

XXI. Romans in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel of God
“The Righteousness of God: Ask the Pastor – Part 3”
Romans 3:27–31
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The text for this study was ground zero for the Reformation. Paul having brought us to the throne room of judgment, having dismantled all evidence of defense, bring the indictment and describing the indicted he then gives us the only answer which he says in Romans 3:21–31; [21] *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested (appeared) apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— [22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. [26] It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

[27] Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. [28] For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. [29] Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, [30] since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. [31] Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I recently had new members in my home and I allow them to look at the books I own but my request is that they don't leave the house with any. After this group left, I went to my study to see that my 14 commentaries on the book of Romans were still there (smile) especially since we have been in this study. The text for this study is so crucial and it's the text that Luther says brings the cardinal doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This is the text that Augustine who stimulated these Reformers pour over and was just transformed by its message. The confession of the five Solas of the Reformation comes from this text which tells us we're saved by faith alone through grace alone in Christ alone, why, for the glory of God, which is your joy alone. It is in Him, for Him and to Him.

It is such a glorious text that I not only want to acknowledge the value of those commentators but I am so grateful for Dr. Ferguson's lectures in my systematic theology class in seminary, his predecessor's John Murray's commentary and R.C. Sproul's commentary on this as well for they have really shaped my grasp of this, bathed my heart and emersed my life. It's like drinking water in an oasis in the wilderness for me and I have prayed that God would allow me to share that with you today as we come to this last piece of it.

Here is where we are. The Apostle Paul seems to have a desire to bring something up as he gives an initial statement and then do what he wants to do to set up the exposition or enlargement of that statement. So, he gives to us this Gospel of God which he is eager to preach and unashamedly proclaims. Paul wants desperately for us to understand it so he initially lifts it up before us and turns it with two facets of the diamond in front of us. Romans 1:16–17 says

[16] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (the first facet) [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (the second facet)

In the next study, Paul will start to unfold this exposition of the Gospel of God with its power and righteousness in Romans 4. Paul shows us why those two statements in the next few chapters are so crucial and he brings all of humanity to the day of judgment, the bar of justice, for on that Day God will bring judgment that is inflexible, eternal and unsearchable as Paul has dismantled, destroyed and shown us there is no defense strategy possible. We are all indicted. Romans 3:19 and 23 says *[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. [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* All are under the law and therefore all are under God's wrath. There is none who seek Him.

In other words, Paul has shown us we are helpless, hopeless, and are in need of a Savior. Praise God to the helpless the power of God saves you for nothing else has the power to save you, only the God of glory and grace. God regenerates and give us His righteousness. How can a holy God be just and justifier of the unjustifiable? He found a way for it is the power of God in Christ to bring dead sinners to life that they may believe in Jesus and the righteousness of God removes their sins to give us an impeccable record of His righteousness in Christ. In Christ, comes the power of God to bring us from spiritual death to life and in Christ is the righteousness of God to give us an impeccable holiness. All of the Old Testament was designed to point to that fulfillment – all those promises point to the Promised One in whom everything is fulfilled to save His people from their sins. Now we're going to see something else Paul does.

What does this look like in someone's life who has been saved by grace alone in faith? Paul uses questions for he has a penchant for questions. He loves to ask questions, surface questions from those whom he is speaking with and he loves to meet questions head on. This has really affected my life and it's why now for 28 years I have had the privilege to do something called 'ask the pastor' with various groups in our church as they get to send emails to me with questions, but Paul didn't have email but he anticipated questions and would surface questions that he thought they ought to be asking.

Why is Paul able to do that? He is able to do that for two reasons. One, is that Paul knows the Bible so when the Bible tells him what man made in the image of God is like apart from Christ, he knows they will live for glory but it won't be God's glory but for the person's glory. Paul also knows from the Bible that when men and women get saved and their lives are changed, they don't become perfect on this side of eternity. They do still have the old man within them that controlled their old way of living and is still trying to come back in and penetrate their heart and life to somehow make it about them, but he also knows what those under grace still have to deal with. Paul knows what questions to ask and in this text we see four questions because he knows what the unbeliever is thinking, asking, or avoiding asking and thinking. He also knows outside of us is a culture of self.

