

No Excuses

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[0:00] I want to remind everybody tonight, Carson Murphy will be leading a report from time and kind of a little instruction time on some of the things he learned and wants to share with the church on his time in Mexico.

So we gathered around him a few weeks back and prayed for him sending him out and he has come back from that trip. Had a wonderful time down there and he's going to share tonight. I believe that's going to be in the fellowship hall. Is that right? Fellowship hall. All right. Six o'clock fellowship hall. Carson will be there. He may have some slides to share and all that.

So don't miss hearing about what God did in Mexico. Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to Romans chapter two. Romans chapter two. As we as you turn, let me ask you this question. How many people do you know? How many people know you?

A hundred more? Supposedly, according to the Wall Street Journal, and I think it was somebody from the University of Washington or something who did this study, but supposedly the average person knows between 250 and 600 people.

And I think usually on the high side, I think the number that I read was 611. How many of you know more than 611 people? There you go. Since then, how many of you have more than 600 friends on Facebook and you're not sure who they all are?

[1:28] That's true, right? You get friends in common. Somebody sends you a friend request. I'm like, I've never met this person before, but apparently we're friends. All right. Is it possible for people to know you, but not really know you?

Yes. How many of those 600 people or more or less that you know, really know you? Not a lot. It's a much smaller number, isn't it?

Is it possible to know a lot about God, but not truly know him? Paul's going to talk about this in Romans chapter 2 and Romans chapter 3.

We're going to pick it up in Romans 2 and go all the way up to where we left off in Romans chapter 3. Let's look at verse 17 of Romans chapter 2.

Would you join me in standing if you're able to? If you need to remain seated, that's fine. But let's honor the scriptures by standing together and let's read Romans chapter 2, verse 17.

[2:41] You who are Jews, you rely on the law and boast about your relationship with God. You know his will. You approve of what is superior because you're instructed by the law.

You're convinced that you're a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children. You're convinced of all this because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth.

Bo, would you run my water up to me, buddy? It's right there. Thank you. I've got a little tickle in my throat. Thank you, sir. Okay. You who preach against stealing, do you steal?

You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law as it is written?

God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. Stern words from the father of the early church, the apostle Paul himself.

[3:57] Let's bow our heads together and ask God to show us his truth this morning. God, speak to us from the scriptures. You've used this letter throughout the generations among your people all around the world.

Use it again today to convict us, to show us how we need to come back to you and you alone. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You may be seated. Thank you for standing. Point number one this morning is this.

As we continue in our series of When in Romans, this is week 13. So if you missed the first 12 weeks, you can go on YouTube at FBC Henrietta and you can catch up if you have all that time. If not, that's okay. Wade, can we put like AI-generated summaries of each sermon or something and trust that it's giving accurate information?

Good luck with that. We're going to talk about this theme that Paul's kind of talking about in Romans 2 and 3, which is no excuses. No excuses. This is our theme today and point number one from Romans 2 into Romans 3, but we read these first seven verses here, is knowing the scriptures isn't the same as knowing God.

[5:09] Knowing the scriptures is not the same as knowing God. And that's why we open with the idea that you can know someone without truly knowing them.

Most of us in this room, not all of us, but most of us in this room, know most of the people in this room. But we probably haven't gone too deep with most of the people in this room.

Now, little rabbit trail here, and I know I'm going on a rabbit trail, so y'all remind me to help me find my way back from this rabbit trail, okay? But another little rabbit trail is we do the Christian life of following Jesus the best when we do it in community with one another.

It is to our shame that we don't know one another as well as we could. We've got to, we're called to, and we must break out of our circle of familiarity and reach across the aisle, so to speak, in this room and get to know people outside of Sunday morning.

If your primary and main and sometimes only experience with the church is on Sunday mornings, you're missing out on so much of what God has for you in the community of Christian life and Christ followers.

[6:33] So that's a little rabbit trail. We're going to find our way back to the main point now. But we need each other, and we need to know each other beyond just the surface level. When you start to get to know someone, they start to change you.

You start to become more like them. How many of you have been married for a while, and you find yourself rubbing off on your spouse, and your spouse is rubbing off on you, and you start acting more and more like each other?

Has anybody else noticed that? Trick question. Why is that a trick question? I found that. Sometimes there's little things I picked up from Holly.

Holly, sometimes I've finally fixed something about her and made her more like me. I'm teasing. I won't be in trouble when we get home. But look, the religious crowd in Paul's day, they thought they knew God.

