

February 5, 2017 by Steve Brandon



The Law Of Faith

Romans 3:27-31

- 1. Excludes All Boasting (verses 27-28)**
- 2. Includes All Peoples (verses 29-30)**
- 3. Upholds All Law (verse 31)**

When I was in college, I majored in Physics. And one of the aims of Physics is to reduce the complex into the simplest of forms. For instance, ...

$$E = mc^2$$

The energy of an object is equal to the mass of the object times the speed of light squared. This is Einstein's law of relativity.

$$F = ma$$

The force upon an object is equal to the mass of the object times the acceleration of the object. This is Newton's second law of motion.

$$PV = a \text{ constant}$$

The product of the pressure and the volume of an ideal gas at constant temperature is a constant. This is Boyle's law.

And the laws of Physics aren't always represented by a formula. Sometimes, it's a sentence, like the second law of thermodynamics. "The total entropy of an isolated system always increases over time."

Like Archimedes' principle: "The buoyant force is equal to the weight of the fluid displaced."

And in physics, the task at hand was to take the laws that have been verified by experiments, and apply them to predict the behavior of our world.

Well, when it comes to theology, it's normally not that simple. God is complex enough that you can't simplify him down to a formula to apply in every circumstance. Life is complex enough that you can't come up with a single unifying principle to live by. People are complex enough that you never really quite know what is going to happen with them.

However, today, we will come close. Because we are going to look at one of the laws of the Bible. We are going to look at one of the guiding principles of salvation. It's called, "The Law of Faith." We are going to look at what it means that we are saved by faith alone.

This is what our text explains for us this morning. It explains to us what it means that we are saved by faith, and not by works. This is "the principle of faith." So, if you haven't done so already, I invite you to open in your Bibles to Romans, chapter 3. Our text covers verses 27-31.

Romans 3:27-31

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. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Our text begins with a question, "Then what becomes of our boasting?" (verse 27). And again, I remind you when Paul raises a question in the book of Romans, it's because there is a connection to what he just said. And you would do well to ask yourself, "Why did Paul ask that question?"

I think that here there is a simple answer: Paul just said is that our salvation comes by grace through faith. Look back at verses 23 and 24.

Romans 3:23-24

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

In other words, our salvation comes to us as a gift. We don't work for it in any way. Rather, it comes to us by grace. The only thing that we bring to the equation is our sin (verse 23). And so, the question naturally comes up, "What part did we play in our salvation?" What can we boast about in our salvation? And the answer come back, "Nothing."

Here's my first point this morning about the law of faith. It ...

1. Excludes All Boasting (verses 27-28)

When you are saved by grace through faith, you have no ground upon which to boast. Isn't that what verse 27 says?

Romans 3:27

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.

See, God saves by faith alone! In other words, in order to be saved from your sin, you need to come to an end of yourself. You need to come to an end of your resources. You need to simply call upon the Lord as an empty vessel needing help.

This will be Paul's clear statement later in chapter 10 and verse 9, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." This is what the thief on the cross did. When dying justly for his sins, he turned to Jesus and said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

There was an acknowledgement that Jesus was Lord, as he mentions Jesus being sovereign over a kingdom. There was a belief that God will raise Jesus from the dead, as he mentions Jesus being alive in the near future. So what did the dying thief have to boast in? Nothing! He gave nothing to the local synagogue. He didn't perform a religious fast of any sort. He didn't confess his sins to some priest and offer up sacrifices for his sins. He helped no ladies across the street. He didn't join the throng in worship. He made no efforts at evangelism. All he did was express his faith in Jesus Christ.

And Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). This is how all of us are saved. We are dying thieves who simply cry out to Jesus, pleading for mercy. And God, by his grace, saves us. We can boast in nothing that we have done.

Romans 3:27

What becomes of our boasting? It is excluded.

Now, the Jews loved to boast in their religion. But Jesus warned against them. He warned against those who would sound their trumpets to announce to all what they were giving to the temple treasury. He warned against those who would stand and pray in the synagogues and in the streets to be seen by others as righteous people. He warned against those who would look gloomy and disfigure their faces when they were fasting, so that others would notice their good deeds.

Do you remember the Pharisee in Jesus' parable? He stood and prayed to himself. "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get" (Luke 18:11-12). There's some religious boasting! "I haven't engaged in a list of dirty sins! I have fasted! I have prayed! I have given my tithes!"

