

The Way: Step Two

The Way

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

Bible Text: Romans 3:23-25
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I want to encourage you this morning to open your Bibles to the book of Romans, in the New Testament, the book of Romans chapter three. If you are a first-time guest or visitor here with us here at First Baptist, we want to welcome you to week number two of a very short message series, a very short sermon series. Just for one month we are going to cover the entire book of Romans.

Now if you know anything about the book of Romans it is traditionally known as kind of the Christian dissertation. If you were to summarize all the doctrines of the faith, all the contents of what Christianity really believes, it is found in the book of Romans.

You are wondering. How can we cover an entire book of that magnitude in just a few weeks? Well, you can if you fly over at about 30-40 thousand feet. And that is exactly what we are doing. We are literally just kind of skipping across the book of Romans, kind of summarizing in a nutshell what are the essential, basic concepts of this thing known as Christianity. Traditionally we have called these verses of Scripture the Roman Road. Just a simple path through the message of the book of Romans.

So you may question: Why would we call it The Way? Well in Acts chapter nine a man named Saul before he would become the apostle Paul was on his way to Damascus, on his way to persecute the very ones of when he would be the chief of the apostles some years later. He called those who believed in Jesus, he called those who confessed their sins and needed a Savior, people of the way. The reason that is so important and so significant for this message series is the message of Jesus Christ, the message of Christ is called The Way because it stands along against any and all other faiths.

So as we come to the book of Romans, particularly today to chapter three, we look at this concept of Jesus Christ in Christianity being the way. We find ourselves in chapter three, beginning in verse 23. Verse 23 is one of the most famous verses of Scripture in all of the Bible, in particular the book of Romans. We are going to read verses 23 through 25. It says:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.¹

¹ Romans 3:23-25.

If you are a first time guest or visitor with us or were unable to be with us last week, we looked at the book of Romans chapter one where it said that God is doing his desperate best to communicate to us, to speak clearly to us about our desperate need for him in our lives. The message that we talked about last week wasn't that he is having a communication problem, but we are having a listening problem. We are not heeding what he is saying. We are not heeding what he is showing to us. And over the course of these two chapters the Lord has done this in the book of Romans, he has laid out a case for us that it doesn't matter how high or low you sit, how broad or narrow your life has been or you hope it to be, that every human being falls into a single solitary definition. And that is what we are going to talk about today and on step two of this series entitled The Way.

We know that God is trying to speak today. We are going to discover in step two where you and I, as humanity, fall on God's scale of righteousness. To understand this, though, we need to break it down into just a few concepts. And the first one is this. We need to understand the parameters of God. Now in Romans chapter three verse 23 it says: "For all have sinned."²

And that is kind of the phase we are going to focus most of our attention on today, but the first parameter that you need to understand about God is this: he is a completely inclusive God. Now this is a buzzword in our society in that everybody wants to brag about how inclusive they are. In recent days we have heard that the latest Olympiad has been the most inclusive of all of the Olympics. They have allowed those with apparatuses who originally would be paraplegic, they have been allowed to actually race in the Olympics. We have celebrated the fact that those who are of other faiths that will not allow them to wear the proper Olympic regalia, they are allowed to run anyway. We have celebrated people from all kinds of identities and backgrounds coming together and they have bragged that the Olympics has been a display of inclusiveness.

No, it hasn't. It has been a display in exclusiveness.

You say, "Why?"

Did you get to run? Now think about that for a moment. They have bragged on how any and all have been allowed to participate, but there were seven billion of us who did not get to participate. And, see, that is the paradox of this term inclusiveness. What inclusiveness really means in the world is there is us and them. There is you and me. What inclusiveness really means in the world's definition is we are willing to include anyone who will agree with how we think. But no matter how inclusive somebody claims to be, there is always somebody who disagrees with him and isn't convenient that they excluded them in the name of being inclusive. Well, the Lord is the most inclusive of all.

