

TRAVIS: All right, everybody. Welcome back to the Bible study podcast. I am Travis Pauley, joined, as always, by Wes McAdams.

WES: Good morning -- or afternoon or evening, or whenever people are listening to this. Hello.

TRAVIS: And Mr. Kirkwood is back with us. Welcome back.

CALEB: It's good to be back. I've enjoyed it all. I've had a blast.

WES: We've enjoyed having you.

TRAVIS: Likewise. And I think, per the arrangement of the three of us talking, we have a very theologically deep discussion happening right now.

WES: Yeah. Oh, you meant before we started recording or the one we're about to get into? Were you trying to segue or make a joke? Because we were talking about the Mandalorian, and I didn't know if you were going to segue to that.

TRAVIS: No, I'm talking about the kind of conversations the three of us are having. It's like we're getting into some deep stuff today.

WES: Oh, yeah, that's true. Yeah, we've been having some really good stuff.

TRAVIS: Holy Spirit, blasphemy, and now today is justification.

WES: Yes. We've had all kinds of good questions that people have sent in. In fact, I think we're getting close to the end of the questions that we've had submitted, and so -- in fact, some of these questions I've had in the tank for a long time, much longer than we should have, and we finally got to a lot of them because we had an extra guest to -- an extra co-host to help us to sort through them.

Yeah, and so today we've got an anonymous question that was sent in. Not so much a question as just a request for us to discuss justification. And he said, "Hey" -- sorry. The "Hey, brother" was not, I think, part of his question. He said, "When is the next time you think you'll be doing a podcast on justification? And I mean beyond the whole just-as-if-I'd-not-sinned phrase. Too many people I've observed going to school never speak on what it actually means that we are made righteous in God's eyes. It is such a fundamental aspect of the gospel, but it seems that if you speak on it you are automatically labeled a liberal."

I really wanted to kind of pause and talk about that because that concerns me that there's any group of Christians that if you talk about justification that you're labeled a liberal, which I'd like to take that whole labeling-people-a-liberal thing aside and just talk about that for a second, but we won't. We won't dig into that, just about how easily people label others and dismiss them. But that aside, let's talk about this idea of thinking that somebody is liberal, or is not rooted in scripture, or maybe is doing the wrong thing if they talk about justification. Have you guys heard that, experienced that?

TRAVIS: Not specific to this topic, but I definitely think about the liberal/conservative labels. I mean, it's funny because they're really -- like the original terms are just talking about a temperament. You can have a conservative personality, a liberal personality, and now they've kind of been co-opted and made into these labels that mean -- you know, they really -- I guess they really mean progressive or --

WES: Yeah. Not holding to -- I think, like, "liberal" would -- in a positive sense, in scripture even, giving -- the only time "liberal" is used is about giving liberally. It's about a generosity, like you said. A generosity of spirit, a generosity with your funds, so giving things away, and I think that that idea has been applied to being too generous with salvation, maybe. Maybe that's what -- how they take it, like you need to be conservative, and I guess that does tend to be how we are. We draw a circle about who's in and who's out, who's good and who's bad, who's saved and who's lost, who's us and who's them. And so we draw a tighter and tighter circle, and the more, quote, "conservative" a person is, the smaller their circle is.

In Jesus' time, there were all kinds of circles that people had drawn in the sand about who was not a real Jew, who was not a real Israelite, who is not really a child of Abraham and who was, and so that circle was smaller and smaller. Like the Samaritans, who also descended from Abraham, were not considered in the circle because the, quote, more "conservative" descendants of Abraham, or the Jewish people, excluded them. So I think that there may be -- maybe that is part of it, is the exclusion and inclusion part of it, or just the holding to tradition, that that's kind of the conserving idea. We're conserving tradition. And I think that sometimes there's a fear -- and, usually, this labeling goes along with fear. "I'm afraid of what you're doing to our faith"; "I'm afraid of what you're doing to our religion," and so they're afraid we're giving away the store, as it were, when we are too loose with ideas about forgiveness and God's mercy and salvation.

TRAVIS: So is that where you think this kind of gets into -- like he mentions, like being labeled a liberal if you talk about justification? Do you think that's where it gets into being too liberal with people being forgiven?

