



No Boasting!

Romans 3:21-27

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Our text this morning is Romans, chapter 3, verses 27-31, but I'd like to begin our reading at verse 21 so we have the full context of Paul's thought. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely without error, the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative, and the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient. Romans 3, beginning at verse 21:

“But now the righteousness of God 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. For there is no distinction: 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, 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. 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. 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.”

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Lord our God, we come to you this morning and ask that you would open up your Word to us, that in it we might see the Lord Jesus Christ, that your Word might take up residence in our hearts, that we might be made more and more like Jesus. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen. We come now to the final paragraph in the third chapter of the book of Romans. Paul is concluding his initial argument about justification by faith. He has shown that all are under the judgment of sin. He has shown that no one can be justified by what they do. Then he shows that the forgiveness of sins, justification, and forgiveness can all be found through faith in Christ.

This morning, we're going to look at three implications of the great doctrine of salvation by grace. Paul has laid out what it means to be saved, that salvation is by grace through faith, but now he's going to come to us and show us what that means for us. I'd like us to look at three things from our text. First, *salvation by grace excludes boasting*. There is nothing we can boast in if we are saved by grace.

Secondly, *salvation by grace is for everyone*. There is no one who is excluded from salvation by grace. Finally, *salvation by grace upholds the law*. Rather than doing away with the law, salvation by grace establishes the law of God. Excluding boasting, for everyone, and upholding the law. These are the implications of salvation by grace.

Salvation by Grace Excludes Boasting

Let's begin by looking at how *salvation by grace excludes boasting*. We may first ask the question... *Why does Paul even continue on with this last paragraph?* He has just given us a crescendo. He has just reached a high height describing the atonement of Jesus Christ. We might expect Paul to end on that high note. That's what a good literary man would do, but Paul is not a literary man. Paul is a preacher, and he's a preacher of the gospel.

He knows we need to see the gospel not just from a positive presentation of what it *is* but also from a negative presentation of what it is *not* so we can flee false gospels. So he continues in showing these three implications of the gospel. First, a negative thing about the gospel: the gospel excludes boasting. This is a very important thing for Paul to come to, because the atonement is at the heart of the gospel and the Scriptures.

Paul begins by excluding our boasting. He says, "What is the consequence of being justified by grace as a gift? What are the consequences of by no works of the law will any human being be justified? What does this mean for us?" It means no one can boast or glory in who they are or what they've done. This is crucially important for us, because pride is at the heart of who we are as sinners. It is in our nature to boast and to take pride in things.

After all, pride is the great sin of mankind. Pride is the very root sin from which all other sins flow. We see this in the Scripture, as Satan himself is described as having been proud, as having thrust himself up, wanting to be in the place of God. We don't have to get very far in the Bible to Genesis 3 to see that Adam and Eve both were proud. They wanted to be like God, the Scripture tells us. They wanted to know good and evil so they could be like God.

Pride is the sin we are most susceptible to. It is natural to our fallen state to want to be above other people. Pride also is nurtured out of our sight. It is a problem that hides in the dark places. Worse than that, in all other moral systems, pride is held up as a virtue. You're supposed to be the best you can be. You're supposed to put your best foot forward. You're supposed to show God why you are worthy of his love.

All philosophical and religious systems are based on the idea of pride innate in human nature, that we can do things to please God. Pride demands that God approve me for what I have done. Pride is constantly pleading my worth. It says, "I am good enough. No, wait a minute. Check that. I'm *more* than good enough." At its heart, pride doesn't need Jesus. Pride says, "I am enough."

Paul says the gospel cuts off pride. The gospel does not say to you that you are useless. It doesn't say that you are valueless. Actually, it's quite the opposite. The gospel tells us we are of great value to God, but it *does* say there is nothing you can do to answer the problem of sin. The gospel tells us you cannot make yourself right before God. Therefore, boasting is excluded.

Now what does Paul mean here when he uses this word *excluded*? He means boasting is shut off, shut out forever. Perhaps picture in your mind taking something and putting it in a closet, shutting the door, locking the closet, putting a padlock on it, and then pushing a dresser in front of it. Boasting is excluded. It is not to be seen at anytime and in anyplace. We are not to glory in anything we have done, because salvation is by grace.

