

God's Great News for Humanity's Great Problem
Paul's Letter to the Romans

The Power of Jesus' Faithfulness

Romans 3:27 – 31

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Exegetical Outline

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 by faith

is one.

31 Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be!

On the contrary, we establish the Law.

Introduction: The Power of Jesus' Faithfulness

The Sunday before Thanksgiving, my two roommates, Robert and Lawrence, saw something amazing. They saw the power of the faithfulness of Jesus of Nazareth. In early November, the three of us moved out of the Cooley Apartments on Cooley Road to another apartment complex at 355 East O'Keefe, which is a tougher area of East Palo Alto. The first thing that struck me was: There are a lot of gangsters there. They're called Surreños, which is Spanish for "southerner." They hang out in the back, wearing blue, and they traffic in drugs. They also hate the Norteños, the "northerners" who are gangsters in another part of town, who wear red. The Surreños are the 1st generation Mexican immigrants. The Norteños are the 2nd generation Mexican-Americans. Within a few days, we had hung out a little bit with the Surreños in our apartment building. But we discovered that one of them, a 19 year old guy named Chapulin, wanted to befriend us. He was a pretty jokey guy, but there were moments of openness between us, and he told Lawrence that he wanted to go to church! He knew of a Spanish speaking church way up in San Francisco, so Lawrence and Robert decided to go with him up there. A van with some other adults came to get them. During the ride, Chapulin said that he makes \$1,000 a week dealing crack. On a good day, he said, he makes \$3,500. But he wanted to leave that life behind because he knows it's dirty money. My roommates asked him, "What about your friends in the gang?" Chapulin said something very insightful: "They're only my friends because I have money."

When the van pulled up to the church, my roommates were amazed. Gang members from all levels in the gang hierarchy were there. There were guys wearing blue and guys wearing red sitting down in the same building. And they weren't fighting each other!! During the service, Chapulin, our softening drug-dealing friend, even cried openly twice and read Psalm 1 on his own! These guys were brought to silence. They were brought to peace. And they were brought to tears before Jesus of Nazareth. My roommates sat there awestruck, partly because they were the only two Asian guys sitting among a huge congregation of Mexican folks, but also because Jesus was demonstrating his POWER ... TO OVERPOWER HUMAN PRIDE, TO OVERPOWER HUMAN DIVISION, AND TO OVERPOWER HUMAN SIN IN THE HEART.

Context:

We are in Romans 3:27 – 31 and studying Jesus' faithfulness and his great POWER. Last week we saw Jesus unveiled as God's one and only answer to the corruption of sin in us, human beings. Jesus fulfilled all the promises that God had made to the people of Israel for the sake of the whole world. God had made a covenant – a sacred bond of unconditional love – with Israel. God called Israel to be a medical focus group. In the midst of all humanity being uncooperative patients, God drew Israel in with special blessings but special responsibilities to adjust to the demanding health regimen God as the Good Doctor prescribed. Israel tried and made some progress, but in the end, couldn't do it. So Jesus fulfilled Israel's side of the covenant by being 100% faithful to God the Father, and by doing that, Jesus cut away and burned away the corruption of sin in the human heart. Jesus also fulfilled God's side of the covenant by giving back to Israel a "circumcised heart," a human heart or a human nature that was surgically healed of sin, which God had promised in passages like Deuteronomy 30:6. Jesus of Nazareth – the human with a human journey – was the ultimate demonstration of all of God's character.

But what is our response to Jesus? There is only one thing to do: stop trying to be right with God on our own merit, recognize our tremendous sin and self-centeredness, and bow before Jesus Christ in faith. Now in v.27 – 31, the word "faith" appears five times. Faith is our only appropriate response to Jesus. But what does faith mean? What exactly does faith in Jesus do to us?