WES: Yeah. I think that for so long Christians -- and this isn't specific, I don't think, to churches of Christ. I think that people have, for a very long -- it's not even specific to Christianity. I think that even in Jesus' day I think that there was a pride in hellfire-and-brimstone preaching. And we've talked about that before on the podcast, that everyone loves for a preacher to preach against sin. They just want the preacher to preach about somebody else's sin. They just don't want the preacher to preach about their sin. So tell us about how everybody else is going to hell, and we're good.

And so I think that anytime we start to say that God is more merciful and forgiving than you think he is, that makes people very uncomfortable because we want -- we're so much like Jonah. We want God to be merciful to us --

CALEB: But not to them.

WES: -- but not to them. That's exactly right. And I think that that makes people very, very uncomfortable when we start talking about God's mercy, God's justification, God's forgiveness of people because people want to believe "I've done it the right way. I've checked all the boxes. I've completed all the tasks. I have been faithful. They haven't, so they deserve to be condemned and I deserve to be forgiven," which that goes right in line with what this word is all about. And that very

attitude, that very perception of forgiveness and justice and justification -- that very perception of it is at odds with everything Paul had to say about justification in Christ.

CALEB: Yeah. Whenever -- in my limited experience with people kind of having a more, quote-unquote, "liberal" perspective on justification, it usually falls in line with something more along the lines of, "Oh, I've been justified by faith in the blood. I can do whatever I want," which is usually the -- no matter whoever is saying it and however they're saying "justification," that's usually the, quote-unquote, "conservative" tone that they're hearing the, quote-unquote, "liberal" saying justification. That's whenever -- in you-all's conversation, that's what I was kind of picking up on in the back of my mind, of oh, is this what this guy -- this gentleman's aiming at?

WES: Yeah, kind of -- and we've even had that conversation, I think, even while you've been here, Caleb, about once saved, always saved, or something like that, and I think that maybe there's a fear that if you say we're justified by faith in Jesus, then, like you said, you can do whatever you want to and that you can't be lost because you're justified. And there might be those -- and are those. I mean, there are those who take justification, or forgiveness in general, and use that as a license to sin. And Paul even talks about that, about using grace or using this idea of being saved as a license to do things that aren't right and aren't good, and, of course, that's condemned. Paul condemns that over and over again. But that was something that he had to deal with even in his day. Again, he came from the tradition of the Pharisees, and there were still

those that had that way of thinking about them.

And so when Paul talked about "You're not justified by the law," people were up in arms. "Well, wait a second. Are you saying -- are you saying that we can just go on doing bad things? Are you saying we can go on sinning so that grace may abound?" And I don't think anybody really thought that they could do that. I think that they were accusing Paul of making that claim. They were taking the gospel and saying, "This is nonsense, because if we really take this idea of grace and justification to heart, then we can just go on sinning," and Paul says, "By no means. How could you be freed from sin and then go back to it? Those aren't compatible. If you've been freed from sin, you don't go back to what you were. You could, but you shouldn't, and I'm not saying that you should or can." And so Paul obviously condemns that way of thinking, of using freedom in Christ as a license for sin or using grace as a license for sin.

But I do think that always has to be part of the conversation, but I think sometimes what happens is we're so afraid that people will do that, we're so afraid that people will run off in the other direction and, quote, be "liberal" and do things that they shouldn't do and just give away the store and just act like everybody's saved, nobody's lost, and you can do whatever you want and there are no consequences -- I think sometimes we're afraid that's what's going to be interpreted or how people are going to take things or people are going to run with that and use freedom in Christ as a license for sin, that we -- we're very reserved in how saved we think we are or how saved we preach people to be.

And so people end up -- even faithful Christians end up wondering,

"Am I saved? Am I really saved?" They are worried that their salvation is tenuous instead of having an assurance and a confidence about their position with God. They're constantly terrified, and that's not okay. It's not okay for us to so warn everyone about disobedience that we make the obedient feel like they might very well be lost. That's not okay. It's not okay for people -- for us to give people the impression -- for preachers and teachers to give people the impression that if you're saved, you're barely saved. Just because once saved, always saved isn't truth, doesn't mean that if you're saved, you're barely saved, and we have to -- we really have to steer away from that, as well, and we have to preach justification and we also have to preach faithfulness.

