**Shelter-In-Grace**

**Part 3**

**Finding Refuge in RIGHTEOUSNESS**

**Romans 1:17**

**SEE INTRO FROM WEEK 1**

Let’s open our Bibles today to the NT Book of Romansand find refuge in God’s gift of righteousness.

**Romans 1:17**

**For in the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is BY FAITH from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”**

The Book of Romans is a letter actually…and this letter is one of the single-most history-changing letters ever written. In fact, it wouldn’t be an overstatement to call it *THE* single-most most impactful piece of literature in the last 500 years.

I love the Bible. I love the OT. I love the NT. And I love the OT a lot MORE, now that I understand that I’m not UNDER its arrangements.

The OT is the inspired Word of God just as much as the N…and it was written FOR me…but it wasn’t written TO me. And understanding that reality has revolutionized my relationship the Father!

The word “testament” is the word “covenant.” And when I say that we aren’t under the OT – I’m saying that we aren’t under the OC, which is the Law of Moses, given to the ancient Israelites…God’s chosen people to bring forth the Messiah – the Savior – into the world.

You see…the Law was given through Moses in order to show God’s ancient people what it would require in order to be *in right standing* with Him. And if you know anything about the Law of Moses – you know that it was far more complex than just the Ten Commandments.

Of course, the Ten Commandments alone would be enough to convict ANY of us in a court of Law. We’ve all *lied*. We’ve all *stolen*. We’ve all *coveted*. We’ve all been *unfaithful* in various ways to both God and others…

But when you get into the weeds of the Law of Moses, you get into more than 600 other rules, regulations and rituals that the ancient people of God were commanded to follow. In fact, some of it sounds completely ludicrous to us today.

Did you realize that as an ancient Jew under the Law of Moses, you weren’t allowed to…

* Eat pork or shellfish? (Can you imagine, NO bacon on those otherwise-healthy Brussel sprouts?)
* Mix fabrics in your clothing? That means if you chose to wear your cotton/polyester blend today…YOU’re deep in sin!
* Eat fruit from a tree within four years of planting it?
* Trim your beard improperly?
* Show up empty-handed to a party? (I actually like that one!)

And guess what? The Apostle James says that to stumble in keeping just ONE of these 600-plus commands in God’s Law is to be guilty of breaking the *whole thing* (James 2:10)! In other words, God’s OC Law is an ALL-OR-NOTHING proposition. It’s a PASS-OR-FAIL test.

Which leads any reasonable person to ask a very important question: *WHY in the world would a loving God be so strict with the rules He made?* And I’m glad you asked that question, because it leads into the subject of the talk today, which is *Finding Refuge in Righteousness*.

Righteousness is an unfamiliar word to many of us. It’s one of those big, scary theological words that most of us don’t really understand.

Righteousness comes from a root word that was a medical term referring to making something straight that was once crooked. It was used in reference to a doctor resetting a broken bone. And Biblically, the word “righteous” literally means *“to be set right with God.”*

One writer says that righteousness is *“goodness that is good enough for God.”* Which brings us back to the question: *“Why would a loving God give His people such strict rules? Why would He require such a high standard of goodness in order to be good enough for Himself?”*

*Let’s dive into that…I mean really dive into that by taking a few minutes to be reminded of the story of the Israelites.* You see, long before God gave the Law Covenant to Moses – about 600 years before – He had made another covenant with one of Moses’ forefathers…a man named Abraham. And that covenant that God made with Abraham was not a Law-covenant. In fact, it was JUST THE OPPOSITE! It was a grace-covenant.

And one of the core promises of that grace-covenant was that Abraham’s people would have a land to call their own. A Promised Land!

So, fast-forward to the time of Moses and you find that the Israelites have been living under Egyptian slavery for the past four centuries. And God raises up Moses to become their deliverer – to lead them out of Egypt and into what? Into the LAND that He had originally promised to Abraham.

So, think about what it must have been like to be an ancient Israelite living on the tail end of a 400-year period of slavery. The Egyptian culture…the manners and customs…the rules and regulations…the gods and goddesses…would’ve all become SO familiar to you that the God of Abraham would’ve been little more than the stuff of legend – just a story about your history that you assumed was long-gone.

By this time, the Israelites had heard some of the ancient Jewish stories passed down by oral tradition, but they had lost track of any relevance those stories might still have in their own lives. In other words, the people had long forgotten about the Land of Promise…but LORD hadn’t forgotten!

And when He delivers the people through the Red Sea into their freedom, His intention is to lead them directly into that Promised Land. And yet, what happens? The Israelites don’t understand how to handle their new freedom!