To answer those questions this morning, we're going to reflect on three more things about Jesus and his power. First, in v.27 – 28, Jesus overpowers human pride. Second, in v.29 – 30, Jesus overpowers human divisions. Cliques, divisions, groups, subcultures, and even nations are flattened into obsolescence by Jesus. Third, in v.31, Jesus overpowers sin in the human heart by placing the Law deeply and squarely in the heart of human beings, writing over the sin-script that had been written there before. All three of these things make Jesus unique. Jesus is INCREDIBLY RADICAL, standing far apart from every other religious leader idea AND CONTAINING THE TRUE POWER OF THE ONE TRUE GOD.

Jesus Overpowers Self-Justification: v.27 – 28

Let's take the first point: Jesus overpowers human boasting. Paul begins in v.27: "Where then is boasting?" Now what is boasting? In this immediate context, boasting is something done with the mouth, where you speak very loudly about your own morality or ability.

So boasting is quite common, isn't it? Just the other day, I was cleaning my apartment, and I let the two oldest Gonzalez girls, N* and C*, in along with their friend Cl*. They're 11, 10, and 10. They came eating Cornnuts. Now, I like Cornnuts, but I don't like them on my floor, and the girls knew that. So I let them hang around in my bedroom while I cleaned my living room. N* suddenly came out and pointed a finger into the bedroom, and said, "Cl* dropped Cornnuts on the floor!" And she said with crossed arms, "I don't do things like that!" That is what a boast is. It is a loud vote of confidence in yourself. I think we can boil it down to one phrase: "I'm good enough!!" Other people may be bad, but "I'm good enough!!"

Now in the wider context of Romans, boasting specifically means "boasting about one's self right in front of God's face." That position is like being summoned to court as the defendant, walking up to God the Judge and saying, "I'm innocent!" It's fascinating to trace the references to speech from Romans 1 – 3. The first person we saw boasting was the bad man of Romans 1:21 – 32. Picture the most competitive person you know, and you've got a small part of this guy's personality. He was self-confident, and he loved to talk about himself. First in 1:22, he "professed to be wise," and soon enough in 1:30, he fully bloomed into becoming "insolent, arrogant, boastful." Then in Romans 2:17 – 3:8, we saw another smooth-talker. He was the opposite archetype of humanity, the ultimate religious person, the observant Jew of classical times, called to the stand. He also did a lot of talking about himself, boasting in 2:17 in the fact that he had the Law of Moses, the perfect moral standard. So he tucked his fingers underneath his suspenders as he boasted in his self-righteousness. He said, "I'm better than other people!" Boasting, then, flows out of a self-sufficient, self-centered, and self-righteous man or woman.

But suddenly people shut their mouths. In chapter 3 verse 19, every mouth was closed. There was silence. Why? BECAUSE ALL WERE CONVICTED OF SIN, whether it was self-centeredness, self-deluded judging, or self-righteousness. In the face of this kind of expose, all we could do was sit silently.

Fortunately for us, God didn't zap us with lightning bolts as if he were Zeus on Mount Olympus. That's not even the same type of character. Instead, God pulled aside a curtain and He displayed Jesus, where Jesus bore the cost of bearing a fallen human nature in a fallen world, fought through all the temptations, and purified that human nature through his total faithfulness. Jesus fought for a new human nature in his own body, and attained through his death and resurrection. So receiving Jesus' God-soaked, God-drenched resurrected humanity is the only way to take full responsibility for what we have become as human beings. And receiving Jesus is the only way to allow God to heal human evil in us, which is what God wants to do in everyone. So now what happens to the self-righteous boasting, in light of Jesus? In v.27, Paul says: "It is excluded." That means it is no longer possible. It is no longer possible to say, "I'm good enough," because only Jesus is good enough. Not even "good enough," but 100% good.