You say, "Well, how do you know that?"

² Romans 3:23.

Look at Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned.”³

If you are a first time guest or visitor with us, allow me this very trite thing that I enjoy doing. The New Testament was originally penned in Greek. I read it. I study it. I preach in English, but help me, church. What does the Greek word for all mean? All. Thank you. Do you know what the Lord is saying? It doesn't matter what your skin color is. It doesn't matter what your religion of preference is. It doesn't matter what your body structure looks like. Everybody has sins. Now that is inclusive. The Lord has left nobody out. He did not say all have sinned except those who go to church on a regular basis. He didn't say all those who have sinned except those who have a huge, big, fat bank account. He didn't say that. He is inclusive. He says all have sinned. Not only is he inclusive, but he is also very insistent. He says we have done this. It does not say all have thought about sinning. It doesn't say all might have considered on one of their bad days of life. No, no. It says all have.

One of the great portions of the Bible is that which we call the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7. The Lord goes so far as to say this. “You may not have murdered anybody, but if you have ever hated them, you have sinned in your heart.” You may not have actually committed the physical sin of adultery, but if you have looked on somebody desiring to, you are guilty as charged.

The Lord is insistent. It is not necessarily just our actions, but it is our attitude toward him that determines that all of us have sinned. These are the parameters that the Lord has set up regarding the subject matter of sin.

Point two is this. We have got a problem, because the Bible says we have all sinned, but the problem we have is that we live in a world that wants to justify that for some reason I am really not a sinner, I really haven't strayed. I haven't done that. This is that word that comes up all throughout the book of Romans, that word to sin. Can you just confess with me? This is a word that is completely outdated in our world today. This is a word that is hardly even used anymore, because it has such a harsh connotation to it that we sin. When you say there is sin, you are making a connotation or the declaration that there is a right and there is a wrong and we don't live in a world today that is conducive to that type of bigotted talk, because we want to include everybody in our way of thinking.

So when the Bible says: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”⁴

The Bible uses that word sin over and over and over again, but it also uses other phrases or other terminologies that give you and me a picture of what it means to actually sin. And so today is going to be a good refresher course for some of you. It is going to be enlightening for others to discover how the Bible says that you have sinned.

³ Romans 3:23.

⁴ Ibid.

The first word of the first terminology that I want to deal with is the word to transgress or a transgression. This is a terminology that was used in Luke chapter 15. Do you remember the story of the prodigal son? A man has two sons. One of them is younger and kind of spoiled rotten. He says, "I want all my inheritance and I want it now." The father gives it to him. He goes by the way. He spends it all, finds himself in a mud pit with a bunch of pigs. He says, "Well, hopefully my dad will receive me back as one of his hired servants." He goes back home, finds that his dad who represents the Lord is waiting on him with a ring and a robe and a fatted calf. And they are going to throw a party for him. The next part of the story, the older brother, the righteous brother is outside of the house. He is not celebrating. He is not happy. His dad entertains him. He goes outside. He begs him to come to the party. He says, "Don't you understand? Your brother was lost, but now he is found. Don't you get this?"

Do you know what the older brother says? He is upset and he says, "Do you not understand, dad? I have never transgressed your law ever."

Now those of you who are parents and grandparents, can you testify? That is a bald faced lie. A child looking up at his parent saying, "I have always done whatever you have asked."

Now there may be some of you out there who believe that is possible. There are some of you that think that can happen. Come by this afternoon about two o'clock, three minutes in my house is all you need. That is all you need. This is a short little lesson. Here is the message of Luke 15. When he said, "I have not transgressed," what he was really saying is, "I have never been caught."

See, there is a difference between being guilty and transgressing and actually being caught. Let me give you a visual illustration of what I mean. Have any of you ever seen this sign? Enough said, right? Although we found a speed limit sign that I am more prone to appreciate. Look at this one. If only that were real.