I’m going to say that again just in case there’s anybody here who can identify: *The Israelites don’t understand how to handle their freedom!* Does that sound familiar in today’s world? It sounds familiar to me! Ironically, there are many modern-day Christians living just like that! They don’t know what to do with the freedom they’ve been given in Christ…which is why so many continue to live under law and legalism.

These Israelites had been conditioned to living under the harsh rule of Egyptian slavery. For 400 years, they lived under a set of laws that dictated everything about their way of life. They were told…

* When to wake up, and when to go to bed.
* When to eat, and when to work.
* What they could wear and not wear.

In other words, they had been prisoners for SO long…that they didn’t know how to handle their freedom! So when you read the story, you discover that it’s actually the *people* (in Exodus 19) who tell Moses, *“Go ask the Lord to give us some rules, and whatever He says to do, we’ll do it!”*

It’s an amazing thing to consider the fact that it was actually the PEOPLE – who couldn’t conceive of how to live in freedom – who asked God for the rules!

God tells them, *“All I want from you is trust.”* I’m going to provide EVERYTHING you need FOR FREE…by my grace. You can’t earn it. You can’t work for it. I just want you to trust me for it:

* I’m going to give you manna every morning – fresh, all-you-can-eat buttermilk hotcakes!
* I’m going to give you quail as a source of protein. You won’t need to hunt them, they will just come to you!
* I’m going to cause springs of water to rise up out of the desert on your journey to keep you hydrated!
* I’m going to provide my own GPS system – a cloud for you to follow by day…and a pillar of fire by night!

I don’t want you to *work* for me. I don’t want you to *perform* for me. I don’t want you to *beg* from me. I just want you to ***trust me***. Put one foot in front of the other – and in about 11 days, you’ll be knocking on the door of the Promised Land.

But they just couldn’t handle it! Freedom seemed WAY TOO dangerous for them! How would they keep themselves accountable? How would they feel like they were doing their part if they simply trusted God for a free lunch every day? How could they know for CERTAIN that this God of their forefathers really *would* come through on His promises to provide?

So, they bickered and complained. They disobeyed both God and Moses. They fought and grumbled with each other…until finally – by their words and by their actions – they ask God for a list of rules to govern themselves.

And God, with what I can only imagine were tears in His eyes, basically says, *“Okay…if that’s the way you want it. If you would rather relate to me on the basis of Law rather than Love – on the basis of fear rather than faith – on the basis of trying rather than trusting – then here are the demands.”*

And God – through Moses – gives them 613 rules, regulations and rituals as if to say, *“If you really want to try to be good enough for Me in your own strength…here’s what it’s gonna take.”* And that’s the point in the story where God reveals that the ONLY standard of goodness that’s good enough for Him is *absolute perfection*.

You see…God’s plan from the beginning – from the moment He introduces Himself to Abraham – is that His people will relate to Him on the basis of grace and the freedom it brings. But it’s the *people*…filled with the fear of what freedom might look like…who tell God they’d rather relate to Him on the basis of rules.

And for the remainder of the Old Testament story…up until the time of the cross and resurrection of Jesus…God’s people are under the Law THEY had asked for.

So WHY did God give His people the Law? In order to show them the impossibility of reaching that standard of goodness – that *righteousness* – by their own effort.

So, we fast-forward again – 1500 years after the Exodus from Egypt – and Jesus Christ has now finally completed His work of redemption through the cross and resurrection. And this man named Paul…who has been raised under a very strict interpretation of the Law of Moses…is set free from that bondage by a supernatural experience with grace in Acts 9.

But this is where we come to the Book of Romans. Because in this book – more than in any other Book Paul wrote – he goes into painstaking detail about how God chooses to give His people *another Deliverer* even greater than Moses. And *another deliverance* even greater than that of Egypt. And *another series of promises* even greater than those He gave to Abraham.

And in the opening chapter of the Book of Romans, Paul writes these words, our theme text:

**Romans 1:17**

**For in the Gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is BY FAITH from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”**

And this verse sets the tone not only for the Book of Romans…but it is the verse that Martin Luther re-discovered over 500 years ago, which became the catalyst for the Protestant Reformation…

It’s why you came to church today ready to *enjoy God* rather than being afraid of Him! It’s why you’re sitting here today *in spiritual freedom* rather than in slavery. It’s why you’re sitting here today in union with God and with His unconditional *forgiveness* as we’ve already talked about past two weeks.