It is shut off by the principle of faith, Paul tells us. You can't be justified freely by faith and still try to get credit and boast. It is like this. Imagine if someone was very generous with you, and they came up to you and gave you a brand-new home. You moved into this gorgeous, four-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath, fully centrally air-conditioned, hardwood-floors, brand new house. Some friends came over to visit you, and they said, "This is a nice house."

Your response was, "Well, yes, it certainly is, I built it with my own two hands. I had to sweat and labor. If you could see the calluses I got from building this house... It was so much work. I'm not even sure it was worth all the work I had to put into it." If we were observing this, we would say, "You're crazy. You didn't do anything. You got this all as a gift. How can you claim this is your work?"

That pales in comparison to us saying that we have worked to earn God's love. Us boasting in our own works pales the comparison to the new house. Verse 28 allows Paul to make specific and clear what is going on. He says, "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law." What, then, is excluded? What are we tempted to boast in? We're tempted to boast in our works, in the works of the law.

The first way we see this is in our *morality*. We look around us, and we find people who are worse than us. Then we like the comparison. If we're honest with ourselves, if you look long enough and hard enough, you can always find someone who's worse than you, someone to make you look good. So we think we have it all together because we're better than *this* person or *that* person.

After all, we like to be honored. We like to think we could be approved by God, either for what we've done or what we *will* do. Even if we say to ourselves, "Well, we haven't really done things right," our excuse is always, "But this is what we *will* do. We'll be perfect. From this point on, I'm never going to be impatient with my children ever again. From this point on, I'm never going to say an angry word to anyone ever again."

Usually, when we turn over that kind of new leaf, it lasts maybe about an hour. We realize that nothing we've done and nothing we claim we *will* do can give us standing to boast before God. Our sinful nature wants a checklist. It wants a list of things we've done or *will* do that we can check off and bring to God and as we stand before him say, "You owe me, God. Look at what I've done for you." Salvation through Jesus' work does away with all of this. We have no grounding to stand and boast on our morality.

The second thing we are tempted to boast in is our *knowledge*. This is especially tempting in a world that cares so little for doctrine and the teaching of the Bible. We think that because we know much about God we can take pride and hope in that. We know a lot of things *about* God. We know about the Trinity. We know about God's attributes. We know about his history and his actions, but we need to be very careful here.

I want to take a moment and specifically talk to our young people. You come to church each and every week with your parents, and you learn an awful lot. You go to Sunday school, and you're able to answer the Sunday school questions. You're able to come up with all of the knowledge and information. You memorize Bible verses, and you go to vacation Bible school, and you know the Bible stories. You know an awful lot about God, and that is good, but it can't stop there.

It can't stop at just knowing *about* God. You have to *know* God. You have to trust the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. You have to commit your life to him with no reservation, to know that he is your only hope. No one is saved by knowledge. We are saved by the work of Jesus Christ. Do you know who knows the most about God? The Bible tells us that it's Satan. Satan is the creature that knows most about God. If you think about it, he was there at the beginning of creation. He was amongst the first beings created.

He knew how powerful God was. He wanted to be like God. We're filled with accounts in the Gospels of demons seeing Jesus and declaring that he is the Son of God and doing that at a time when his disciples are following him around, bumbling, not sure what's going on. The demons know. James even tells us that the devils believe but tremble. They tremble because they know *about* God, but they will not submit to God. They will not trust the Lord. They will not be redeemed.

We have to remember that just as our morality will not save us and we cannot boast in it, our knowledge cannot save us, and we cannot boast in it. If there is anything you think you have done that makes you worthy of saving or gives you the reason to boast, you're headed down the wrong path. There is a second, more subtle way we can boast. Those of us in church realize we can't claim we have done works worthy of salvation. That would get someone giving you an odd look if you said, "I'm earning my salvation through works."