But they hadn't gone deeply enough with him. They hadn't spent time with him and truly knowing him. So they had the right labels. They knew the rules that he had given. They had the heritage. They had taught others about God.

[7:38] And they felt secure just because they possessed the right information. But that only did so much for them. Look, it's like if you own the playbook.

Let's just say the Henrietta Bearcats, because, you know, we're Henrietta. So if you know the playbook to the Henrietta Bearcats, then you think you're on the football team. Well, that's not true. Robbie Clark can tell you you're not on the football team just because you happen to get your hands on a playbook. And he wants to know why you have the playbook and what you plan to do with it. The reality is just because you have the instruction manual for something doesn't mean you know how to put it together.

You can be a fan of something, but not be a part of it. John chapter 5. Jesus echoes this.

He's talking to the Pharisees. Kind of the ultimate picture of this attitude that I'm talking about. And he challenges them and says, you search the scriptures because you think the scriptures can give you eternal life.

[8:48] Is that blowing your mind right now? Let's look at that again. You search the scriptures because you think they can give you eternal life. Y'all, I'm here to tell you the Bible does not give you eternal life.

Jesus gives you eternal life. Then what's the Bible good for? Well, Jesus goes on. He says, the scriptures point to me, the giver of eternal life.

Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life. Now, look, this was a whole thing about the Messiah. The traditional Jewish religion and those who followed it would refuse to acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah.

They were looking and looking and looking for a Messiah for centuries and generations. And then he shows up and he's here. But he didn't come how they thought they would. Well, if they had searched the scriptures enough, they would have seen the ties to Bethlehem.

And they would have seen the markers that pointed to, yes, this is the Messiah. But they were blinded by their own interpretation of what they thought the scriptures were teaching.

[9:56] So the eternal life was missing. So the eternal life was missing. Because the giver of eternal life was missing. All their knowledge of the scriptures was not pointing them to Jesus.

And that's what the scriptures are there to do. The Bible is not God. There are three members of the Trinity that we believe in. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. There's not a fourth member.

God the Bible. God the Bible. The Bible points us to Jesus. It points us to the triune God. So that's what Jesus is teaching.

He says the scriptures point to me. So you can know a lot about the Bible. You know, some of the people that I've met in this world that know more about the Bible than most of you in this room are atheists.

Anybody ever notice that? People who say, I don't believe in God, but they can quote more of scripture than most of us in this room could. Knowing about God does not mean you know God.

[11:01] Knowing the scriptures does not mean that you know God. So Jesus is teaching us this. And then Paul is writing about it. And he's saying, look, you can.

How do we apply this as a church then? We're not. Most of us in this room wouldn't say we're atheists. But do we get to the place that Jesus is calling out these Pharisees at where it says, You refuse to come to me to receive this life.

We will turn to all kinds of other places. We will run and seek all kinds of other solutions except coming back to Jesus himself.

We'll find ourselves pursuing everything else and not pursuing him. So in reality, we're doing exactly what he's called them out on doing.

We're not coming to him. We're refusing to come to him to receive this life. Time and time again.

Man, salvation is not a one-time thing, folks.

[12:08] You don't choose to give your life to Jesus and say, I believe in faith. I come to Jesus. I choose Jesus. You don't do that and then stop coming to him. You keep coming back to the well.

Eternal life is not a one-time gift and then you have it and you never go back to it again. I've got my eternal life sitting on the shelf. I'm okay. You keep drinking from that well every day.

You keep going back to it time and time again. And it's a sign of a lack of faith. It's a sign of a lack of belief. And it's a sign of not really knowing God when we refuse to come to him to receive this life.

What does that look like? It means searching the scriptures. I knew I was going to do that. It means searching the scriptures that point to Jesus. It means going into them and finding, you say the scriptures point to you, Jesus?

How? Show me where. If somebody comes to a pastor or a youth pastor, teenagers, or a Sunday school teacher, or children's director, young people, and you go to them and say, I want to know how the scriptures point to Jesus.

[13:19] You know what our favorite thing to do is? Show how the scriptures point to Jesus. We love that. We'll sit down with you. We'll print off lesson plans. We'll print off devotionals. We'll equip you with resources that show you how the scriptures point to Jesus.

So then you're not just reading the Bible just to read it or check it off a box. I read the Bible today, so I rubbed my magic lamp. You know, now God's going to give me whatever I want, right? That's not how that works.

We search the scriptures to find how they point to Jesus, and then we live like he does. We live like him. So that's how we begin to know God.