Now, if God saved us on the basis of those things, then we could boast about them. And our boasting would have full merit! But God doesn't save us from our sins based upon religious efforts and attainments. He saves us by his grace, and that means that we have no boasting.

This is the clear implication of "the law of faith" (mentioned there in verse 27). When God chose to save us by grace through faith, boasting is excluded.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Have you ever thought why it is that God doesn't save us by our works? He could have established a way to himself that was based upon works. But what would be the outcome? We would share in the credit. We would share in the glory.

But God has chosen to save us in such a way that in the end, it is God who gets all the glory for his saving grace in our lives. Ephesians 2:7 says that, "in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." In other words, when our lives are finished and we are with Christ in glory, we are going to be trophies of his grace. We will be proclaiming for all eternity, by our mere presence in heaven, that we are enjoying the presence of Christ, only because of the immeasurable riches of God's grace toward us!

See, when you are justified by faith, there is no boasting in ourselves. All of the boasting must go to God. That's the point of verse 28, ...

Romans 3:28

For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Have you ever thought why it is that God saves us by faith alone? What about love? Why doesn't God save us by love? Why doesn't he save those who love him?

Fundamentally, it comes down to this: because salvation fundamentally comes to us by receiving, not by giving. "Jesus came to his own, but his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:11-12). In other words, by definition, believing in Christ is receiving him. Love to God is giving, as are all works of the law. But faith in

God is receiving.

Now, if you watch the Super Bowl this evening, you will see those who don't understand this. If there is any position group that is known for their boasting, it is the wide receivers. The linemen don't boast. It's the receivers that boast. They are the ones with the outgoing personalities! They believe that they are always open. They believe that every play should go to them. And when they make a great play, it seems like they forget that the quarterback is the one who threw them the ball to put them in a position to make the catch in the first place.

And rather than doing their fancy dance when they score a touchdown, they should, instead, make a b-line for the quarterback. And direct our attention to him, who threw him the ball.

Now, in fairness, the catches that these men make is incredible! And they have reason to rejoice at their great catches.

But, the catch that we make in our salvation is far different. We don't have to run down the field at high speeds, avoiding defenders who are trying to get in our way. We don't have to catch the ball that is at the end of our fingertips, trying to tap our toes in bounds as we are being pushed by the defender. When it comes to salvation, God has come to us with the football in hand, he sets it in front of us, and gives it to us. We simply need to hold out our hands and receive the ball. We simply need to receive the Lord in faith.

And when God saves us this way, the law of faith Excludes All Boasting (verses 27-28). Let's move to our second point. The law of faith, ...

2. Includes All Peoples (verses 29-30)

See, if the principle of salvation is that it comes to us by faith alone, then it's not out of the reach of anyone. Anyone can open their arms and receive Jesus. Anyone can believe in Jesus. That's what Paul argues in verses 29 and 30.

Romans 3:29-30

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

It matters not whether you are Jew or Gentile. Since there is only one God (verse 30), he is God of both the Jews and the Gentiles (verse 29). See, there isn't one God for the Jews and another God for the Gentiles. No, there is only one God. And the law of faith means that there is only one way to God, through faith.

Now, if you notice, there is a bit of a difference between the Jew and the Greek. And if you look closely at verse 30, you notice a slight difference in Paul's wording.

Romans 3:30

since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

Now, if you try to figure out the difference between "by faith" and "through faith," I think that you will end mostly in speculation. I think that it's best to see these words as simply "rhetorical." That is, he was simply using different words for stylistic reasons. But if you think about it, the Jew and the Gentile--though they both come to God by faith--they do come at it a bit differently. Paul alludes to this in chapter 1.

Romans 1:16

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.

Salvation is to everyone who believes; of that, there is no argument. But the salvation comes to the Jew first and also to the Greek. God placed a priority on the Jewish people first. After all, they were God's chosen people. They were the ones with the oracles of God. They were the ones on the planet who were uniquely blessed by God. They were the ones who were recipients of God's covenant. The rest of the world stood outside that covenant.

Paul wrote of the Gentiles in Ephesians 2:12, "Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Historically, the Gentiles were at a different place than the Jews. And in this way, the gospel came first to the Jews long before it came to the Gentiles who were "strangers to the covenants of promise."