So how exactly does Jesus exclude boasting in self-righteousness and self-affirmation? Paul reflects more on this in v.27: "By what kind of law [or principle]? Of works? No, but by a law [or principle] of faith." When we first read that, it sounds like a strange thing to say, and it is, but looking at it more closely helps clear it up. Paul is comparing two principles. The word "nomos" sometimes means Law with a capital "L", which is the Law of Moses. At other times, it means "principle" as it does here, so I'm translating it "principle." Now Paul examines these two principles. The principle of works promotes boasting. The principle of faith excludes boasting.

The principle of works is the principle that says the more good deeds I do, the closer I am at achieving heaven and reaching God, in fact, becoming so RIGHT that no one can accuse me. The principle of works is contained in all human myths even down to the present. If you were a young man in ancient Greek times, you would have been inspired by the story of Hercules becoming a demigod by his twelve incredible works of courage. Or if you were in medieval England and Europe, you would have had Sir Lancelot, who through his own chivalry and purity achieved absolute righteousness. If you were a young lady in almost any culture, you would have been exposed to the motif of the virgin who saved her family, or who won ultimate love, through her own purity. And today, if you do good through the year, Santa Claus writes your name on his list, checks it twice, and finds that you've not been naughty, but nice. Good deeds makes you an achiever.

But why? What is it in us that runs so deep? Stanford psychologist Claude Steele calls it our desire for self-affirmation. We want to be loved because we're lovable, respected because we're respectable. We have a huge desire to be right, to be right in our own eyes, to be right in the eyes of other people, and of everyone around us. Most importantly, we want to be right because we do rightly. He says that the desire to see ourselves as capable and

autonomous human beings is more basic than our desire for sex. Well, at least for some! It is possibly the strongest desire we have. It's PRIDE.

Pride in yourself permeates every human religion. Observant Jews follow the Ten Commandments in their own moral strength in order to be righteous. Hindus honor nature and the Vedas and the Bhagavad-Gita in order to attain a better life in the reincarnation ladder. For Muslims it's practicing the Five Pillars of Islam. For Buddhists, it's the Eightfold Path. In every case, it's what you can do. What about today? Well, if in ancient times, people who gave alms to beggars were righteous, then today, people who give to charities are righteous. If in ancient times, serving your dead ancestors was righteous, then today, serving your dead ancestors is still righteous! (In ancient times, serving King Arthur or the Emperor was righteous, whereas now, serving King Public Health or the Emperor Public Service is righteous.) On top of that, everyone is encouraged to "believe in yourself!" You have the power to be good on your own. Whatever the case, life is just a matter of being "good enough" or at least just being "better than other people."

So along with laws, codes of behavior, and rituals come people who are better law-keepers and worse law-keepers. You get a hierarchy of people. In schools where you have the cool people on the one hand and the losers on the other. Or in the company where those at the top model the corporate values, and those at the bottom don't. The same thing happens in gangs and social clubs. Whenever human beings get together, the natural tendency is to develop a set of behaviors that gets legalized or becomes religion. And according to that system, a hierarchy of people develops based on who has done MORE and who has done LESS. People at the top boast, and the higher you climb, the more boastful you become, until you are the guru, the monk, the person who does all the work. That is why **BOASTING CANNOT BE SILENCED BY A SYSTEM OF WORKS**. Works requires laws to measure them. Laws result in better law-keepers and worse law-keepers. This results in moral hierarchies, which results in more PRIDE.

How then is boasting silenced? By Jesus alone, because in Jesus, we see a different principle. Santa Claus brings presents because we earned them. Jesus Christ gives life freely because he perfected human life for us. This is not the principle of works, but the principle of the faithfulness *of* Christ which we can connect to by faith *in* Christ, where we rely on Jesus to *be our life*. Now that might be hard to swallow for some of us, because the principle of faith says that only Jesus was right. Only Jesus was ultimately loving. Only Jesus was fully good. And by extension, we must be **INCONSISTENT, MORALLY WEAK, ABSOLUTELY NEEDY**, and worst of all, **JUST LIKE THE NEXT GUY**. But think about how unusual Jesus is. Jesus contradicts every myth and every other religion. He shatters pride, flattens all hierarchies, and equalizes all humanity in one fell swoop.