TRAVIS: I think it's really hard to know like what you actually believe and what you believe out of comparison in relation to other people, because I think -- I mean, so much of what we've already talked about -- I keep going back to the idea that it's like you only think about that if you're looking across the way at somebody and going, "Whoa, they can't be saved if I'm saved. I'm doing all these things to be saved," and right there I feel like you get to the heart of it. It's like anytime we talk about forgiveness of sins, we can't help but talk about what we earn, what we have to do. And it's like, obviously, there are -- and maybe that's, you know, part of -- one of the rabbit holes we need to go down, but it's like there is a paradox in being forgiven. Salvation is free, but you've got to open the gift, like you've got to accept it. But I think anytime we talk about, "Am I justified, am I forgiven, am I clean," inevitably, I start thinking of, "What have I done? What have I done to be clean?" And it's

like that seems to be very antithetical to the message Jesus brought in the first place. And I think -- I think that's a really dangerous thing, I mean, and I don't know if there's any way you can sort the -- you know, what do I believe -- what do I actually believe and what do I believe because of comparison to other people without just, you know, I mean, really, really examining yourself in isolation, you know, in isolated moments of going, you know, "Do I even think about that concept? Do I even think about am I forgiven for a certain sin or something if I'm not looking across at other people and going, 'Well, they're saved; I'm not,' or, 'I'm saved and they're not,'" or...

WES: I mean, we could stop the podcast right here because I think that nails it. I think that that's exactly -- I want to get to Romans 3 here in a second and really take a look at the text, but I think that's exactly what Paul is dealing with. That's what he's dealing with all of the time. And in Rome he's dealing with various house churches that, based on people -- the people's names in Romans 16, a lot of scholars believe that there were house churches that were ethnically divided, and so most of the letter -- most of the book of Romans deals with "for the Jew and also for the Greek." It is for the Jew and it's also for the Greek. Salvation is for the Jew and it's also for the Greek. The Jews need to be saved and the Greeks need to be saved, the Jewish people and the Gentile people. Everyone needs the salvation of God. Everyone is saved on the same basis. Everyone is justified on the same basis. Because there was that tendency to measure one's justification, measure whether or not I'm in a right covenant relationship with God based on not God and what he said,

but based on what other people are doing, and saying, "Well, I don't think they are, but I am because I'm better than they are." And so we have this tendency to measure ourselves by ourselves, and that's exactly what Paul, throughout his letters and epistles -- what he says you can't do. That's not the basis of justification and righteousness.

Now I want to look at Romans 3, starting in verse 9, because -- and even the original question that was asked did a really good job of laying out these two words. He says -- let's see. How did he say it? He talked about "justified," and we've kind of broken the English word down into an easy-to-remember phrase, "just as if I had not sinned," "justified," "just as if I had not sinned," which is cute but, obviously, doesn't really get to the depths of the Greek idea, or beyond that, the Hebrew idea. But he says that it means "made righteous in God's eyes," and I'm really glad that he pointed out the "righteous" and "justified" because those two words in Greek -- in English they're not related, which makes it difficult because "righteous," "righteousness," those words aren't tied to "justification," "justified," "justice," but in Greek all of those words are tied together. They all have the same root. And so when Paul talks about "righteous" or "righteousness" or "justification" or "justified," in Greek those are all part of the same family of words; but in English, when we read it in our Bibles, we don't necessarily pick that up, but I think we have to recognize that those words are intimately related.

Verse 9 of Romans 3, he says, "What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written, 'None is righteous, no, not one; no

one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." So he's quoting from Psalm 14, but he's saying that this applies both to the Jewish people and to the Greeks, to the Gentile people, that no one is righteous. And that word "righteous" means just. No one is just. No one does justice. No one -- if they came into a court of law and it was examined about them, "Have you done justice? Have you been a just and fair person? Have you kept the covenant? Have you loved your neighbor as yourself? Have you been good to the widow and the sojourner and the orphan? Have you done what was right and good and just?" The answer for everybody would be negative. Nope. There is no one who is righteous.

And so on that basis -- and then he goes on to say, "Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." So the opposite of all of those things -- if he's describing unrighteousness, the opposite of those things would be righteous. They would be what is just. Their throat would not be an open grave. They wouldn't use their tongues to deceive, but to tell the truth. The venom of asps would not be under their lips. Their mouth, instead of being filled with curses and bitterness, it would be filled with goodness and blessings. Their feet would be swift to do good instead of shed blood. In their paths there would be blessing and order and good things instead of

ruin and misery, and their way would be a way of peace and the fear of God would be before their eyes. That would describe righteous people.