Furthermore, when you trace the spread of the gospel through the book of Acts, you see it coming to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles. In fact, in the first 9 chapters of Acts, it's primarily a story of the gospel coming to the Jews. That all changes in chapter 10, when Peter is summoned to take the gospel to Cornelius, a god-fearing Gentile. And from that point on, the book of Acts describes the spread of the gospel throughout the Gentile world.

But still, there is a priority of the Jews. When Paul entered a city to spread the gospel, he went to the Jews first. Normally, this meant coming to the local synagogue. But, as is the case in Philippi, he went to where the Jews gathered for prayer--down by the riverside (Acts 16:13). Only after the Jews had first opportunity to respond did Paul extend the reach of the gospel to the Gentiles.

So, the Jew and the Greek came to God a bit differently. One came in fulfillment of the promises of God. The other came as an outsider into the fold of God. And their experiences were different. And by way of application this morning, all of us come to God in slightly different ways.

Some of us are raised in a strong Christian home. Others are raised in a godless home. Our environment taints our coming to God. The one in the strong Christian home comes to God a knowledge of the Scriptures and in full support of family. The one in the godless home comes to God with little knowledge of the Scriptures and (sometimes) in defiance of family.

Perhaps that accounts for the difference of working Paul uses in verse 30 (Jews by faith; Gentiles through faith). But at the end of the day, we all come to God through faith. This is the law of faith. It Includes All Peoples (verses 29-30).

And if you think about it further, you can see how it works. When you come to God, you don't need to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When you come to God, you don't need to offer your sacrifices in the temple. You can come to God anywhere.

You can come to God in a church. You can come to God in a bar! You can come to God in Canada. You can come to God in Zimbabwe. You can come to God on an airplane or on a boat or on your bed. You can come to God watching the television in your basement. Because, you come by faith. There is no ritual that you need to perform. There is no place you need to go. There is no duty you need to do. There is no person that you need to talk to. You simply need to cry out to God.

This is the law of faith. The law of faith Includes All Peoples (verses 29-30).

Perhaps this should help you as you think about sharing the gospel to those without Christ. All peoples can believe in Christ. And you can call all people to repentance. This is what Paul did on Mars Hill. At the end of his message to the intellectual elite of his day, Paul declared, ...

Acts 17:30-31

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

This the message that we have for the world. "God commands all people everywhere to repent! And come to God in faith." Perhaps that is you this morning. Perhaps you need to repent. Perhaps you need to come in faith to Jesus Christ.

Let's look at my last point this morning. The law of faith Excludes All Boasting (verses 27-28), because we receive salvation by faith. The law of faith Includes All Peoples (verses 29-30), because all everywhere can believe. The law of faith, ...

3. Upholds All Law (verse 31)

With this point, I'm trying to be consistent with the verbiage of verse 31, which reads.

Romans 3:31

Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

Again, we see a question that Paul asks: Do we overthrow the law by this faith? And again, I encourage you to ask the question: "Why did Paul ask the question?" Again, I don't think that the answer is too difficult.

Paul has been demonstrating that you don't come to God via the law. You come to God through faith. And if this is so, it can lead us to wonder what the use of the law is. If we come to God by faith, then what's the point of the law? And that's Paul's question "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?" And Paul replies, "By no means. On the contrary, we uphold the law."

Now, figuring out exactly what that means is difficult. But if you look at the context, I do think that we get some clues.

At the beginning of chapter 3, Paul points out the value of the law of God, calling it the oracles of God. The Jew had a great advantage in life, being instructed by the law in how to live. Yet, the problem came in that the Jews sinned. They were unfaithful. And this thought led Paul to the conclusion that none of us are righteous. We are all sinners.

That's what the law clearly demonstrates in Romans 3:10-18. Scripture after Scripture testifies to this very thing. And then Paul makes his comment in verses 19-20.

Romans 3:19-20

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.

We uphold the law in that we allow the law to function God intended: to lead us to see our sin. And the fact that we come to God by faith doesn't nullify that law. In many ways, it is the fulfillment of that law.

Do you remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount?

Matthew 5:17-20

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For

truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

We will see later, in Romans 10:4, that, "Christ is the end of the law." What good news!

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