Here is why Paul starts here with the 'then.' It is because the Gospel of God has revealed our only defense and reveals that the power and righteousness of God has been summoned by God to save any and all – helpless and hopeless sinners – by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, therefore then in light of this Paul now addressing four dominating, prominent questions that are not only prominent because God's Word has clarified it for him, but it's prominent for some very personal reasons. Paul is a saved sinner. He knows what drove him

before he was converted and he knows the old man in him that he deals with. These are the questions that Paul addresses in his own life.

Romans 3:27–31 says [27] *Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. [28] For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. [29] Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, [30] since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. [31] Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.*

Paul likes to raise an issue, speak pointedly and powerfully and then pick it up and enlarge it later and that's exactly what he is doing here. Paul brings these four questions to those who have acknowledged Christ through grace alone through faith alone and here he gives us the short answers to those questions but he is not through. In the next study we'll be in Romans 4 and Paul will give us the larger answer on the first question about boasting in Romans 4:1–2. Then he will give us the larger answer to the second question in Romans 4:3–8 and the larger answer to the third question in Romans 4:9–12. Then Paul will give us the larger answer to question four in Romans 4:13–25. These will be the next four studies in our series on Romans.

So, let's look at little closer at the short answers. The first question is what becomes of our boasting? Do you see what Paul assumes here? He assumes that before you come to Christ you have a life of boasting. Here is why he assumes this; God made us for His glory and we are glory seeking people, but if we're not in Christ our sin nature makes us consumed with glory for ourselves. We are glory hounds. We will do anything and everything to find a way to get glory to ourselves – our marriage, our children, our job, our money, our possessions. Perhaps you're thinking 'I'm converted now.' We still have the same problem.

We have this constant desire day by day, even with true religion to make it about ourselves. When you're unconverted that self-centered glory reigns. When you get converted, it no longer reigns but it's still there and wants to put itself in everyday, even using Christianity to bring attention to ourselves and to exalt ourselves. It even works to make the Christian life all about me instead of Him. I'm not just talking about people with a superiority complex but even those with an inferiority complex. Those with a superiority complex basically become self-reliant, self-exalting and self-absorbed but those with an inferiority complex are also self-reliant and self-absorbed. One says 'look how great I am' and the other says 'I'm not as great as I think I ought to be (so pity me).' Self is still the point of reference and don't associate it with humility.

Studying for this series has so impacted me in my life to think my way through this. Even after converted we still manage to find a way to take those things of great value that God has given to us and say them in a way that it becomes about us. Paul's short answer to 'our boasting' is that it is excluded. Notice that he doesn't say it's managed or that it's bad manners but he says it doesn't belong in our lives – get rid of it. We boast only in the Lord. Boasting in ourselves is not to be tolerated. Paul says whenever you become self-reliant, self-absorbed, self-promoting or self-pointing you have to say to yourself that this doesn't belong and has to be excluded. I believe the other three are directly related to this – this one was the key. I believe Paul puts this one here because this one was his battle. It kept him from coming to Christ and then after he became a Christian, he had to address it. I believe this due to the evidence of Scripture.

I want to show you this from Philippians 3. Paul is bringing this to us because this is something God had convicted Paul of. He knows this is something that beats within all of us. Even when you get saved the culture of self wants you to make it all about yourself. This culture

of immorality, insanity, absurdity and rebellion against everything that God has declared – it's there because we believe everything is about me. Even after you're saved, inside of you there is still that old man which is the remnant of that old way of thinking where you would try to rationalize boasting in your life. Everyone ought to have a little bit of self-pride, right? There's a big difference between pride and self-respect that comes by the grace of God.