But he says you can look at the Jewish people -- and he's talking generally and collectively, and he's saying, "You guys haven't been righteous. You haven't been just. You haven't kept up your end of the covenant bargain." And then when you look at the Gentile world, obviously, they haven't been just, either, and so both the Jewish people and the Greek people need salvation. They need saving because none of them have been -- they're all under sin's curse because none of them have been righteous.

Any thoughts to add before we keep going? Because we really haven't gotten to "justified" yet, but I think that that -- seeing that tie together -- so instead of "righteous," we might say "just" because that's a good -- because that's part of the same family of words in English. And so I think we have to tie those together and recognize that when Paul says no one is righteous, he's saying no one is just, that there really haven't been -- there haven't been any people that have really, truly practiced justice, and if you want to be considered a just person, it's not going to be on the basis of your justice because you haven't lived up to the standard of justice. God showed you what was good. He told you to do justice, to love mercy, to walk humbly with your God. He told you, oh, man, what was good, and you didn't do it. You never have, and because of that, you are under the curse of sin.

He says in verse 19, "Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be

stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." And I think that that's an important part, that on the basis of works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, that the law reveals sin. It reveals what righteousness is, but then when you measure yourself according to the measure of righteousness, of justice, of doing what is good and right and in keeping with your covenant relationship with God, then you realize that you've fallen short. So unless you perfectly kept the law, then nobody is justified on the basis of works of the law. So the law doesn't justify; it condemns. That's what law does. It condemns because nobody has lived up to it perfectly, and Paul is specifically talking about the law of Moses, but it would be true of any law that God gives. Anything that God says -- "Here's what justice looks like. Here's what righteousness looks like," and if we compare ourselves to that and say, "Okay. On that basis, I'm right with God. I am a just person. God will justify me," well, we -- none of us have lived up to any standard of righteousness, even -- and I think that this is pertinent even for people in the world.

"Justice" is kind of a buzzword right now, and I think that -- I think it's really interesting to look at even when human beings create our own standard of justice, what is just? What is right? What is good? How should human beings deal with each other? How should human beings deal with God? How should human beings deal with life? How should human beings deal with whatever it may be? And we all -- I mean, if we

really had a one-on-one conversation with somebody and said, "Okay. What does it look like to be a just person," and they were to describe that to you, and then to turn it back on them and say, "Okay. Now, have you lived up to that? This is your standard of righteousness, your standard of justice. Have you done all of these things?" Wow. At the end of the day, the answer would be no. Even on the basis of our own -- our own judgment of righteousness, we've all fallen short, much less God's even higher standard of justice, we've all fallen short. So whatever it is that we're trying to appeal to to say on that basis of justice, I am a just person, you're not. So no human being is going to be justified, especially in the -- by works of the law of Moses.

CALEB: And in that kind of vein that God's law and the human moral law -- or the human interpretation of the moral law, that's basically the entire conversation Paul has had or already had -- my epistle knowledge is very limited.

WES: It's in there somewhere.

CALEB: It's in there somewhere. I know it's in Romans. That much I do know. The Jews are condemned because they have the law of God; the Gentiles are condemned because, well, they had the moral law written in their hearts and they both blew it. It's that conversation there that -- if you want to go book, chapter, verse on it, that's where you would go.

WES: Right. Yeah, and that's exactly what he's summing up here. I think that's good to tie it back to that because in chapter 1 he goes through and he says here they had everything that they needed to know about God, based in what he had created, to know what was good and

right, and I think that even recognizing that is an important thing. Sometimes we think that people in the world can't be right about justice, can't be right about goodness, can't be right about what is good and right and just and fair, and I think that that is denying an aspect of their humanity that scripture affirms. Scripture affirms that every human being is an image-bearer of God, so we should expect atheists and agnostics and Buddhists and Hindu people, everybody -- we should expect that everybody will have some inkling of what is just, what is right, what is fair. And there's going to be so much overlap that we can agree and say, "Yes, that's right, that's good," and then help them to understand that even by their own standard, "Have you lived up to that? Have you been a just person? Have you been fair? Have you done what was right?" And if we're honest, then we recognize, "No, I haven't."

