and pay the penalty that we owe for not doing it ourselves. Pride wars against this concept. If we can't do it ourselves then we don't want it, that's our innate fallen nature. We want to earn our way to heaven so that we can stand there and gloat at our achievement, or at least take credit for some part of it. But again, as we've said, God will have no such thing in His kingdom. God made justification by faith rather than by works deliberately so that His eternal family would be the sort of worshipers that He desires them to be.

There is a reason to all the workings of God, no matter how strange and mysterious they might seem to us. There is this simplistic view among professing Christianity that the sum total of God's plan is to see how many human beings He can persuade to believe in Jesus so they won't end up in hell. I call this kindergarten theology. It is the prevailing concept among those who embrace Arminianism. Without a doubt the most destructive element of this simplistic view is that it denies God the full glory for our salvation, and makes Him simply a partner in the process. This is exactly the opposite of what justification by faith alone is intended to teach us. It fosters self-reliance and self-dependance, and it surely fosters some degree of self satisfaction for our perceived contribution. Again, God will have none of this kind of thinking in His eternal kingdom. Justification by faith alone, is justification by God alone, because faith is a gift not a work. Faith does not come simply by human reasonings, it is not just a human decision, faith (also called regeneration) is a gift of God that completely realigns sin damaged human reasonings into conformity with God's. In the logical order of salvation, this happens first, then the human decision is possible. Although in the human experience they seem to be simultaneous.

It's one thing to come to the realization that we are saved from our sins by a gracious gift of God, and not by our own workings. It is another to mature in our Christian walk to the level where we realize *the point* of this process. After all, what difference does it make to God how we're saved, so long as we are saved? Whether by works or by faith alone, what does He care? What difference does it make to God? We're back to our kindergarten theology. While many people don't seem to see any difference, there's clearly a difference to God. And it's when we recognize that salvation by faith alone is entirely God's design, and His own doing, then we begin to realize that there's some *reason why* He made it this way. We graduate from kindergarten and begin to move into the halls of higher education. Why does God deliberately save us by faith rather than by our own works? Because by so doing He makes it crystal clear that He and He alone is the source of redemption and salvation, and man has absolutely nothing of his own to contribute to that process.

This is the point that every born again believer must reach to be ready to occupy God's kingdom and be counted among His acceptable worshipers. ***God uses salvation by faith alone to establish an eternal relationship, an eternal understanding, between Himself and all His family of eternal worshipers.*** And the very heart of that understanding is that He is everything and we are nothing. Oh yes, He loves us very much, but not because we've earned that love, but because He has chosen to set His love on a few totally unworthy beings, who know and fully understand the full nature of that relationship. And He has done this because it suits His own intended purpose. I said in an earlier lesson that God never intended to create equals to Himself, His original motivating desire was to have a family of worshipers, and to worship is to fully realize, and appreciate the difference between the ones worshipping and the One being worshipped. We do not worship our equals, or even those who are just somewhat superior, we worship that which is entirely beyond what we are. (Jn 4:21-24) If we understand *why* justification is by faith rather than works, then we don't have difficulties with issues of Arminianism and kindergarten theology.

Masses of professing Christians believe that justification is by faith rather than works simply because God, in His mercy, has provided a way to save mankind in spite of our innate fallen condition and lack of power to save ourselves. It is simply because He is a loving God who is merciful to pitiful humanity. In other words, it's all about our own inabilities and God's compassion for us. Now, while these thoughts are somewhat true, they are simply the tiniest tip of the ice burg, and they entirely miss the whole body of the issue which remains hidden beneath their view. ***The real heart of justification by faith alone is that it serves God's long term purpose of mentally preparing a family of suitable worshipers.*** Our unwinnable struggles against sin and unrighteousness are intentional on God's part, and are an indispensable part of His planned means for preparing the attitude of His worshipers. It is part of God's way to get our heads right; meaning our thinking, our feelings, our affections, our gratitude, and our submissive attitude of authentic worship. God saves man by faith alone, apart from our own works, ***because it suits His purpose***, not simply because it suits ours. We desperately need to get past this kindergarten theology that dominates our present day thinking, where everything is about us, and God exists to serve our needs, rather than the other way around.