But our pride is so crafty it finds a way to give us credit even with salvation by faith. What do I mean by that? If you ask the average Protestant why he is going to heaven, he will tell you he believed God and others didn't. He will say it's all about his faith. He's justified because of his faith. He had faith; therefore, God saved him. This is where an important error can creep into our thinking.

It's as if God says, "I know you can't keep my law; therefore, I'm going to change things up a bit. I know there are so many things to be kept from the Old Testament and from the law of God that I'm going to make this much simpler. Now, instead of keeping all the law, all you need to do for your part is to believe. That's *your* part. If you do it, then I will save you."

What does that mean? That means my faith has become a work. It's what I bring to God to obligate him to save me. It's what makes me different from someone else. It's no different than if we decided to have a basketball dunk contest and went out to the back of the church where the hoop is, and once it became painfully obvious that I couldn't, along with most of you, dunk on a 10-foot hoop, we said, "You know what? Let's just lower down to five feet and see how that works." We just change the standard.

Faith is not a change in standard. There is not one law of works and a different law of faith. When Paul says the "law of faith" here in verse 27, he is talking about a principle. We've already seen Paul use the word *law* in different ways to mean either the actual law of God or the books of the Bible. Here it means a principle. It's the principle of faith.

The principle of faith, by definition, excludes any form of boasting. The very idea of faith is against boasting. If that's the case, how could we boast in our faith? After all, the Bible tells us our faith is not even our own. It is a gift from God (Ephesians 2). Faith is not *our* work; it's the work of the Holy Spirit. The Scripture tells us the Holy Spirit works where *he* wills, not where *we* will.

This is very important. I want you to listen closely. Nowhere does the Bible say we are justified because of our faith or on account of our faith. The Bible always says we are justified *by* faith or *through* faith. Faith is an instrument to receive what justifies us: the work of Jesus.

I can't put it any better, so I'm just going to quote Martyn Lloyd-Jones. "Faith is nothing but the instrument or the channel by which this righteousness of God in Christ becomes ours." Faith is not a work. It's not something we do. It's not something that separates us from others. Faith is the gift of God that receives the righteousness of Christ. There is no room for boasting in a gift we've received.

Salvation by Grace is For Everyone

The second implication of justification is its *applicability to all*. Notice I didn't say its *application* to all. I said its *applicability*. Not everyone is saved. We all know people who do not want to be saved. We know people who don't love God, who don't have any time at all for Jesus. That's why I say *applicability*. That is, salvation by grace can apply to everyone.

We see this in two ways in verses 29 and 30. Paul says, "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." Paul is once again anticipating an objection. This time someone might say, "Does this really apply to everyone? Aren't there all kinds of religions? You may believe in Jesus, but I don't need to."

This aspect of our world is interesting. We live in a world that has a sense of orthodoxy. There are certain things you are allowed to say in public and other things you are not. If you go against the orthodoxy of our

culture, you will be attacked and savaged, usually beginning on Twitter, but not ending there. At the same time, there is a formal kind of relativism in the world today, that there are many kinds of religions and all that's important is being spiritual, *any* kind of spiritual.

You know the old adage, "All roads lead to God"? Well, it's even worse today, because now it's not just that all roads lead to God; it's that all roads lead to some *kind* of god. We don't even have to have an agreement about what god is. So the question comes, "Isn't this just about the God of the Jews?" Someone might object to Paul and say, "Don't bother me with your law. Don't bother me with your view of salvation. Don't bother me with Jesus. He may be for you, but he's not for me."

In Paul's day, this manifested itself in the way pagans viewed the gospel. Believe it or not, in Paul's day, Christians were seen as being irreligious; that is, not religious enough, because they only believed in one God. They were not religious because they didn't believe in dozens and dozens and dozens of gods. Christians believed in one God and that he was applicable to all people.

What Paul is telling us, as we listen to the message of salvation by grace, is that it is applicable to all people. There is only one God. Therefore, we must listen to *his* message and his message alone. There is no other god with whom we have to deal. There is no other god who can save. Paul tells us this in 1 Timothy. "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

It was preached in the book of Acts, chapter 4. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved [but Jesus]." Salvation by grace through faith is so important, because there is no other way for a person to be right with God. That's why Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

So don't waste your time looking into something else. There is no other hope other than Jesus. This is also why it is so important for us to spread the good news of the gospel. It's the only hope our neighbors, our friends, our family have. There is only one God, only one message, only one way of salvation. So it is critical that we bring that message to a lost world.