Paul says in Philippians 3:2–11, [2] *Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. [3] For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— [4] though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. [7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. [8] Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ [9] and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— [10] that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, [11] that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Here Paul shows us his issue with boasting in the flesh but he also shows us what marks us out as God's people in verse 3, for it's not self-worship but God worship. It is worship by the Spirit of God in spirit and truth. Where is our glory? It is in Christ Jesus – not in our marriage, our children, our family, our money, our possessions, the things we teach – but my glory must be in Christ Jesus alone. Then we see we put no confidence in the flesh and all three of these things deal with this boasting issue. That is what God's grace brings us to – worship of God not self, glory in Christ not self, confidence in Christ not self. Paul counted all loss because he knew it wasn't about him but it is all about Christ and Paul points out that suffering isn't something for self-pity but for Christ's glory. Christ is the One that raises me up.

So, we are to exclude boasting and the idea is to put it away, make no room for it. It also means to drop the curtain. Before you came to Christ by God's grace your life is devoted to yourself. Now that you have come to Christ close that play – drop the curtain. How do you close the play? Close your life of self, drop the curtain, take no more bows, take no encores and raise the new curtain for it's all about Christ. Boast in the Lord.

The second question is, and I like the way the NIV translation puts this even though I'm not a big fan of the NIV, by what principle is our boasting excluded? Paul says it's not by the principle of the law of works, for if you think your works save you then there are all kinds of reasons for boasting. If you understand that God has loved you from eternity past, has chosen to place His redeeming love upon you and that He sovereignly brought you from death unto life then it's the law of faith that you have been saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and it excludes boasting. Why? It's because I receive my righteousness by faith, I don't create my own righteousness. I believe in Jesus and receive His righteousness that has now been given to me. I believe in Jesus because God's grace set me free to believe in Jesus.

Ephesians 2:8–9 says [8] *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it (the faith) is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* God devised an instrument for me to receive Christ and His righteousness that I can't exercise without the power of Christ bringing me from death unto life so that I could believe and

no longer be dead in my sin. The origin of faith is that Christ gives me the ability to believe by grace. The object of faith is Christ for it's all of Christ, to Christ and for Christ. That brings me to the third question.

The third question is, God the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles or of Jews only? Who is Paul going to use to answer these questions? Until Abraham (the father of the Jews) in Genesis 17, there weren't any Jews nor were there Gentiles. It was people. By the way, this is the key to the race issue – one race, all from Adam, in multiple ethnicities. That's what we were and who made everyone? God. Paul's short answer to this question is in Romans 3:29b–30 which says [29b] *Yes, of Gentiles also, [30] since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.*

How so we know God has saved Jews? The Bible is full of the fact that God has saved circumcised Jews. How do you know that God saves uncircumcised? Abraham was the first Jew who was circumcised in Genesis 17 but was saved in Genesis 15:6 which says [6] *And he (Abraham) believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness.* Abraham was saved by the same righteousness you do – the righteousness of God in Christ. Abraham's was anticipating it by believing the promises of God – yours is looking back at the promises fulfilled in the Promised One but we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In case you missed it, the first Jew as saved while still a pagan – Genesis 15. Is there any difference?

We aren't sitting here because plan A failed with the Jews. Plan A was to reach people. The Jewish nation was designed as a covenant nation through which God would fulfill His promises – Abraham was told by God he would be given a seed and through that seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 22:18). So we (Jew and Gentile) who worship the Lord, put no confidence in the flesh and glory in Christ, are circumcised by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The old heart was cut out and the new heart was installed from Christ that glories in Christ and that worships the Lord.

Finally, we have the fourth question which is what about the law of God? Romans 3:31 says [31] *Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.* The law has been fulfilled. Who gave the law? God did, through His Son at Mount Sinai. Why was the law given? The law has no power to save and we have no power to take the law to save ourselves. The law can't save for it wasn't designed by God to save and we can't save ourselves through obedience to the law. The law came to show us what sin is, that we couldn't save ourselves, to point us to Christ – the Law Giver – who would come under that law and provide us a perfect righteousness and pay the penalty for our disobedience to the law. We uphold the law and we don't make it do what it's not designed to do. The law shows us were indicted, impotent and we need Christ. Now, we use the law as God intended, the right use of the law and that's why we have it.