We do not need to debate or defend the truth of justification by faith alone, Paul forever puts that question to rest in these verses we're studying, and many more. The topic is not an open question, it is quite conclusively settled forever. But the logical implications of it, and the divine purpose for it, are not so clearly understood. In fact, I have rarely heard preaching on justification by faith alone from the perspective of why God uses it and exactly what it accomplishes. I hope our discussion will add some clarity to this issue, and move our thinking beyond ourselves, and our own felt needs, and onto God's divine and eternal purposes for originally creating us humans in the first place.

In verses 24 and 25, Paul says *being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.* If Jesus had done everything that He did in secret, or as an invisible Spirit being, then our whole religious system would be like an elaborate novel. It would be hard to say if it was real or just a grand work of fiction. But, to forever dispel such thinking, God chose to display His Son in the flesh, and to have Him die, to shed His life's blood unto death, in full view of humanity as a public display of the propitiation for sin through faith in Him. God shows mankind that He has provided forgiveness of sin and salvation from judgement for all who believe in His beloved Son.

Do we see how this completely eliminates all self-reliance and self-satisfaction in the process of redemption? It is all about Jesus Christ and Him alone, and anything we think we might have to supplement that is less than useless, but even worse, it denigrates the monumental importance of that sacrifice. If we assert that Christ's crucifixion was only effective because it was combined with our own act (our own work) of faith, which we mustered up by our own doing, then we are, by that claim, putting ourselves in actual partnership with Christ for the glory of redemption, no matter how small we feel our part might have been. This is exactly what God the Father will not tolerate in His eternal kingdom. There will be no partnerships in the credit for human redemption, that credit, and the glory it demonstrates, has been reserved for Christ alone, forever. It is the root from which springs authentic worship, and the foundation that supports eternal gratitude. The importance of this doctrine cannot be overstated, and it must be rightly and thoroughly understood. Which I say with sadness, it is not. Superficial childish theology of self interest, and self importance dominates the current thinking, even in the majority of churches. Now, moving to the next set of verses:

Verses 25(b)-26:

*This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that **He would be just** and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

God the Father, for the purpose of demonstrating His own righteousness, temporarily passed over exercising His eternal judgement on previous sins, so that He could now demonstrate His own righteousness through the sacrifice of His beloved Son. I wonder if we realize the full scope of what Paul is saying? He says that God the father is doing something that demonstrated His own righteousness. And what was that? He was showing that He doesn't overlook sin, period. That He doesn't tolerate or ignore even the smallest sin, or He himself would not be perfectly righteous. To be perfectly righteous God must deal, one way or another, with each and every sin ever committed in all eternity. Paul says *so that **He would be just**.*

If God desires to save some of his sinful children from the wrath of His judgement, then how does He do that without breaching His own righteousness, because allowing any sin to go unpunished would not be righteous. This is what Paul is saying, that God chose to demonstrate His righteousness by providing a substitute recipient for the punishment of every sin ever committed by His own elect. Not one sin will go unpunished, ever in all eternity, because God is perfectly righteous, and this is what Jesus Christ demonstrated in His own flesh when He died the death that was due for the sins of God's elect. Christ demonstrated that His Father does not tolerate sin, and He paid for it publically on a brutal cross for all to see. For this reason, "God himself is just" and, He is the "justifier" of all who believe in His Son Jesus Christ. This verse is Paul's declaration of the vindication of God's righteousness in His forgiving of sin in His elect. Because He made arrangement for payment in full through the act of His beloved Son. Christ's death, in full public view, was the vindication of God's perfect righteousness, demonstrating that God does not ever tolerate or overlook sin, period, whatsoever. What He does do is allow One who is guiltless to pay the sin debt of others if both are in agreement. But the debt must be paid in full because the righteousness of God demands that it be so. This brings us to the next verses:

Verses 27-30:

27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. 28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

Paul has now brought us to the place where he wants us. If justification is by faith alone, and faith is a gift of God, dispensed by His grace alone, he asks the rhetorical question *Where then is boasting?* He doesn't even wait for an answer, he immediately declares the obvious - *It is excluded.* This word was most likely pointed at the Jews who held high regard for their knowledge of the Commandments and their perceived observance of them. But the point has much broader implications. It speaks of an attitude of self accomplishment and self righteousness that is totally excluded when we understand our own depravity and our utter impotence to save ourselves with our own resources. We have absolutely nothing whatsoever to boast about in regards to our salvation, because it was entirely, 100 percent a gift of God, bestowed by His grace alone.