And we don't live like those who don't believe. So Jesus looked at the same kind of religious experts that Paul's dealing with here in the church in Rome.

And he said, you study the Bible to death, but you've completely missed me. Knowing right from wrong doesn't mean you automatically do right instead of wrong.

[14:24] Having the map doesn't mean you're walking the path toward the Savior. Let's go back to Romans now. Skip ahead to Romans chapter 3.

The next part is talking about circumcision. The rest of Romans 2, we touched on that last week. We're not going to touch on it again, okay? We're going to leave it alone. There's a couple of you laughing, and you know what I'm talking about.

It's a difficult concept to dive into, but this was a major religious custom back then, and it came from a command of God. Circumcision was not a normal thing, right? So since it was a Jewish command and custom, they were requiring then the new Christians or followers of Jesus to abide by this old Jewish custom and command from God and say, this is what you all need to do.

So even if you weren't circumcised as babies, you now need to be circumcised before you can join the church. We don't have that kind of requirement if you want to join First Baptist Henrietta, okay? Just throwing that out there. Now let's jump ahead to Romans chapter 3 and verse 1.

So Paul is teaching this concept. The old religious customs that the Jews have had to follow from the very beginning are not transferable to the new way of following Jesus.

[15 : 37] You don't have to require those things to have somebody choose to follow Christ. So then he says the natural question that results from understanding that. He says, so what's the advantage of being a Jew?

Romans 3.1. Is there any value in the ceremony of circumcision or should we just throw the whole thing out? Verse 2. Yes, there are great benefits. First of all, the Jews were entrusted with the whole revelation of God.

True, some of them were unfaithful. But just because they were unfaithful, does that mean God will be unfaithful? Of course not. Even if everyone else is a liar.

It's one of the best verses in the whole New Testament right here, folks. Even if everyone else is a liar, God is true. God is true.

Can we say those together? Even if everyone else is a liar, God is true. Do you believe that? Do you believe Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life?

[16 : 39] God is true. As the scriptures say about him, remember the scriptures point us to Jesus. You will be proved right in what you say, and you will win your case in court.

Yes, God will always win the case in court. Verse 5. But some might say, our sinfulness serves a good purpose. Here comes the manipulation.

Here comes the distorted thinking. That naturally follows all of us. And it's a trap for all of us. Some might still argue, or I'm sorry, in verse 5.

Some might say, our sinfulness serves a good purpose. For it helps people see how righteous God is. So see, it's okay that I go out and live for myself and live like the devil and I don't have to be nice. It's okay because it just shows everybody else how bad I am and thereby how great God is. Paul says, not quite. Isn't it unfair then for God to punish us?

[17 : 41] This is merely a human point of view. Verse 6. Paul calls it out. Of course not. If God were entirely fair, or not entirely fair, how would he be qualified to judge the world?

Verse 7. Some might still argue, how can God condemn me as a sinner if my dishonesty highlights his truthfulness and brings him more glory? Or continuing with this argument. Yeah, I'm dishonest, but then that just shows how truthful God is.

Some people might even slander us by claiming that we say, the more we sin, the better it is. Those who say such things deserve to be condemned.

So Paul's really calling out this point of view. And that leads us, we're down into verse 8 of Romans 3, and that leads us to number 2. Grace begins where excuses end. This is what he's about to teach them.

Grace begins where excuses end. Look at verse 9. Well then, are we Jews any better? No. Not at all.

[18 : 43] For we've already shown that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin. As the scriptures say, no one's righteous, not even one. No one's wise. No one seeks God.

All have turned away. All have become useless. No one does good. Not a single one. By the way, another little rabbit trail here. In case you thought that you were awesome. In case you thought that you were good.

Read these two verses right here. Paul's teaching you, you're not. You're just like the rest of us. You're a mess. And you need Jesus. Everybody does.

Every single one of us does. So, no one does good. Not a single one. Their talk is foul. Like the stench from an open grave. Man, he's not putting it lightly here, is he?

Their tongues are filled with lies. Snake venom drips from their lips. I'm thinking of the words to a, you're a mean one, Mr. Drench, right now. Sort of Paul's version of this, right?

[19:41] It's really bad stuff. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. They rush to commit murder, destruction, and misery. Always follow them. They don't know where to find peace. They have no fear of God at all.

Why? Because they know a lot about him, but they don't know him. If you don't know him, he can't change you. This is what you're left with.

You might be able to answer some Bible trivia, but you don't know Jesus. Now, whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world held accountable to God.

Every mouth may be silenced. And all our excuses are stopped. And the whole world is held accountable to God.