An immediate fear someone might have when he hears there's only one way of salvation is that he might not be on the inside track, that he might be left out, that salvation might not apply to him because he didn't grow up in church. He doesn't go to vacation Bible school. He isn't a part of a Bible study. "What can I do?" Have you ever been somewhere where there was an insider discussion going on and you pretended to know about something so you wouldn't be embarrassed?

This happens to me every time I go to the mechanic. He begins telling me about parts, hoses, doohickeys, whatchamacallits and what they do, and I stand there with a very serious look on my face and nod and go, "Oh yes, that could be a problem." I'm sitting there thinking to myself, "I have no idea what you're talking

about, and I really hope this is not going to cost a lot of money," but I don't want to admit I don't know what's being talked about. This is a fear we have.

So someone might have this fear. "I don't know all this insider language. Pastor, I had enough trouble hearing and pronouncing *propitiation* last week. I don't know what it means. How can salvation be for me?" Paul lets us know this one way of salvation is applicable to everyone. God justifies by faith, and he does so universally. There is no other way of salvation. The way of salvation is narrow. There is no substitute, but no one is shut out of that way.

Paul specifically deals with this with the primary difference in his lifetime: the difference between Jews and Gentiles. He specifically says that God justifies the circumcised *by* faith and the uncircumcised *through* faith. Don't let those two different prepositions hang you up, as if faith acts differently in a Jew and a Gentile. It doesn't. Paul is just using a little artful language. He'll use these prepositions in different ways in different portions of other books.

The idea is the same. Faith receives the gift of God, salvation by grace, whether you're a Jew or whether you're a Gentile. This is the greatest difference Paul could have used. If he were speaking in *our* day, he may have said, "God is the one who justifies African-Americans by faith and Caucasians by faith, native-born Americans by faith and immigrants by faith, men by faith, women by faith, rich by faith, poor by faith." It doesn't matter who. All are justified only by faith.

This salvation by grace is for everyone. Who can come to Jesus? Everyone. No one is excluded. "So how do I have to come, then?" might be your next question. Just like the old hymn writer wrote: just as you are. It's not just a nice hymn; it's good theology. There is no preparation needed to come to God, because you can bring nothing with you to boast in. Do you see Paul's point? If you can't boast in anything, how could you bring something?

If we look at the Bible, people come to Jesus in all sorts of different ways. Some people, like Zacchaeus, come running, singing and shouting. Others, like Nicodemus, come a little more cautiously, asking some questions. Still others come kicking and screaming, like the apostle Paul. If you can hear the words of the gospel today, you can come. Salvation by grace is for all.

"Well, *when* can I come?" You can come at anytime. There's no waiting. There's no preparation that needs to be made. It doesn't matter what your time of life is. You may think you're too young. No. If you understand that you're a sinner, that you do things that are wrong, and it makes you feel bad and guilty and you need forgiveness, you can come to Jesus.

You may think you're too old. You may say, "But, Pastor, I've lived a long life, and I've done a lot of bad thing. Life has just passed me by." No. Jesus receives all kinds of sinners. Remember, there is no boasting.

There is nothing keeping you from Jesus. Again, I can't say it any better, so I'm going to quote the prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon.

"Oh, my dear hearers, come to Jesus! Come in the morning when the dew is on your branch, for he will not cast you out. Come in the heat of noon, when the drought of care parches you—and he will not cast you out. Come when the shadows have grown long and the darkness of the night is gathering about you, for he will not cast you out! The door is not shut, for the gate of mercy closes not, so long as the gate of life is open!" Salvation by grace is for everyone.