You know, when I turned 16 years of age it was a scary time for most people involved in my life. Not only was I given a piece of paper that said I had a permit to drive alone, I had the keys to a 1965 Mustang that had way too much horsepower for my attitude and personality. Within a couple of weeks of getting that driver's license I found myself pulled over talking to a law enforcement officer. It was on a Wednesday. I had gone to school. I had gone to a job interview. And then I was on my way to church. I am on my way to church for Wednesday night activities. I come across a hill not five minutes from the church that I went to growing up. And there is a law enforcement officer. There is a policeman standing in the middle of my lane motioning me over to a side street.

Now I am beginning to get scared. I am thinking maybe there has been a horrible wreck. You know, maybe the highway has been shut down. Maybe something horrible has happened. And so when he pulls me over and comes to my window he says, "Young man," he said, "Do you have any idea why I pulled you over?"

I said, “Sir, I don’t have a clue.” I said, “Is the road out?” I said, “Has there been a horrible wreck?”

He just kind of chuckled. He said, “Son, You have no idea how fast you were going.”

To which I ignorantly and arrogantly asked, “How did you know?”

He is just in the middle of the road, right? I come over the hill. He is just waving me over. He says, “Well, about a half a mile back my partner is sitting in his car on the side of the road and he clocked you at... And then you came over the hill.”

I was shocked. I took the ticket. I drove the speed limit to my church. When I got to the church much like on our campus, we had those who give of their law enforcement abilities, like officer Reed here, those who just kind of become a part of our family and help us and protect us and take care of things when we have emergencies and such. And I went to this individual whose name was James and I had gotten mad. I had gotten upset. I was angry at this point, because listen. I had been trapped.

How many times have you caught in a speed trap? And so I went up to James and I just started spitting. I was so mad. To which he looked at me and he said, “Young man, I hate to tell you this. But there is no such thing as a speed trap.”

I said, “What do you mean?”

He said, “You can’t get trapped into something that you are guilty of doing.” And he said, “The problem isn’t that you were speeding. The problem is that you got caught.”

When we use the word transgression, when we look back in Luke chapter 15 this young man had done something wrong. He had just never been caught. And often times you think that you are ok with God, because you have never been caught. You are ok with God because you have never done this, this and this. But, you know, James 2:10 says that if you have broken one of the laws, it is as if you have broken all of them. That is what the Bible says when it speaks of a transgression.

The next word that is used for sin is the word to trespass. By strict definition to trespass means to find yourself in a place you have no business being in.

Now I want to show you a sign we found this week that to me is awfully confusing. Look at this sign. Where am I supposed to be? Same sign, different size.

You know, because our family is about one thousand miles away, we have become experts not only in I-20, but I-10, depending on where we are going first. But Traci and I would tell you. We have also become... we could become people who give the ratings on or give evaluations of public restrooms. Why? Because when you are going 1000 miles you have got three little kids and a wife, you have to stop more frequently than normal

people would need to stop. And so that being said, we have learned that there are times where she will send me in and say, "Give me a rating when I come back." And I am like, no. Start the car. Let's go. This one is bad. We don't want to go in there.

But every now and then you find a really good one and it just so happens that we were on our way back about a year ago and we came across a restaurant that we don't get to frequent much because there is not many in this area. So we decided, let's go. And by the time we got there, daddy needed a pit stop. So Traci took the boys. They started ordering in line. I went and took a pit stop, met them back at the table and I shared with Traci this incredible revelation.

I said, "Honey, that is the nicest public restroom I have ever been in." I said, "It smelled incredible." I said, "The paper on the wall wasn't pulled." I said, "Everything was clean. It wasn't a wreck. It wasn't a mess." I said it was fabulous.

About five minutes later my middle son George said that he needed to take a pit stop. So I am talking to George. We are going and I have got my hand on the door. I am about to push it open. He says, "Daddy." I said what? He goes, "That is the ladies restroom."