How does Jesus do this? It's because Jesus rules out the principle of works. That's exactly what Paul explains in v.28: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." Again, to be "justified" in general means that you had a reason to exist. Nowadays in business, people say, "Give me a justification for that proposal," meaning, "Why should this be allowed to continue?" In classical Rome, the meaning was similar. To be justified was when a Roman judge looked at you, declared you free from condemnation, let you go, and ended the trial. If you were justified, you were acquitted. You were pardoned by the Judge and you had a reason to exist. But Paul is also speaking specifically of being "justified" in the Jewish sense: by being restored and on the other side of the Sinai covenant, to be given a circumcised heart or new human heart or new human nature by God.

Who perfected that new human heart? Only Jesus. In other words, we are not **ACHIEVERS**. We are **RECEIVERS**. We don't earn anything. Jesus gives us everything. Human self-righteousness is bogus. That is what Christ shows us. Christ overpowers boasting.

Maybe the best setting to see Jesus' power played out is India, where we have a strict caste system with Brahman priests at the top and untouchables on the bottom. The caste system originates in Hindu literature (the Upanishads, Puranas, the code of Manu, the commentaries of Sankaracharya, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Brahmanas) and defines all human relationships. You go up or down the caste system based on works and reincarnation. Now during the late 1800's, there was a boy of a high caste named Francis Kingsbury. He was a deeply committed Hindu. He also boasted in his high status, as he looked down on others below him. Not only that, but he hated Christianity. He had even sketched a picture of Jesus Christ on the cross in his house so he could kick the picture every day. As a young man, Francis wanted to become educated, but the best college was a Christian college, the Madras Christian College. Nevertheless, he decided to go. There he began to read of the story of Joseph and Jesus and began to wonder about

them while he questioned his own Hindu faith. His father was afraid that he might convert, so he sent Francis to the Presidency college. However, Francis kept reading the Bible. He eventually came to faith in Christ and began caring for those beneath him in the caste system. As a result, his father permanently disowned him. Francis wrote the following while reflecting on the break: “By becoming a Christian I lost my father’s love, lost my inheritance, and lost the opportunity of becoming a civil servant or a barrister-at-law. I knew all this and deliberately chose to be a Christian. Is there anything in Christ Jesus to compensate for these losses? In Jesus of Nazareth I have found pardon and peace. These are not idle words. I know that my sins, which are many and dreadful, are all blotted out from the memory of the holy God by the blood of his Son...To live for Christ and for India is now my one ambition in life.” (Sherwood Eddy, *India Awakening*. New York, 1911, p. 129 – 131.) Today there are small pockets of Christians there, and when they meet, these people from different castes who would ordinarily not have anything to do with each other, they gather together in houses in the mornings. Jesus overpowers their boasting. They pray together. They study together. And they love Jesus Christ together.

(I think we can learn from the story of a loudmouth named John. John’s mother died when he was six years old, so his father, who was the skipper of a ship, raised him. John went to sea when he was eleven years old. Like most all sailors, he learned to curse and swear and make roaring boasts. He sailed the high seas for eighteen years. During that time his father retired, and John got careless and fell into the hands of a slave trader who was doing his crooked business in Africa. But John’s mouth pulled him through a narrow escape and eventually got him into becoming a slave trader himself. He profited from taking kidnapped people from Africa to England and North America as slaves. Like any sailor with some narrow escapes, John was proud of his loose and libertine lifestyle. But John went so far as to mock God. I can just imagine this man in his late 20’s and early 30’s, in the prime of his life, standing on the deck of his ship at night, laughing at the starry sky with scorn. But John’s mouth was about to be changed. One day on a long voyage from Brazil, a storm hit and almost sank his ship. John had also picked up Thomas a Kempis’ spiritual classic, *The Imitation of Christ*. These things struck him with the burning realization that he could not mock God, either with his life or with his mouth. He came to faith in Christ, and wrote a song about what Jesus meant to him:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.