And then the question becomes, "Well, what are you going to do with that?" And every religion -- every religion is, to some degree, works-based. "Well, I'm trying to be better. I'm trying to do these good things." "So you believe that, ultimately, your good works erase your bad things that you've done?" "Well, yeah, I guess." "And so you're hoping that your good works will outweigh your bad works?" "Yeah, I guess that's kind of what I'm hoping for." "How will you know? How can you ever know?" And that guilt that we carry around -- that burden of guilt that we carry around about having this inkling that the bad things we've done probably outweigh the good things that we've done, or this effort to try to prove that we really are more good than we are bad, that every human being is struggling with this, every human being

is struggling with this -- that burden that we're carrying around causes us to do all kinds of even more bad things, and we do all kinds of things to each other because we're afraid we haven't been good enough or we're trying to prove that we're better than we're afraid that we are. All of these things create this incredible burden, and Paul is saying, both to the Jew and to the Greek -- to your point, Caleb -- that none of you are going to be justified by your works.

CALEB: And kind of circling back to the -- we shouldn't be surprised when outsiders do good, we see this a lot in the book of Acts with Paul's missionary journeys. My first thought is -- going to Paul's sermon on the Areopagus in Athens is, Paul starts off with the fact that "You guys are good. You are religious. You know of the spiritual world," which is kind of lacking in today's society. Anyway, side tangent. But -- "and you even understand that there may be someone out there, an unknown God, that we must honor. Let's start there and expand on that," and even brings in "Some of your own poets have said we are his offspring."

If we kind of take that kind of approach of going to Athens and meeting with the Athenians with this kind of understanding of, "I'm right, you're wrong, you're condemned," you're not going to go very far. You won't even have a meeting with these people who are the elites in Athenian society unless you acknowledge the fact that "Yes, you've done good; there is good in you. Let's expand on that. Let's interconnect what good you do know with the fuller goodness that I do know."

WES: Yeah, yeah, that's the biblical model of evangelism, is finding common ground. What we tend to do is we tend to go into the

marketplace and criticize people for where they're wrong and say, "Oh, you people, you ought to know better. You're a bunch of horrible, no good, immoral people. You all are bad and you're corrupting our society and we need to get rid of all of the people that think this way." And it's like, stop. That's not the way we preach the gospel. The way we preach the gospel is we go and we find what they're doing that is good and just, what is righteous and say, "Do you know where that inkling comes from? Do you know where that inclination comes from?" That's part of the conversation. And part of the conversation is, "And what do you do with your guilt when you don't live up to that? What do you do with your sorrow and pain and the burden that you're carrying because you haven't even lived up to that standard?" But if we don't applaud that inner written-on-their-heart morality, that goodness that we see -- and we can see that. I mean, we can see that. We can see that with the most ungodly people in the world that don't believe in God, that hate religion, but there are things that they're trying to do and accomplish that are good, that we can find a lot of common ground with, and instead of applauding that and using that as a common ground to build from, we go in and we say, "Well, you do that, but I can't really talk about that because I want to talk about this bad thing that you do over here," and it's like stop. That's not going to help us to help them see the one who is the justifier, the one who is the Saviour.

And so I think you're exactly right, Caleb, and I love that example of Paul in Athens because that's how we deal with unbelievers. We find common ground and we build from there rather than finding points of

conflict.

TRAVIS: And that's a far cry from the fire-and-brimstone style we were talking about in the beginning, and it makes me think -- you know, today you can -- I was just watching a video that came out this year. You know, a friend and I were kind of laughing at a video of a preacher just -- I mean, classic fire, brimstone. I mean, even the tone of his voice was like you'd imagine it was like on a town square in the 1700s, but it was this year. He's talking about COVID. I can prove it was this year. And then on the other--

WES: He is out on the town square or you're saying he sounds like somebody --

TRAVIS: I can imagine it on the town -- no, no, no, he was at a very, very --

WES: A church building.

TRAVIS: -- a very big church building, very nice, no. And then on the other end of that spectrum, you can also find, easily enough, the no stipulation, no turning -- because at least in the fire and brimstone, there's a method for, "But if you do this," you know.

CALEB: There is a reason to that madness, which is a fun bit, but...

TRAVIS: But I've always thought implicit in the fire and brimstone preaching is a sort of -- I mean, I can hear Jesus saying, you know, "There will be many who say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord,' and I will say, 'I never knew you.'" I can hear -- on both ends of the spectrum. And the compulsion that I have to sort of think in those ways, whether it's no stipulation, just believe in your heart, or the other end of, you know,

God's going to rain down fire on all the sinners and --

WES: "Many will meet their doom," and we are smiling when we sing it.