Ladies, yours just smells a lot nicer than ours. I have just got to say that. That is called trespassing. I was in the wrong place doing the wrong thing at the wrong time.

But let me show you a picture that is not near as humorous. This is a picture of me and Andy Schindler. He plays in our orchestra and was on our trip to the Middle East and Israel last year. This is on the border between Israel and Syria. You have all seen that in the news lately. It is kind of a hot spot, a kind of an area you don't want to be a hole lot close to. There is a sign behind us that says, "Do not trespass for there are landmines on the other side of this fence."

And you and I would look at that sign and think about what that could result in. And you would say there is no reason we are going down that path. We are not going there, right?

Let me tell you about how we trespass. We trespass when we say, "You know what? I know that I am not supposed to be in another man's house with a woman that is not my wife, but I am going to go there anyway." That is trespassing. I could use example after example. When we find ourselves in positions we need not be in, it ends up getting us into situations we don't need to be in, doing things we have no business doing. And so when the Bible says we have all sinned, sometimes it means that we have crossed a line and we are guilty even though we haven't been caught. Sometimes it means we have been in places we had no business being in.

But maybe you be sitting there this morning and saying, "Well, two for two. I am good."

There is a third definition for sin in the Bible and it simply means to miss the mark, to come up short or to not hit the bullseye. The best example, in fact, from Biblical times is a sport that was very popular this year in the Olympics, because of a recent movie and

book series, the sport of archery. It simply means no matter how far back you are, no matter how good you are, that when you let loose of the bow and the arrow it does not hit the bullseye.

Now next week we are going to focus more on this definition of sin. So we are going to kind of cut it short right there. But the thing that you need to understand is to transgress, to trespass or to miss the mark. I would dare say there is nobody listening to my voice right now who would say that they are guiltless on all three of those. But do you realize that is who Jesus dealt with all the time? When he dealt with the Pharisees, when he dealt with the Sadducees, when he dealt with the scribes, they had created a system that allowed them to check off all three of those boxes. They could, in their worlds, they believed they had not transgressed. They had not trespassed and they had not missed the mark. And one of the best definitions of being a Pharisee that I have ever heard lately was creating a system of rules and regulations where with enough discipline and determination you could actually meet the standard. That is what the Pharisees had done. They said, "I don't walk this far on a certain day. I am good. I have never been a place named that, so I am good. And I have never gone short or further than I was supposed to, so I am good."

But Jesus told a story in Luke chapter 10 of the Good Samaritan. He told this story of the fourth definition that I want to share with you today. It is the definition for sin and it is called an error. By definition an error is not doing that which one was supposed to do.

In Luke chapter 10 it was a lawyer who came to Jesus. Now don't get that confused with our definition of lawyer. This was an individual who specialized in the Bible. This was an individual who specialized in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses. And he came to Jesus quoting from the book of Deuteronomy that there are two main laws, to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and spirit and to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus said, "You are exactly right."

And then a lawyer trying to trick him said, "Ah, but who is my neighbor?"

And Jesus tells this parable of the good Samaritan, the story of a man who is left half dead on the side of the road and a priest comes by. He goes to the other side and ignores him. A Levite comes by and goes to the other side and ignores him. And a Samaritan, in their terminology, a half breed, comes and assists and helps financially and materially and medically. And Jesus asks this lawyer, "So who demonstrated that he was a neighbor?"

He said, "The man from Samaria."

Jesus told that story to prove to that man this point. Yes, you may never have transgressed. Yes, you may never have trespassed. You may have never missed the mark of your standards, but every single human being has been in a situation where they knew they were supposed to do something good and did not do it.

James chapter four verse 17 says: "...to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."⁵

For the first three definitions you may have been able to sit back and say, "I think I am good." But the fourth one causes every one of us to strike out, because an error is not accomplishing that which should be happening on a regular every day common sense level.

