

# Justified Through Faith

 Romans 3:27-31

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Last week we started the good news in Romans 3:21-26. These six verses were considered by one of the greatest scholars and godly men of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Alva McClain, to be verses that “all Christians ought to memorize.” His advice is wise counsel as he taught most, if not all of the Bible and the Book of Romans many times. He says, “If someone should ask me, “Brother McClain, if you could have just six verses out of the Bible, and all the rest be taken away, which would you take?” I would select these six verses. All of God’s gospel is there, and in a way found nowhere else in the Word of God.” What does he mean in a way found nowhere else? He means in a way that has such emphasis on the core of the gospel. What is the core of the gospel? One word “righteousness.” The good news is that in verse 21 a God-kind of righteousness has been manifested apart from the Law. This is what helped Luther break through and become free in Christ. Before he did not know there was a righteousness accessible apart from works of the Law. When he learned of it he was set free! Why did he not know of it before? Because it had been hidden from him and countless others during the medieval times when the Roman Catholic Church kept the Bible hidden from people through the Latin Vulgate and the Priesthood, most priests having no knowledge of the word of God, only able to recite the mass. Yet, Luther learned Greek and from the few manuscripts that Erasmus had put together he translated the Greek into German. As he did that he discovered a righteousness accessible apart from the Law and the prison gates sprung open. Here in verse 21 we see some of the material behind Luther’s being set free from bondage. Paul says that this truth was not new but only, being testified to by the Law and the Prophets, a reference to the entire OT. This righteousness was testified to come by the prediction of its provision in the seed of the woman and its application before the fact through faith. As an example, Abraham believed and it was credited to Him as righteousness as it was with all OT saints. There was no one counted righteous by keeping of the Law. There is only one way of salvation, through faith. As verse 22 asserts, “even a righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ.” The God-kind of righteousness that gives us legal standing with God comes “through faith.” Faith is the instrument through which we are counted righteous. The faith that counts us righteous is “in Jesus Christ,” the object of our faith. So then it is through faith alone in Christ alone that we are counted righteous. This righteousness is for “all those

who believe; for there is no distinction." Paul means in context no distinction between Jew or Greek. In Galatians Paul adds no distinction between male or female, slave or free. All distinctions common to man are irrelevant when it comes to justification before God. Justification before God is always "through faith in Jesus Christ" no matter who might be involved. Why? Verse 23 answers with two reasons. First, all are justified through faith "for all have sinned," as Paul already charged and summed up in 3:9, both Jews and Greeks are under sin such that they are a slave to sin who is master and whom they willingly obey. If they are under the power of sin then they cannot be justified by works! Second, all are justified through faith because all "fall short of the glory of God." Not only do we not do the works we should do but we fail to attain to the glory of God. The glory of God is not an abstract concept. In the Hebrew *kabod* and in the Greek *doxa*. The basic idea of both of those words is weight or heaviness. It's a reference to the weight or heaviness of His being and therein what Paul is saying is no one has ever attained to Him. No one even got close to attaining to His essence. Often sin is defined as any want of conformity to the character of God and that is what is being said here. No one conformed to His character. Therefore, verse 24, all must be "justified as a gift by His grace." This is the core truth of the gospel, justification. It is a legal declaration before God that gives us a standing before Him. It is also a work of God that is a gift to us. If it is a gift it is not something we can earn because something earned is not a gift but a payment for what is due. Justification is not a payment for anything we have done, it is something we freely receive. Further, there is no cause in us for Him to justify us, even our faith is not the cause of His justifying us, our faith is simply the instrument through which He justifies us. The actual cause of His justifying us is stated to be solely His grace. "We are justified...by His grace." What is His grace? Unmerited favor toward us, there is no merit in us, all merit is exclusively in the object of our faith, Jesus Christ. It is not held in Jesus Christ and other so-called saints like Mary. All merit is in Christ alone and therefore justification is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. By grace He declares us to be righteous in His court through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. His grace does not at the first make us righteous, in the sense that we become righteous, no, rather it declares us righteous so that we are given a legal standing of righteousness before Him. What is the basis of this legal declaration? The basis Paul says is "the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Christ paid the redemption price. We were slaves in the slave market to sin and He, by His death, bought us out of the slave market of sin such that we are no longer slaves to sin but slaves of our new master, Jesus Christ. Now we have been freed to obey Him and to know a freedom we never knew before, the freedom unto righteousness. Christ Jesus, Paul says in verse 25, was displayed publically by God "as a propitiation in His blood." The cross of Christ was not a private event, it was a public event, for all the world to see, by both the human and angelic realm. What was happening was He was making a propitiation. What is propitiation? It is satisfaction. God's justice had to be satisfied because He cannot compromise His justice. Since He must judge sin Jesus Christ willingly took upon Himself our sin (since He had none of His own) and thus satisfied the justice of God. This set God free, so to speak, to express His love toward