Salvation by Grace Upholds the Law

We conclude with the third implication of salvation by grace: *it upholds the law*. Because Paul has emphasized grace and faith, it's inevitable that someone is going to object, "Well, then the law has no purpose. It's worthless." There are usually two forms of this objection. The first comes like this: "I can do whatever I want because of grace. I have grace, so the law doesn't bind. Therefore, I can sin all I would like." Or the second form of this objection says, "That can't be right. That can't be true. Because of that, Paul, your gospel can't be true."

Paul takes this head on in verse 31. He asks the question and then answers as strongly as possible. He says, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law." This is once again Paul using this phrase *by no means* that we've seen translated, "God forbid!" It's the most negative statement in all of the Bible. There's no way you can say "No" any stronger than this.

When I was growing up, there were grades of *no*. "No. No way. No way, Jose." You really take it to the nth degree. There's no more negative you can get than this. Paul is thrusting aside this question. He says it's ridiculous to think that salvation by grace undoes the law. He says it's actually the opposite. Salvation by grace establishes or upholds the law.

How can this be the case? I think, first, we need to see that justification by grace shows that the law is so holy and so perfect no one can fulfill it. God hasn't done away with the law or changed its requirements. The law and its holy requirements remain in effect. That's what the gospel says, that all are sinners and all fall short of the glory of God. The law also requires punishment for sin, and the gospel upholds that punishment for sin.

The punishment for sin is death. We read that all the way back in Genesis 3. God does not forgive sinners by doing away with the punishment. He fulfills the punishment by enacting it on Christ. We saw this last week in the concept of propitiation, God's wrath being satisfied by Jesus Christ. It's not that God says, "Well, I'll give you a mulligan. Oh, don't worry about that. Boys will be boys." No. God says, "Sin *must* be punished, my law *must* be upheld," and the gospel makes that true in the sacrifice of Christ.

The other thing is that justification is more than just the payment of the penalty of the broken law. Justification is also receiving the righteousness of Christ. The Bible tells us that the righteousness of Christ is ours if we believe on Jesus. It's not just that we're not guilty; it's that we become righteous and holy in God's sight. Not because of anything we've done (we have nothing to boast in, Paul would say) but because of what Jesus has done, the righteousness of God given to us.

The law accomplishes this by Jesus. The reward of obedience to the law is upheld. The gospel upholds all of this. It doesn't do away with the law. If it did, there would be no righteousness of Christ to receive. If it did, there would be no punishment to be laid on Jesus. The gospel makes the law true. Salvation by grace also upholds the law in the life of the believer, the one who's saved.

The objection here comes that the saved person will simply just go on sinning. It's as if the only motivation for obedience is to get some kind of reward. The assumption there is someone who's saved is unchanged by the work of God. They remain just as they were before they were saved. So what happens is you can't tell someone they're saved, you can't give them grace, you can't give them faith, because you have to hold a little something back. You have to have something held back to get work out of them.

This is a part of human nature. We see this oftentimes in our families. What family has not used some form of this phrase? "Well, you won't get dessert until you do *this*." It could be "finish your vegetables." It could be "clean your room." It could be any number of things, but we hold dessert out, because we know once we give the dessert, what happens? We're not going to get the vegetables finished. The room is probably going to stay messy. That's human nature.

But human nature doesn't count on the sanctifying, transforming work of God in Jesus Christ. We're made a different person. In fact, through salvation and the work of the Holy Spirit you are actually enabled to obey the law. The righteousness that comes to us by free grace is the work of God, and it does not stop at a declaration of "Not guilty." You are able more and more to die to sin and live more and more unto righteousness.

So there is still no reason to boast, because this is the work of God. This is not of yourself. It is the work of God in you. Do not ever separate the work of God in Christ *purchasing* redemption from the work of God in the Spirit *applying* redemption. Salvation by grace is the great truth of the Bible. It's worth repeating over and over again. It is worth remembering the implications it has in your life.

It means you can never boast in who you are or what you have done, but you can only boast in Jesus. It means there is only one way of salvation, and that way is the way for everyone, every sort of person. It means God in this work upholds his law, showing his righteousness in Christ's work and also in the change he makes in us. Salvation by grace is the great work of God in the lives of sinners. We give him all the praise, for he is worthy.