And so John Newton wrote the hymn *Amazing Grace* and over three hundred others. He became a minister at the age of 39, and his proud boasting stopped. Instead, his mouth was filled with praises for his Lord and Savior, that the punishment for his sin had been paid for, and all he needed to do was accept it by faith.)

Jesus Overpowers Human Divisions: v.29 – 30

That brings us to point number two. Jesus overpowers human divisions. Look at v.29 – 30: “Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised by faith is one.”

Now living in our time, this question might not sound exciting. Of course God is the God of both Jews and Gentiles! I’m going to read you a story that demonstrates why this is still unusual. It’s Dr. Seuss’ *The Sneetches*.

Now the Star-Belly Sneetches had bellies with stars.
The Plain-Belly Sneetches had none upon thars.
Those stars weren’t so big. They were really so small
You might think such a thing wouldn’t matter at all.
But because they had stars, all the Star-Belly Sneetches
Would brag, “We’re the best kind of Sneetch on the beaches.”
With their snoots in the air, they would sniff and they’d snort
“We’ll have nothing to do with the Plain-Belly sort!”
And whenever they met some, when they were out walking,
They’d hike right on past them without even talking.
When the Star-Belly children went out to play ball,
Could a Plain-Belly get in the game...? Not at all.
You only could play if your bellies had stars
And the Plain-Belly children had none upon thars.
When the Star-Belly Sneetches had frankfurter roasts

Or picnics or parties or marshmallow toasts,
They never invited the Plain-Belly Sneetches.
They left them out cold, in the dark of the beaches.
They kept them away. Never let them come near.
And that's how they treated them year after year.
Then ONE day, it seems...while the Plain-Belly Sneetches
Were moping and dopping alone on the beaches,
Just sitting there wishing their bellies had stars...
A stranger zipped up in the strangest of cars!
"My friends," he announced in a voice clear and keen,
"My name is Sylvester McMonkey McBean.
And I've heard of your troubles. I've heard you're unhappy.
But I can fix that. I'm the Fix-It-Up Chappie.
I've come here to help you. I have what you need.
And my prices are low. And I work at great speed.
And work is one hundred per cent guaranteed.
Then, quickly, Sylvester McMonkey McBean
Put together a very peculiar machine.
And he said, "You want stars like a Star-Belly Sneetch...?
My friends, you can have them for three dollars each!"
"Just pay me your money and hop right aboard!"
So they clambered inside. Then the big machine roared
And it klonked. And it bonked. And it jerked. And it berked
And it bopped them about. But the thing really worked!
When the Plain-Belly Sneetches popped out, they had stars!
They actually did. They had stars upon thars!
They they yelled at the ones who had stars at the start,
"We're exactly like you! You can't tell us apart.
We're all just the same, now, you snooty old smarties!
And now we can go to your frankfurter parties."
"Good grief!" groaned the ones who had stars at the first.
"We're *still* the best Sneetches and they are the worst.
But, now, how in the world will we know," they all frowned,
"If which kind is what, or the other way round?"
Then up came McBean with a very sly wink
And he said, "Things are not quite as bad as you think.
So you don't know who's who. That is perfectly true.
But come with me, friends. Do you know what I'll do?
I'll make you, again, the best Sneetches on beaches
And all it will cost is ten dollars eaches."
"Belly stars are no longer in style," said McBean.
"What you need is a trip through my Star-Off Machine.
This wondrous contraption will take off your stars
So you won't look like Sneetches who have them on thars."
And that handy machine working very precisely
Removed all the stars from their tummies quite nicely.
Then, with snoots in the air, they paraded about
And they opened their beaks and they let out a shout,
"We know who is who! Now there isn't a doubt.
The best kind of Sneetches are Sneetches without!"
Then, of course, those with stars all got frightfully mad.
To be wearing a star now was frightfully bad.
Then, of course, old Sylvester McMonkey McBean
Invited them into his Star-Off machine.
Then, of course from THEN on, as you probably guess,
Things really got into a horrible mess.
All the rest of that day, on those wild screaming beaches,
The Fix-It-Up Chappie kept fixing up Sneetches.
Off again! On again! In again! Out again!
Through the machines they raced round and about again,
Changing their stars every minute or two.
They kept paying money. They kept running through