Paul makes the same point with other words when he asks: *By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.* Paul makes reference to keeping the Law as the means of justification, and says "No" that's not how it works in God's plan, and proceeds to declare the famous words: *28 For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.* I have heard much debate on just what this statement actually means, and the full scope of its ramifications. By far the most prevalent is the misconception that Paul has declared the Law to be obsolete, because it is not the method of salvation. There's no question that it isn't the means of salvation, but Paul did not say that we were justified in spite of the Law, or in violation of the Law, or contrary to the Law, but simply apart from the works of the Law. He never said anything contrary to the Law, just that it wasn't God's means for justification. We'll speak of this more thoroughly in verse 31.

Paul then asks: *29 Or is God the God of Jews only?* What does Paul mean by this question? Most likely that the Jews thought of themselves as the only people who had God's Laws, so they were inclined to think that salvation was for them alone, but Paul goes on to make it clear that this is not the case at all. He says: *Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,* and by this statement Paul makes the salvation of Gentiles as well as Jews a matter of eternal fact. And he goes on to demonstrate this by the statement: *30 since indeed God, who will justify the circumcised by faith, and the uncircumcised through faith, is one.* Paul says that God will use the faith of the circumcised, meaning the Jews, in the written oracles of God to implement their justification, and at the same time He will accomplish the same work in the hearts and minds of the Gentiles by the sanctifying gift of saving faith in Jesus Christ, even though they may not know all the Laws and statutes that the Jews had known for centuries. It is the one and same God who will justify both groups and implement their common salvation. A salvation by faith alone, apart from the works of the Law. Now Paul adds a very, very important verse:

Verse 31:

31 Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law

After he has made such an important point over justification being entirely apart from the works of the Law, Paul realizes that many will surely misinterpret what this means. If justification isn't by keeping the Law then there's no reason to try to keep it at all, is there? Hasn't Paul just told us that the Law is obsolete because of faith? When I was just a young believer this is what I was taught by my early church. The teachers used these verses in Colossians:

14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross Col 2:14 (NASB)

The teachers inferred that the certificate of debt that had been nailed to the cross was the Law itself, and now it has been nailed to the cross of Christ. In other words, that the Law now meant nothing, it was all about what we believe, not what we do. This is called antinomianism, a term coined by Martin Luther as I recall, and it cropped up early in the history of the churches. Despite its condemnation as heresy it still clings to some churches and denominations. But Paul said nothing of the sort. What was nailed to the cross was the certificate of death laid upon us for not keeping the Laws of God. And the same thing applies to justification by faith alone, apart from works of the Law.

To surmise that the Law has no purpose because it isn't the means of salvation is back to kindergarten theology. The whole point of salvation by faith alone is to establish the Law, not abolish it, as Paul declares. The sanctification process, being performed by the Holy Spirit (1Pet 1:2) is progressively making the saints of God live in conformity with the Laws of God, that's the intended result, the intended purpose. (1Jn 2:3-6) Do we intentionally ignore God's purpose for our justification because we don't think it's mandatory for our own salvation? It seems that an alarming number of professing Christians actually do. As long as we perceive that we are saved, then nothing else really matters very much. This is not the heart attitude of a regenerate believer. Anyone who thinks themselves to be saved, but has no serious desire to depart from sin, is without a doubt self-deceived. (1Jn 2:3-4)

Paul is not reversing his teaching with this verse, he is clarifying it. He is preventing it from being taken to extremes and used as a means to justify ongoing Lawlessness and sin by believers. Justification by faith alone is the only possible means of justification for fallen mankind, but it doesn't nullify the Law of God, it establishes it through the power of the Holy Spirit to progressively sanctify those in whom He dwells. It isn't an either/or situation, it is the establishment of the Law of God in the lives of His believers through the initial means of faith alone in Jesus Christ. Genuine faith never seeks to nullify the Laws of God, but rather always produces the result of establishing those Laws in the lives of true believers. This is how we know if we've really come to know Him and love Him, if we keep His Commandments. (1Jn 2:3; 5:3)