In fact, as Paul lays out his arguments for the greatness of this Gospel, he says the following just two chapters later:

**Romans 3:21**

**But now *apart from the law* the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.**

Apart from what? Apart from the Law! There’s a “righteousness” that has been made known through Jesus Christ that’s “apart from the law.” In other words, you don’t get this righteousness from following a list of rules and regulations and rituals! And if that wasn’t good enough news…check out what he says next in verse 22…

**Romans 3:22**

**This righteousness is *given* through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe…**

I want you to say that phrase with me: *“This righteousness is GIVEN.”*

Now I dare you to try not to shout “amen” as I explain this…. Do you understand what this means? This means that this perfect standard of goodness – this standard of perfection which is required to be in right relationship with God – is NOT something you can *earn.* It’s NOT something you can *deserve*. It’s NOT something you can *perform* for. It is NOT something you can *take credit* for. It is something that is GIVEN. It’s a gift.

The root of the word “given” is the Greek word “charis” – which means grace! The words *grace* and *gift* are synonyms in the NT! This means that it’s impossible for YOU to provide your own righteousness! It’s impossible for you to attain to a level of goodness that is good enough for God on your own effort! And it means that when you understand and embrace the Gospel of amazing grace, you will never have to live under those burdens again!

So, let me just quickly share with you three big ideas about what it means to find refuge in righteousness.

**Finding Refuge in Righteousness means…**

1. **On your worst day, in your darkest hour, you’re now GOOD enough for God!**

Law-based religion will continue to *ruthlessly* tell you that you have to do more. That God loves you, but He doesn’t *like* you that much. That God tolerates you but He’s a little embarrassed by you. And that if you go “too far” off course, He *may* just turn His back on you.

But thankfully, that’s not true! In your worst moment – in your darkest hour of shame, guilt, regret, sin, stumbling and fumbling…God says, *“You’re good enough for Me. And not only do I love you…but I like you!”*

Secondly, finding refuge in righteousness means…

1. **On your best day, in your brightest hour, you cannot look DOWN upon others.**

See how this works? It means you’re free from the religion-game of feeling superior over someone else because of your impressive religious or moral achievements. Religious folks love to play the popularity games. Who’s in and who’s out? Who’s anointed and who’s not? Who’s holy and who’s unholy? Who’s important and who’s just average?

And one of the biggest black-eyes upon the church today is the fact that so many people *outside the church* avoid church altogether because they’re afraid they’ll be judged and condemned if they were ever to darken the doors of a local church!

But ironically, Jesus was ALWAYS making the religious folks angry because of His friendship with lepers, and prostitutes, and gamblers, and drunks, and tax-collectors and sinners. And the reality is that if the church of Jesus Christ is not attracting the same kinds of people Jesus attracted, then we aren’t declaring and demonstrating the same Gospel Jesus declared and demonstrated!

What I’m saying is this: Finding your refuge in the gift of righteousness frees you from the ugly disposition of self-righteousness. It makes you mysteriously attractive to those who don’t yet know Christ because of how comfortable you are in your own skin! When you’ve got nothing to prove and nothing to hide…people take notice!

And finally…number three…when you’re finding refuge in righteousness, it means:

1. **Every day, in every hour, you are WALKING by faith.**

Why? Because the most courageous thing you’ll ever believe in this life is that you ARE who God says you are! That your righteousness is identical to that of Jesus…and that this is true even when you can’t *see it* or *feel it!* It’s been said that true, Biblical *humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less*.

And when you’re no longer preoccupied with your own self-consciousness…and no longer finding validation in your own self-righteousness…and no longer trusting in your own self-worthiness…you are ***truly*** walking by faith!

Because every day of your life, you are being lied to by the value-system of this world! You are being told that you DON’T measure up…that there is MORE to do in order to make God happy…that your value is found in what PEOPLE think of you. And in the face of those voices of condemnation and accusation, finding refuge in the free gift of your righteousness is the greatest reality of faith you can possibly express.

You see, the gift of righteousness – just like the gift of forgiveness that we focused on last weekend – is NOT something we receive in many small doses along the road of life. It’s a gift that is given in *totality*, the moment we place our trust in Jesus Christ.

At the very moment of salvation – you’re as righteous as you will EVER BE! There is nothing you *need to do* – and nothing you ever *could do* – to improve upon or add to your righteousness.

And I realize that some folks hear this Good News and they say, *“What about spiritual growth? What about discipleship? What about growing in your relationship with God? Isn’t that important?”*

And to that I have to say, *“Hold on a minute! Did you hear what I said? I said that the moment you trust Christ, you are as* ***righteous*** *as you’ll ever be. But I didn’t say you’re instantly as* ***mature*** *as you’ll ever be!”* Maturity – growing in grace – is a process that takes place over a lifetime. But becoming righteous is not a *process*…it’s an *event*. It’s an ever-present reality from the moment of salvation.