As many of you know, my sport of choice growing up was the sport of baseball. When you look at a box score in baseball there is three main categories: runs, hits and errors. We want to see how many runs did we score based on the number of hits that we got ,but those errors are important. That means that somebody on the other team or somebody on our team did not do that which they were supposed to do and so we can't say that the person got a hit, because they should have been out and because they weren't out a run scored. And so it is not charged to the E.R.A. or to the pitcher.

Some years ago the most famous error in baseball history took place. The year was 1986. The Boston Red Sox had gone decades without winning the World Series. They claimed it was the curse of the bambino. Since the Red Sox had traded Babe Ruth to the Yankees they had not won the World Series. In 1986 they were in game six of the World Series. They had won three games. The New York Mets had won two games. It was the ninth inning. They were leading and there were two outs. They were one out from winning the first World Series in decades and one of the most famous errors of all time took place. This video is a little grainy, because of its age. We want you to see what happens when a world class athlete does not do that which they are supposed to do.

Bill Buckner. One of the most famous or infamous names in baseball. World class athlete the ball went through his legs. I mean, of all the plays that a first baseman should make. They teach you in little league, if you don't think you are going to catch it, just fall on your knees and let it hit your chest.

It is an error. He should have made it, but he didn't.

Now some of you aren't baseball fans and we are getting ready to go into football season, so we have got a good one for you, too.

The year was 1978, one of the most famous Superbowls of all time when the Pittsburgh Steelers beat the Dallas Cowboys 35 to 31, one of Terry Bradshaw's four Superbowl rings. In the third quarter there was an infamous man by the name of Jackie Smith who found himself in the end zone with a hall of fame quarterback at the helm and this is what resulted.

Yes, that commentator said, "He has got to be the sickest man on the planet." That is right. . There is an old rule of thumb in football. Hit them between the numbers. Why? Because if it hits him in the numbers surely they can't miss it. Hall of fame quarterback throwing

⁵ James 4:17.

to an all pro receiver in the biggest game of the season and it bounces off the numbers. It is an error.

But what is so significant about this definition is there are those who have cried. There are those who would say, "I have never transgressed." There would be those who say, "But I have never trespassed." There would be those who say, "But I have never missed the mark." But every human being has committed an error. Every human being has seen righteous that should be done and not done it. Every human being has seen somebody that needed help and they did not lend a hand which means that the Lord is completely proper in declaring all have sinned. That is the problem. We have sin among us, which brings me to the third point, verse 25.

It says that God has set forth the Lord Jesus to be a propitiation. Now that is a big fancy word that is really hard to pronounce and if you want to impress your friends, the next time you all play Scrabble, use this word, propitiation. There is a propitiation. This is a big fancy theological term which means this. Someone willingly bearing the punishment for. See, here is the problem of humanity. There is none of us who can ever been good enough. There is none of us who can ever elevate himself to be righteous enough. There is none of us, whether it be transgression, trespass, missing the mark or error who will find ourselves one day faultless before the throne of God. All of humanity has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

But here is the good news. It says that Jesus Christ is and was and will always be a propitiation which means he bore our sin. That is why 2 Corinthians 5:20-21 is so important when it says he that knew no sin became sin for us so that we might be declared righteous in him. And that is the message this week from Romans 3, that every one of you must grasp. There is not one of you who can leave this building or turn off the radio or turn off the internet and say, "I am perfect." There is not one of you who can say, "I am righteous." There is not one of you who can say, "I will stand faultless one day. The question becomes this. Because of that fact, what have you done with it? What have you done with Jesus Christ? Because Jesus Christ came and was born. He lived. He died and he rose again. Not to just show he could do it, but according to Romans 3:25, to be a propitiation, to take the punishment of our sin because all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And yet we live in a world today where we make excuses and we justify behavior, attitude, and actions based on an inclusive mentality. You just need to accept me for who I am and God accepts you for who you are, a sinner in need of saving.