TRAVIS: Right, right, like that's a good thing. Like Jesus is happy about that. And I think, throughout the gospel, you get a very different idea that, you know, Jesus is -- you know, he intentionally talked to the sinners. He even said, "I didn't come to save the righteous. I didn't come to save the people who should know better. I came to save the people who have not maybe had as many chances to know better, and if things keep going the way they're going, they will never have a chance to turn."

And I think -- like I think so much of that is like it's reflective of where people are at like when they're preaching that way. Like I've heard you say, Wes -- like you'll say, "I'm preaching to me." You know, if it's a -- especially if it's a sensitive subject where you know it's hard for people to stomach, it's like, "I need to hear this, too."

WES: Yeah, I'm not above this message.

TRAVIS: And kind of implicit in the fire and brimstone preaching is, "Well, I'm good. That's why I can tell you this."

WES: Yeah, yeah.

TRAVIS: "I'm coming down with the word of the Lord off the mountain to tell you that he's not happy."

WES: It's not righteous indignation; it's self-righteous indignation.

TRAVIS: And then on the other end you can see a -- I mean, there was a scandal with a big kind of liberal preacher just in the last several months, and it's like, don't you kind of hear that in the preaching, that it's like we're all trying to kind of set up our own get-out-of-jail-free

card? And I think that's why like the style of preaching of -- even if it's, like, incessantly reminding, I need this, too, you know, just on a preaching level, let alone how we talk, how we just evangelize by being an example in our everyday lives, it's like -- it's definitely a balance of confidence and humility, and it's humility about yourself and confidence in the grace of God.

WES: That's so good. And that reminds me about -- you said about Jesus eating with the sinners, and just yesterday a group of preachers were talking about why is that? Why were those people attracted to Jesus? And my comment was because his correction was restorative rather than punitive. And that's a thought that has been going through my head for the last few weeks, that Jesus wasn't on the, quote, "liberal" side of no correction, because I think there are people that fall in that category that never want to correct anything, and that in and of itself is incorrect. You can't have -- you can't preach the gospel without a message of repentance, of change, of correction, and Jesus preached a message -- a very strong message of correction, so much so that he would say things like, "If your eye causes you to sin, cut it out." I mean, Jesus offered correction, but he offered it in a restorative way rather than a punitive way.

And I think that what we tend to do to, quote, "sinners," to people that know that they're broken and they feel like they're on the outside -- because I talk to people all the time that say, "I don't think I can come in the church building. I might fall down on my head." You know, they feel like -- they know they've done wrong. What they need -- they don't need

somebody to remind them that they've done wrong. They don't need somebody to continue to punish them for their sins, to verbally abuse them for their sins. What they need is someone to bring them corrective and restorative correction to help them to be restored to a right relationship with God. That's what justification is all about. Justification is about restoring someone to their rightful place at the table. If somebody has done something to get kicked out of the table, we don't go and beat them up over there; we show them how to come back. And is there correction involved in that? Of course there's correction involved in that, but it is restorative correction, not punitive correction. We're not punishing people for the wrong that they've done; we're helping them to see how to do better, how to turn around and come back to the table. And for us, we have this humility that we can come to the conversation with to say, "Hey, I used to be exactly where you are. Jesus brought me back. Here, let me show you how he does that," and that brings people back to the table.

Now, not everybody is going to accept that. Whether we find common ground with them or we approach them in a restorative way, some people don't want that and they'll never accept the way of Christ. And like you said, it is a narrow way and there are few that will accept it, but that's at least how we have to approach it.

TRAVIS: You also said the word "marketplace" earlier and that got the wheels turning, because I was thinking, like, what's interesting is like a lot of what I think those ineffective styles of preaching and teaching and evangelizing are selling is it's purely salvation. It's purely so you can feel

comfortable when you die. And it's like, A, that's not what Jesus preached at all. I mean, that was -- in fact, sometimes, you know, heaven feels like -- because it's not -- you know, if you're alive, you're not -- and hopefully in good health, you're not necessarily thinking about that, so what do you come to Jesus for? It's like, well, that, and so that your life gets better right now, and I think if you're not -- if it's just this fear-based model of you're a disgusting, filthy sinner, and if you don't change your ways out of fear, then -- and not even fear for the Lord, but fear for your own punishment and suffering, which is very different, or the other end of, you know, no stipulation, you don't need to change, you just need to accept Jesus in your heart wherever you're at, it's like those things are ineffective because they don't change people.