Why were those offerings there? They were pointing to Jesus. Why the office of prophet, priest and king? It all pointed to Jesus – the Prophet, the High Priest and the King. Christ is the Lamb of God. If the law had the power to save, why did they have to keep doing it everyday? Christ does have the power and once and for all the sacrifice for all of His people has been given and we are saved in and through Him. That is what the law is pointing to. Luke 24:27 says [27] *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* John 5:39 says [39] *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me.* II Timothy 3:14–15 says [14] *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been*

acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. As a Christian we use the law lawfully.

Here's the takeaway. Salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone is singularly for the glory of God alone – we boast only in the Lord. If you are in Christ, drop the curtain for it's not about you. You have been bought with a price so glorify God in your body (I Corinthians 6:20). Everyday don't let Satan, the world and the flesh try to make it about you. Even as a Christian it is so easy to get self-absorbed, self-reliant, self-promoting and self-demanding. I want to recall the parable of the Pharisee and the publican/tax collector in Luke 18.

Luke 18:9–14 says [9] *He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: [10] “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11] The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. [12] I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ [13] But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ [14] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Where is the Pharisee? He is in the temple praying. What is he saying? “I thank You Lord...” That almost sounds like a testimony in an evangelical church. He is in the right place (the temple), doing the right thing (praying), saying the right things (thanking God), but if you let people talk long enough you find out where their heart is. Then the Pharisee says ‘I'm not like him' there the self-righteousness is revealed, the boasting in self. It's wrapped up in what would have been called good religion – in the temple, praying, thanking God – then you find out that it's all about me – self-reliance.

I love that God has drawn a new circle which is I'm saved by grace alone, as the circle continues, through faith alone, right to the center of the circle, in Christ alone, as the circle is joined, for the glory of God alone. I have never seen how Christianity is so used, maybe it's the fear in what's happening in the dissolving of the culture, and how many times professing Christians are asserting self, exalting self, relying on self, counting ourselves more important than others and I have the last word thing. This self-exaltation, self-promotion, self-reliance, self-absorption – needs to drop the curtain for it has no place in our lives.

We need to raise a new curtain and that curtain is the glory of God alone in Christ. We boast in the Lord. I'm saved from Christ to Christ and in all things is the preeminence of Christ. It is enough that Jesus died and that He died for me. As the hymn *It is Well with My Soul* says;
My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

I don't boast in preachers or my religion or politicians or my job or in anything but the Lord. We want to turn out Christians that go into everything as salt of the earth and light of the world but we boast only in the Lord. He is our confidence, our heart and our life. Galatians 2:20 says [20] *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.* So in this dissolving culture when the challenges come, flee to Christ and make it about Him. When opportunities arise, platforms are given, compliments are granted, it's all

Christ. When disillusionment and disappointment arise on the horizon, flee to Christ. Say 'no' to self-pity, self-indulgence, self-reliance, self-promotion and say 'yes' I'm dead – curtain dropped – Christ is all. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. If you would like to pray with someone please call us at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we would love to pray with you about giving your life to Christ or to work on any other areas in your life for Christ. Please Holy Spirit, come and do what You do through Your Word – bear witness to Christ. He is our Hope. He is our Life. Let him who boasts, say 'no' to our boasting and may we say 'yes' to boasting of the Lord, in the Lord and to the Lord, in Jesus' Name I pray, Amen.

Power Point

THEN...

Because the Gospel of God reveals that the power of God and the righteousness of God has been summoned to save any and all helpless and hopeless sinners by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone—Now Paul addresses four prominent and very personal questions.

1. What becomes of our Boasting?
2. By what Law (principle) is Boasting excluded?
3. Is God the God of both Jews and Gentiles or Jews only?
4. Is the Law of God overthrown through a salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone?

LIFE TAKEAWAY

Salvation by Grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone is singularly for the Glory of God alone—we boast only in the Lord—where is boasting—it is excluded!

*Self-boasting abhorred—Christ-boasting adored
Self-Exaltation excluded—Christ-Exaltation enjoyed*