For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. Everyone who thought, everyone in this room right now, who thought that you could become right with God by doing what his law commands.

[21:01] Look at these words. No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

You are all those things. You are a bad one, Mr. Sinner. Miss Sinner. And so am I. We are all bad. We all need Jesus. The bad can't be fixed by doing good. Everybody envision a white piece of paper.

Now put a hundred black marks on it in your mind. Is that paper dirty? Y'all, that wasn't a hard question.

Is that paper dirty? There we go. All right. Good, good, good. You're with me. Now take another piece of paper. Put one black mark on it. Is that paper dirty? Yes.

[21:57] It's not as dirty, right? But it's dirty. Now a third piece of paper. No marks at all. Is that paper dirty? No. It's clean. God can take the life with one black mark, and he can take the life with a hundred black marks and make them both clean.

Guess what? They both need to be clean. Now you can go on either one of those pieces of paper. Let's do the one with the hundred black marks. And you can try to fill in a hundred little hearts because those represent good things.

Did the hearts take the black marks away? Now it's just a really jumbled up piece of paper. You could take the paper with one black mark and you can put in a hundred hearts there.

Can you still see the black mark? Be a little hard to find, but you can probably find it in there in the middle of your hundred hearts, right? So you can be a really good person who's done all kinds of good things, but guess what?

You're not a good person. You're a bad person who has done some good things or things that seem to be good. Truth is, they may have been done for selfish purposes, even if God allowed them to be used to accomplish good things for others along the way.

[23:10] But the good things you've done don't erase the bad that you did. Well, it all balances out. It all evens out. Yeah, that's wishful thinking, y'all.

You can go speeding a hundred miles an hour down Omega Street and tell the cop, but I just donated at the food bank, so it all evens out, right? I don't think he's going to agree with you. And God doesn't either. Grace begins when excuses end. It's not about the good you've done. It's not about how well you knew the rules.

It's about if you knew Jesus or not. When you stand before God someday, that's the only litmus test. That's the only pass or fail.

Did you know Jesus? Not where was your membership? Not how long had it been there? Not what kind of job did you do? Not how successful were you?

[24:08] Not how many good deeds you did through your life. Grace can only begin when the excuses stop. So, Paul rounds up every single good person.

The goody two-shoes rule, the follower, the I did it all right, I followed the rules, I'm a good person. And then he rounds up all the rebels too. All the ones who resist, all the ones who say, you're not going to tell me what to do.

And he puts them in the exact same courtroom. And their mouths are shut. The judge says, silence. You've got nothing to say in your defense.

There's no special treatment. Now we've got to go to Luke 15 and we're done. Luke chapter 15, if you would go with me. This is the story of the prodigal son.

Prodigal son, the man had two sons, an older brother and a younger brother.

[25:16] Younger brother decided he'd had enough of the rules, he'd had enough of living at home, and he went off and decided he was going to go have fun. Anybody identify with that a little bit? Maybe there was a time in your life.

Yeah, we've got a few. Yeah, there you go. Me too. I put my hand up too. So you know what? I've had it. I'm going to go out and I'm going to taste this life on my own for a little while. Well, it went for him about like it went probably for most of you.

Didn't go all that well. By the way, young people, it doesn't go all that well. Okay. Trust us on this one. So he decided I'm going to come home. So look at verse 18.

He's struggling. He's at the end of his rope. He's probably out of money. He's probably out of friends. He's probably out of good times. It's all run dry. He's got nowhere to go now.

So what does he say? Verse 18, Luke 15. I will go home. I'll go to my father. And he starts devising a plan. Starts putting a plan together.

[26:17] You can see the wheels of his mind turning. Man, my dad's not going to want to see me. I left him. I went out and blew through the money he gave me. I've wasted it. He always taught me to spend my money wisely.

And I didn't do that. It's going to be one big, I told you so as soon as I get home. I got to convince him. He might not even let me come home. He might say, boy, no, you left. You're on your own now.

Figure it out. I got to figure this out. You can see him thinking like this. He says, I'm going to go home and I'm going to tell my dad, father, I've sinned. I've sinned against both heaven and you. He's pulling God into it. You know, I recognize I've sinned. I've sinned against God. I've sinned against you. And I'm no longer worthy of being called your son. He's trying to get ahead of it a little bit.

Right. Like, trust me, I'm not expecting you to come back in and just treat me like a son. He says, I'm no longer worthy of that. So please instead take me on as a hired servant. He's negotiating now.