I mean, being in the church, I think, for our lives, as the three of us have been, that doesn't -- that does not help people. It makes them more miserable. It makes them spit out the same nonsense to other people and then more people get to be miserable. Again, either end of the spectrum, if it's not something that can help you right now, as well as offer you a path to live a good life and live an effective life for Christ, then it's worthless. It's worthless.

CALEB: Something that -- there are kind of two things that kind of popped in my head during this little bit of -- one is the kind of preaching style that I find the most interesting that kind of strikes that happy balance between hey, you've done wrong, but don't worry, there's a fix, in the most modern times would probably be C.S. Lewis, especially his Mere Christianity. He catches the -- there's a moral law; we all know it.

Even if you don't want to admit it, there is it. You feel it whenever you feel offended or, oh, that's unjust. Where did the sense of justice come from? It can't be part of the instinct. It has to come from somewhere else. He catches the "all have sinned" without actually saying "all have sinned," which is brilliant, so C.S. Lewis -- look him up; he's awesome, one of my favorites.

But something that kind of catches my mind a little bit is we talked about coming from a state of injustice to justified. We can sometimes fall into this kind of rut or pitfall of being super rigid. "I am justified. I'm not going to do anything to mess this up," where it's a bit -- I would say it's a lot more dynamic of -- it's transformative from one form -- from one justification to another. You are becoming more and more justified, more and more made righteous, and it's God taking the lead.

I was talking to my parents about this, just kind of trying to wrap my own head around it because I haven't really thought about it in explicit detail for a while so I wanted to kind of shoot some ideas with them, and the idea that -- and I think in mental pictures a lot. The biggest mental picture that I came up with was dancing, as silly as it sounds. When two people are dancing, you can't tell -- or if you don't know much about dancing, you can't tell who's taking the lead or who's doing what. It's just one beautiful routine. But if you do --

WES: You're going to get us in trouble talking about dancing. I'm just kidding. No, you're right, though. Go ahead. That's a good metaphor.

CALEB: Yeah, we actually went into that with my family. There's a point, I promise. But if you do know a thing or two about dancing, you

know that the man in the dancing-partner group is taking the lead, while the woman actually has the more, I would say, fun and elegant portion of twirling, going back and forth, around. Where if you want to take that example to us, God is taking the lead and kind of inviting us to dance with him. We accept it; we are then justified. We get into the dancing starting position, and we don't just stop there. You're just holding hands and staring awkwardly at each other. That's not dancing. It's when you start going through the motions. God twirls you over to this side to do righteousness over here. Brings you back, dips you down to bring up the lowly and the oppressed, and on and on it goes until the song is over and the new creation has been made.

WES: Yeah. I think that's so well said. I think that justification should lead to us doing justice. If it doesn't -- if we just look at it cynically and we say, "Well, we could never be just. We can never really be just people. We can never really fully do justice. We can never be as good as we know we should be, so why even try? God 's got us. He saves us and we don't have to worry about it, so let's just count on him." Well, that's not the gospel, either. The gospel is on what basis am I in a right covenant relationship with God? But as you said, once I'm in that right covenant relationship with God, what do I do? Well, I live out the righteousness of God. I live out his kind of justice. I live out his kind of fairness. I live out his kind of goodness.

I do want to keep reading in the text because we really haven't gotten to the point of how and why we're justified, but I think it plays into everything that we've been saying. He says in verse 21 -- we're still in

Romans 3. "But now the righteousness of God" -- God's justice, God's fairness -- "has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it -- the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." That's the Jew and the Greek. "For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." That, I think, is the key point here. And, really, what he's trying to do is he's trying to work on both the Greeks, who -- I think some of the Gentile believers had gotten arrogant about their standing with God, their relationship with God, because, "We don't hold on to the traditions and the old things that the Jewish believers hold on to," and they had kind of gotten arrogant. And the Jewish believers probably had gotten arrogant, too, in thinking, "Well, we have the law and we're lawkeepers, and you Gentiles, you're pagans," and so they both had gotten arrogant, and Paul kind of brings them both down to size and says, "You've all sinned and fallen short of God's glory" and then brings them back up -- and that's kind of that balance we've been talking about, is that he breaks it down and then he brings them up, and he says, "and we're justified. We are in a right covenant relationship with God. We're approved by God. We're considered righteous by God. We're not condemned by God, as a gift." It's a gift that God gives. It's his grace, and he gives it through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. And, again, redemption is about restoration. It's about being exiled away, as the children of Israel were -- exiled in Egypt and then redeemed, brought out of slavery, brought to the Promised Land, or

exiled to Babylon and then redeemed and brought back to the Promised Land. So the redemption that's in Christ Jesus is -- it's by that gift that we're justified.