Until neither the Plain nor the Star-Bellies knew
Whether this one was that one...or that one was this one
Or which one was what one...or what one was who.
Then, when every last cent of their money was spent,
The Fix-It-Up Chappie packed up and he went.
And he laughed as he drove in his car up the beach
“They never will learn. No. You can’t teach a Sneetch.”
But McBean was quite wrong. I’m quite happy to say
That the Sneetches got really quite smart on that day,
The day they decided that Sneetches are Sneetches
And no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches.
That day, all the Sneetches forgot about the stars
And whether they had one, or not, upon thars.

I love that story because it talks about human division. There are stars that divide us. What are they? Our race? How much education we have? How much money we have? How good looking we are? Whether we side with the West or the East? You can call it prejudice, elitism, cliquishness, or if you want to be milder, just call it “caring about people who are more like me.” Whatever we call it, people tend to believe in the superiority of MY GROUP. We are groupie. We form cliques.

And just as human pride produces religions of works, human division produces religions of ethnic nationalism. Let’s first take a historical view of this. The first four major civilizations were Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China. All of their myths and religions were related to their rivers. There was no way a god in Egypt could be a god in China. Furthermore, their gods of war always took their side so they could feel okay about wiping out anyone else. Those gods were nationalistic and parochial. This might seem so silly and ancient, but hold on. Islam is essentially Arab. Allah willed the *jihads*, the holy wars against the infidels! But let’s hit a little closer to home. Both Protestants and Mormons claimed that Americans were the new chosen people, so that European settlers could eradicate the native Americans and not feel bad. Dutch South Africans created their own perverted form of Christianity to establish Apartheid. Nazi Germany did the same against the Jews. Division is engrained in us and we legitimate it.

Now the Jews were NOT supposed to fall into this trap. From their earliest days down to the days of Jesus, Israel was supposed to share God’s heart, and share His universal concern for man. God told the first Jew, Abraham, “Through you, all the families of the world will be blessed.” That’s ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE WORLD. Israel was supposed to be kind to the foreigners in their midst, something that was very unusual for people back then. Isaiah addressed the whole world in his messages. And when their Messiah came, the Jews were to go out to all the nations as missionary-heralds of his kingship. God was preparing them for this.

But the Gentiles hated the Jews. There is something inside human beings that causes us, when we see someone more moral than ourselves, to both admire them and reject them simultaneously. The Gentiles kept trying to wipe the Jews out. In Egypt, Pharaoh killed all the male children except for Moses. In Persia, there was a plot to ethnically cleanse the Empire of all Jews. When Jesus was born, all the Jewish male children were killed again, this time by Herod.

So the Jews returned hatred for hatred. During the time of Jesus, Jewish women didn’t even help Gentile women give birth, because to do so would be to help another Gentile come into the world. That’s how much hatred there was between them. What could change this? Only Jesus.

Jesus was the signal that Jew and Gentile were to both join God’s family for all humanity, even down to you and me. How do we know this? Because of v.30, where Paul answers his own question: “Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised by faith is one.” There are really two reasons embedded in that statement as to why the division between Jews and Gentiles is overpowered.

The first reason is that at Jesus, everyone comes to God the same way: by faith in Jesus’ faithfulness. God will justify the circumcised by faith. That refers to the Jews. Are things any different for the uncircumcised, the Gentiles? No. God will also justify the Gentiles by their faith. Jesus calls everyone to recognize their universal

need for a new heart, spiritually. We are just as needy as anybody else. Therefore, everyone comes to God by the same way, from the same place, from an equal position. That flattens human division.