[27:13] He's got this, this idea. Maybe if he'll just let me come on, he'll just hire me as a servant. I'll still be better than where I am now. At least I'll have a roof over my head. I'll have food to eat.

So he returns home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his father.

Embraced him. Kissed him. And his son started in on his speech. He said, father, I've sinned against both heaven and you. I'm no longer worthy of being called your son.

And before he can get to the part about the servant, his father interrupts and says, quick, bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Let's throw a feast. We're going to have a party. My son was dead and he's alive again.

He's home. Not my servant, my son. Now, y'all, that is the best feel good story. One of the best in the whole New Testament. One of the best you'll ever hear.

[28:18] But you ever think about this? The son didn't know his father too well. He knew about him. He'd grown up with him. But he didn't know him well enough to stick around, first of all.

And it shows you he didn't really know his father's heart when he had to come up with this whole speech to get his father to take him back. But he learned his father's heart that day.

He found out what his father was really about. And that's the point that Jesus is making when he told that story. Is to say, you're going to learn the father's heart when you come to him at the end of your rope and say, I need you.

I'm throwing myself on your mercy. I'm throwing myself with no expectations. I'm throwing myself at your hands. Then you'll learn the father's heart.

And if you've never done that, then there's a good chance you don't know your heavenly father's heart all that well. But I pray that God shows it to you. The law of God backs all of us into the same corner.

[29:38] No excuses. Nothing to offer. But the moment we stop trying to make excuses, the moment we stop trying to justify it, the moment we stop trying to soothe our own conscience and convince ourselves that we're okay, that's when grace runs out and meets us.

And says, welcome back. I have no problem with you. I never had any expectation.

I just want you and I want you to know me. God wants to treat you not as servants, not as slaves, but as sons and daughters.

Here's our finish. It is better to be honest, an honest mess before God than a dishonest saint. John Ortberg, a great Christian writer, wrote that.

It's better to be an honest mess before God rather than a dishonest saint. Come honestly.

[30:49] Come cleanly. Come clean to Jesus so he can make you clean. Whether it's one check mark or a hundred, he can make you clean.

And it doesn't take all the hearts added in to convince him. He just accepts you out of love. So what are you going to bring to Jesus?

What are you going to lay down at his feet today? And that's our challenge today, is come honestly before Jesus today. Would you do that with me today? Would you come honestly before Jesus today?

What are you going to lay down at the feet of Jesus? Would you bow your heads and close your eyes and let's let God minister to us by his spirit in just the next moment or two before we dismiss? Come honestly before Jesus today.

What do you need to lay down at the feet of Jesus? Do you need to lay down your fear? Do you need to lay down your worry? Do you need to lay down your pride? Exalting yourself, your lack of faith, your anger, your bitterness, your self-righteousness, your lust.

[31:56] What is it you need to lay down before Jesus today and say, this is what I have to bring you. I didn't go out and earn a great inheritance. I didn't spend your money wisely.

But God, I'm coming back to you. You don't have to negotiate with him. He accepts you fully, warmly, with loving welcome as a father does to a son.

Come honestly before Jesus today. Music's going to play as it does. Would you do business with God in your seat right here? Somebody needs to come and take a step toward Jesus today.

You need to get involved in a community of Jesus followers and you want to put your membership in this church today. Don't delay that. Don't wait any longer. If God's leading you, say yes to him.

Somebody needs to take the next step and stand before the church and be baptized and say, I want to follow Jesus and obey his command and be baptized as a follower of Jesus.

Don't put that off any longer. Say yes to Jesus today. There's something God wants you to bring to him and lay it at his feet and say, this is a problem. I've been acting this way.

[33:15] I've been engaged in this behavior. Whatever it is, I'm bringing it to you and say, I'm coming in my mess. Please help me. Please help me, Father. Then come honestly before Jesus and lay that down at his feet.

In the next moment or two as the piano plays, if you'd like to come down and kneel at the altar here, if you'd like to kneel at your pew, if you'd like to remain seated, whatever you'd like to do.

If you need somebody to talk to, we'll grab somebody to talk with you. Do you listen to God and his spirit today? Amen. Amen. Amen.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Let's sing to that chorus one time together and we'll pray and be dismissed. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face.

[34:54] Look full in his wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim. And the things of earth will grow strange.

In the light of his glory and grace. In the light of his glory and grace. God, thank you for meeting with us today.

Thank you for teaching us from your word and reminding you, reminding us who you are. What you're about. Let us get to know you more. So we always run to you at any moment.

It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.