Conclusion:

We've now spent several lessons first establishing the total depravity of humanity, and our absolute inability to save ourselves, or even assist in that salvation, because we are born spiritually dead and slaves to sin. Then, from this point of view, we were then introduced by Paul to the grand plan of God called justification by faith alone apart from our works, apart from our actions. This runs contrary to our nature, and is often viewed as offensive by many who believe themselves to be righteous, or at least as much as the next guy. But Paul has spent much time describing the innate sinfulness of humanity, and put to rest any hopes of salvation apart from an act of God himself. And this concept also runs contrary to human thinking, and finds much opposition. We try to understand our creator's actions from our own point of view, and that causes many misconceptions. We dare to compare Him to ourselves, and challenge His authority and righteousness by our own standards of measure. But we read the verses from Isaiah 55 where God tells us that we are not at all like Him, nor is He like us.

When Paul introduces us to the concept of justification by faith alone, apart from our keeping the Laws of God, he opens a door that we've probably never considered before. First he told us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, then that we are innately, from birth, damaged beyond hope, and now he tells us that God has provided a means for our justification that is not by our own doing, but by our believing in the work of His Son. Why would He do this? Why would He make us come into this world in such a condition that we're totally dependent on Him for our redemption? That apart from Him we will surely perish forever? Is this fair and just, and what possible reason could He have for doing this? The vast majority reject such notions out of hand, and conclude that any God who would do this isn't One they want to

know, so they find themselves another, or reject the concept of a Creator altogether. But in our study of these chapters we have come to see that God has a divine and masterful plan in place, and everything that He's done in the past, and continues to do now, have an eternal purpose that He's planned from before creation began.

God justifies His chosen children, His family of eternal worshipers by the process that He does, because it serves the purpose of preparing them spiritually and mentally for the divine and glorious purpose for which He has made them in the first place. All those who will inhabit His eternal kingdom will have been properly prepared by God for their task and position in that kingdom. And the understanding of our place and position, and our understanding of His place and position is a critical part of that preparation. God seeks acceptable worshipers to love and cherish and appreciate Him forevermore, and to become one of those privileged few involves a process that God has designed and implemented within His creation plan. We must, and we will, be made to comprehend and appreciate the massive difference between ourselves and Him. We will worship Him because we want to worship Him, and we're privileged and honored to be allowed to do so. We don't think of ourselves as His equal, but freely recognize and admit our inferiority, and worship Him for that monumental difference. Pride and self reliance will have no place in His eternal kingdom, and everything we experience in our lifetimes has been designed in advance by God to ultimately bring us to this right state of mind. (Rom 8:28) He will finally complete that good work which He began in us (Phi 1:6) when He fully transforms us into conformity with Christ himself (Phi 3:20-21; 1Jn 3:2)

God has a good reason why He justifies us by faith apart from the works of the Law, and a good part of that reason is that it serves the purpose of establishing an eternal understanding and relationship between us and Himself, that makes it clear that we did not save ourselves, or even participate in that salvation, but it is entirely an unmerited gift of God, bestowed by His grace alone, on an unworthy sinner like ourselves. We are not His equal, we are not His partner, we are not His voluntary co-worker in the process of redemption; apart from Him we are absolutely nothing, and we can do nothing of merit in the eyes of God. This is the starting point of sanctification and spiritual maturity for the children of God. And justification by faith rather than by our own works serves the purpose of renewing our minds and establishing a proper spirit of submissive obedience within us. As Paul will later burst out in this same epistle:

33 Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!
Romans 11:33-34 (NASB)

The doctrine of justification by faith, apart from the works of the Law, serves multiple purposes of God, in so much as it provides for the redemption of mankind that cannot redeem itself, and maintains the perfect righteousness of God by providing a substitute recipient of the mandatory wrath of God for sins committed, and establishes the nature of that eternal relationship between God and mankind. It is my sincerest hope that this study has helped us to more fully see the scope and the depth and the breadth of this doctrine of justification by faith alone. To Him be the glory, forever. Amen.

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