In much the same way that a newborn baby is just as human as an elderly person – so also a newborn believer is just as righteous as a very mature believer.

And spiritual maturity happens as we grow in our propensity for expressing *outwardly* that which is already true of us *inwardly*!

Kim and I are the parents of two children. And I’ll never forget holding each of those babies in my arms for the first time. Mom got the first opportunity – as she should have, after doing all the hard work – and then it was my turn.

And as I held those babies in my arms – never for a moment did I think to myself, “I can’t wait until these babies become human!” *(There were sometimes when they were in middle school and high school when I may have thought that…)*

And here’s the truth: Satan’s best-kept secret is that the process of discipleship has nothing to do with you gradually becoming anything other than who you already are! Discipleship is about gradually expressing what you ***truly already are*** as a free gift of God’s grace!

When you placed your faith in Christ – you woke up the next morning with a brand-new heart. But you DIDN’T wake up with a completely renewed mind. And that is where Paul eventually takes us in his letter to the Romans.

After hammering out all of the glorious truths of the Good News, he gets to chapter 12, and he says:

**Romans 12:2**

**Do not conform to the pattern of this world…**

What is that pattern? It’s the pattern of *self-righteousness*, of *self-improvement*, of *self-salvation*, of *self-worthiness*, of pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps before God. So, he says, “Don’t conform to that pattern, but instead…

**…be transformed by the renewing of your mind.**

And I’ll close with this for today:

When Paul uses this word “transformed” it is the Greek word “metamorphosis.” It’s a powerful concept. And it refers to the idea of a caterpillar maturing into a butterfly.

As a caterpillar, the little creature doesn’t yet have wings. It can only crawl slowly on its belly. It is not very impressive to the naked eye. In fact, some may even mistake it for a worm! But God doesn’t.

God knows that little caterpillar is equipped from the moment of its birth with all of the butterfly-DNA necessary to go from crawling…to cocooning…to cruising through the air in all the freedom and beauty it was created for!

And the moment of your spiritual conception – the same is true for you. You are equipped with all of the spiritual-DNA necessary to grow in your outward expression of what is already true of your inward composition.

So, as we saw last weekend, the gift of forgiveness **ERASES** our sinful track-record, while the gift of righteousness **REPLACES** our sinful nature. The gift of righteousness means that the righteousness of Jesus Himself was not only *imputed* to us – but also *imparted* to us – when God crucified that old sinful spirit we inherited from Adam, and raised us to new life with a new human spirit that is fully compatible with Jesus.

If you’ve trusted in Jesus, you’re a new creation at the core (2 Cor. 5:17). You already have everything you need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). You have become a partaker of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). And you are more than a conqueror in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:37).

At my website, bendailey.com, I posted a blog a few weeks ago with 50 things you need to know about your new spiritual identity. I want you to print that blog out and begin to speak the words out loud, with conviction. I give you lots of scripture that reminds you that…

* You’re a saint, a trophy of Christ’s victory!
* You’re a new creation, complete in Christ and perfect forever!
* You’re one with the Lord and the temple of the Holy Spirit!
* You’re eternally redeemed and completely forgiven!
* You’re free from guilt and condemnation!
* You’re righteous, holy and blameless!
* You’re healed and strong in the Lord!

And that’s why being part of a local church like Calvary is so important. My job as a father is not to teach my kids how to eventually become part of the Dailey household through their determined effort. It’s to show them that because they’re already unconditionally part of the Dailey household, they’re free to relax and enjoy the journey together as they mature from babies to full grown sons and daughters.

And in those moments when they forget who they are and start behaving in ways that are contrary to who they truly are, it’s my privilege as their dad to remind them of who they are…and also WHOSE they are.

Perhaps as you’ve been listening, it has dawned on you that you need this gift of righteousness. Maybe you’ve become satisfied with trusting in your own goodness. But the Bible says that human goodness is like “filthy rags” in comparison to the goodness that is required to be good enough for God.

God loves you exactly the way you are. But he loves you way too much to LEAVE you the way you are! He wants you to receive His gift of righteousness. The Bible says that Jesus who had no sin “became sin” for us, so that we might “become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.” (2 Co. 5:21). Are you ready to find refuge in God’s gift of righteousness?

**Today’s Confession: Today I choose to find refuge in God’s gift of righteousness.**