The second reason is contained in the last two words of v.30, that God “is one.” What does it mean that Paul says, “God is one”? It reaches deep within the very nature of God. “God is one” is a reference back to the Shema, the great Jewish creed of Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One!” The weighty Shema distinguished the Hebrews’ monotheism from the pagan polytheism, because God is One. But considering the term *echad* in Hebrew, it also means that God has one face. He is a God of perfect integrity. Therefore, there is no shadow of unfairness or favoritism with Him. That surely must be Paul’s thought here because it fits so well. God does not play favorites at the foot of Jesus, regardless of race, gender, background, or anything else. Everyone approaches God the same way: by faith in Jesus Christ. That’s how Jesus overpowers human divisions.

(If we had the best education we could in this country, if we were born into the right family in the right social circles, if we had the respect of all the right people in our little world and could easily advance, how much incentive would there be for us to leave and go to the Middle East, say? Not very much. Yet Paul, from his perspective, did exactly that. He left his world, where he had the best education, the right family, the right people on his side, to go to the Gentiles where he became a homeless criminal. He gave up all his privileges and all his biases. What caused this? Jesus.)

Now what does this all mean for us? It means we stand in a very rich tradition. When the early church spread, this was the first time anyone said anything about equality, especially between races and cultures, and the most problematic division of all: the division between Jew and Gentile. Christianity was the first movement towards multi-culturalism, where religious ethnic nationalism was pushed aside, and love broke out like a flood. The secular world would very much like to forget this. The true preaching of Jesus may be the only time human division was overpowered. If anything can overpower human division and prejudice, it is Jesus.

Jesus Overpowers Human Sin at Its Source: v.31

Third, Jesus overpowers human sin at its source – in the heart – by emblazing Spirit of Jesus in our hearts. Look at v.31: “Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.”

Paul deals with this question because another Jew listening to Paul would have asked, “Okay, if everyone comes to God equally by faith in Jesus, does this cancel out what God previously said in the Sinai covenant? Is this new principle of faith in Christ totally distinct from the Law of Moses?” Paul phrases the question, “Do we then nullify the Sinai covenant through faith?” His response to that question is the vehement, “May it never be!” which is Paul’s way of saying, “No way!!!” Then, look at his utterly shocking rebuttal: “On the contrary, WE establish the Sinai covenant.”

What does it mean that WE establish the Sinai covenant, or the Law of Moses? Does it mean that we just politely acknowledge the Law of Moses and then move on? No. Or does it mean we create a whole new hierarchy? No.

The first thing to understand is Matthew 5:17, where Jesus established the Law. He said, “I have come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.” But Paul builds on that. He doesn’t say “Jesus established the Law.” He says WE do.

His point is that the Sinai covenant implied a long story between God and Israel, and in Jesus, that story reached its climax and fulfillment (Rom.10:4). Israel was not able to follow Good Doctor’s orders. So they could not perfect the antibodies to the great human disease of sin within themselves. But Jesus did obey the Doctor’s orders. And Jesus has the antibodies in himself. And by faith in Christ, the Spirit of Christ comes to live inside us. Jesus becomes our source of the healing for our sin-sickness. Paul will explain this more fully in chapters 7 and 8. And Jesus honors the Sinai covenant, the Law of Moses, as a story. Jesus’ life in us even raises the bar on what it means to be God’s true humanity. That is why Paul says that it is WE who establish the Law. We establish it within ourselves.

Another way to understand this is to look at the two greatest Old Testament passages about having the Spirit of God live inside us. Ezekiel 36:26 – 27 says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe my ordinances.” And Jeremiah 31:33 says,

“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days...I will put My Law within them, and on their heart I will write it, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”

Thus, when we come to faith in Christ, Christ comes to live in us and deal with sin in our hearts. This is why Jesus in Matthew 5 taught that murder has got to be taken care of when it is anger in the heart. Adultery has got to be dealt with when it is lust in the heart. And so on. It's not just a matter of the outward observance of the Ten Commandments. What is important is the heart, and this is how Jesus overpowers human sin in the heart. Yes, there will be struggles there, as God deals with our hearts. In fact it will be an ongoing struggle until the day we die. But finally! There is hope for the heart!!!