Then he says that -- in verse 25, that God put forward Jesus "as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness," God's fairness, God's justice, "because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins." One point I want to make as we try to wrap up is that sometimes when we think about God's justice, we tend to think punitive. We tend to think God's punishment because when we think about -- in fact, I've heard people say, and I've probably said myself, that "We want God's mercy, not God's justice," but that overlooks a really important fact, that God's justice is merciful. God's justice is full of mercy. God's justice is forbearing. God's justice is forgiving. That's what he says, "because in his divine forbearance." That was part of his righteousness. Part of his justice was the fact that he knew that people were broken and that they were wicked from their youth, and he didn't want to condemn them. He wanted to save them, and it was part of his righteousness to put forth Jesus as an atoning sacrifice, a propitiation, and sometimes we -- I think we wrongly think about Jesus on the cross and we think that it's like God taking out his revenge on humanity on Jesus, and propitiation isn't about revenge; it's about redemption. It's about restoration. He put forth Jesus as an atoning sacrifice because of his mercy, not because he just wanted to punish somebody, not because he wanted to pour out his wrath on someone, not because he was trying to take revenge. That has nothing

to do with the gospel.

The gospel is that God is so just and merciful and forbearing and forgiving that he was willing to say, "You know what? You guys, both the Jews and the Gentiles, all the descendants of Adam, you've all broken covenant with me. You've all acted in a way that wasn't good, but it's okay. I'll fix it. I'll bring you back to the table. I will restore you. I will redeem you" so that he gets the glory and he gets the credit. And it says in verse 26, "It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier." Again, "just" doesn't mean the punisher. It means the one who does what is right, the one who does what is fair, the one who does what is good, "so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." So he gets the credit and the glory.

But to the point we've been making, I think sometimes when we think about faith in Jesus, we just think that that's mental assent; that's just believing. But it includes obedience. It includes -- faith is about grateful, trusting loyalty. That's how I would define "faith." It is grateful, trusting loyalty. It says, "You have done this for me, and in response to that, I belong to you." It is Romans 12:1. It is presenting ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. In fact, this past Sunday I used the word "obliged," which is an archaic word that we don't really use in our country anymore, but it's such a good word, "obliged."

TRAVIS: It had a great run in this country.

WES: It's true, yeah. We say, "Much obliged." Well, originally, it brought the ideas of gratitude and obligation -- obliged, obligation -- and

brought those two ideas together because in ancient people's minds, and in a lot of people's minds today, those two things are tied together. When you're grateful to someone for what they've done, you are obligated to them. But in our mind, "obligated" sounds negative. It sounds like compulsion. It sounds like you're forced to do it even though you don't want to. No, no, no. It's a grateful obligation. It's like the way I feel about my wife. "I can't believe you married me. I can't believe you've given your love to me, and because you've given your love to me, I give myself to you."

And to your metaphor, Caleb, about the dance, that's what it is, is that God, in his righteousness, has invited us into the relationship so that we do go about doing justice, doing what is good, doing what is right, offering our bodies as a living sacrifice to him, loving our neighbor as ourselves, all of these things. But at the end of the day, we don't say, "Well, I did it all right; that's why I'm in a right covenant relationship with God." It's like, no, wait. Did you forget who brought you to the dance? Did you forget who brought you into this relationship? It wasn't your righteousness. It wasn't because you're so just and you're so good that you were brought into this relationship. It's because he is. That's why you're in it; that's why you're kept in it, and out of gratitude for that, out of grateful, loyal obedience to him, you continue to do what is right and what is good and what is fair.

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*well as our McDermott Road church family, for helping to make this podcast possible, and a special thanks to all of you for listening. We love you, God loves you, and we hope you have a wonderful day.*