This is how sin is finally overpowered: at its source in our hearts. The self-centeredness, the judgmentalism, the harsh speech and violence we've studied in the past weeks are overpowered here. First at the Cross when Jesus died to kill the thing that is killing us, then at the Resurrection when rose with a God-soaked, God-drenched new humanity that was healed of the sin-sickness, then by the Spirit as Jesus in US lives his life out through us. Everyone who comes to Christ, Jew or Gentile, will recognize the beauty of God's story because God Himself will plant it in them. It will not be an external code. And our response to all kinds of people, even people trapped in deep sin, even untouchables, even lepers, prostitutes, and drug-dealing gangsters, will be a response of relationship. It will not be putting in a judgmental distance between us and them, where we look down on them, because Jesus Christ in us has a heart of relationship that always seeks to bridge all barriers and bring people together to love him together.

Where else is the heart truly addressed like this? There was once a Gentile who came to faith in Christ. He was known throughout the land to be a Christian, and a very kind and upright man. In fact, during a crisis in the Middle East, he was the main architect for peace in the Camp David Peace Accords. His name is Jimmy Carter, and he became President of the United States in 1977. Jimmy Carter was once asked by the media if he had ever committed adultery. He looked very seriously at the reporter and said, “I've committed adultery in my heart.” And the nation laughed at him. Why? Because man's normal way of thinking is on the level of external behavior because that's as deep as man can really go. But Jimmy Carter didn't see himself as different from anyone else because he knew that his heart had the same problems as everyone else's, so much so that Christ had to die for him. He wasn't better than anyone else. And of course, his compassion led him to start Habitat for Humanity because he could not turn away from those who were not like him.

God cares about the heart, enough to do something radical about it. He gives us purity of heart, sincerity of heart, and love for others that comes from the heart. It might sound like a joke. But it's not. Our hearts are where we are needy, therefore our hearts are where God does His greatest work. He overpowers our pride; He overpowers our divisions; He overpowers our sin. This is the power of Jesus.

The Unique Power of Jesus: Is Christianity For Real?

Now I want to offer a reflection on them. Throughout this study more than others, I have tried to point out real, well-documented and well-understood differences between Christianity and every other human tendency. Without being boring, I've tried to pull a great deal out of history. Why? Because the question always comes up to me in different ways: Is Christianity for real? And I think this section on Jesus answers that question beautifully.

During my second year of work, there was a beautiful summer weekend when a bunch of us decided to go sea kayaking in Monterey. I went, my coworker and friend Teresa also went, along with some others. Now I enjoy talking with Teresa because she's studied business, electrical engineering, art, and anthropology. There's always a lot to talk about! Now on this trip, we paddled near the Aquarium and watched the sea otters and sea lions playing. Then we climbed out and had delicious clam chowder in a sourdough bowl. During lunch, Teresa and I started to talk about the book *The History of God*, a New York Times bestseller. She claimed that God is created by man; religion is always a product of man's mind and serves man's interests. Then it was my turn to say something. Our other friends just listened. Teresa and a few others knew I was a Christian. What would I say? If you were in my shoes, what would you say? After studying this passage, I would now put it like this: “There are all kinds of ways that human beings try to deal with human evil. Religions reinforce human pride, human divisiveness, and the externalization of human problems. But Jesus gives us a new human nature that he perfected in himself. That contradicts the three basic tendencies of men and women everywhere. Everything we know about ourselves from

psychology, sociology, law, history, and comparative religion tells us that we are proud, we are divisive, and we like to deal with external behaviors. There is no incentive for anyone to have invented Jesus.”