us in justification. Again, justified through what? "Through faith" in Him. Also verse 25 says that "This was to demonstrate His righteousness," that is, to demonstrate God's own quality of righteousness, to show that He does not compromise His character like Allah the compromiser who weighs out good vs bad works. Oh no, God is not like that at all. His righteousness must be satisfied entirely. That is why we have Christ dying for our sins and Islam only has Christ as a prophet. God had to demonstrate His righteousness. It could appear that God had compromised His character during OT times by justifying men prior to the satisfaction but this was due to another aspect of His character, namely His "forbearance" in passing over the sins previously committed. He is a great and multi-faceted God. So now, verse 26, "for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Now there is no question whether God is just in justifying each one who has faith in Jesus. Christ's cross demonstrated that God's righteous demands have been met so that He is set free to justify each and every one who has faith in Jesus. Having said that there is no other way of justification. It is always by faith alone in Christ alone. It is not by faith plus works or re-defining faith as a faith that produces certain works or a faith that perseveres to the end of one's life. It is simply faith alone in Christ alone, at which moment in heaven the individual is declared righteous in God's court. The verdict is announced once for all, it can never be overturned due to future behavior or lack of faith. It is a legal decision and there is no double jeopardy. In God's court you cannot be tried for any offenses for which you have already been declared just and God makes no mistakes. So if you have put your faith alone in Christ alone then you are seen by God as if you had always perfectly obeyed. This is your legal standing before God; your position and it can never be challenged. So then you may not feel righteous, you may sin, but as Luther said, *simil iustus, et peccator*. You are at the same time just and a sinner; just in position, a sinner in experience. But any accusation against your position will be met by His defense of you on the basis of Christ's righteousness!

Today we come to more of the most important and fantastic truth of justification by faith; which I said last week is well worth striving to understand because in it you will find freedom as you have never been free before. Why is there more of this? Because it is most natural to oppose the idea that you are justified simply by faith. Paul then states the argument in so many and varied ways in order to refute our most natural opposition to it. How can it be that we are counted righteous as a free gift? Don't I have to do something to get it or to retain it? But what would happen if I could do something to get it or to retain it? Then wouldn't that leave room for boasting, even if just a little bit? All these doors of supposed merit must be closed off in your thinking if you are to find true freedom in Christ. It must also be added that it is entirely preposterous and arrogant to think you did something to be justified. You do nothing; Christ does everything; even the faith you have is itself not doing something but receiving something. To think that it is doing something is a grave error. And to think that you could add anything to what Christ has already done is spiritual pride. I have to ask the question, "What exactly is it you could do to

get yourself out of the slave market of sin? If sin is your master how will you master it! If you are in chains to it will you break the chains or perhaps you will say it is you helping Jesus Christ break the chains, even if He does do 99% of the work? This is not a project you and Jesus are working on together. Yet multitudes of professing Christians claim to be in a kind of project with Christ, together breaking the chain of sin's mastery. Hogwash. To think that you could help Him is the height of arrogance. On the contrary, to think that Christ has broken them entirely by Himself, that is the center of worship. Now I will admit that some will charge me with antinomianism, saying I am preaching a lawless gospel and that if I preach this gospel it will only lead to men living sinful lives. To that I would respond that if I am not accused of antinomianism it is highly questionable whether I am preaching the gospel at all! I must preach a gospel with no strings attached. It must be free altogether. Any gospel that is not preached as an entirely free gift is not the gospel at all! Or they will charge me with preaching 'cheap grace,' saying one can believe and go about sinning as much as he likes. I will respond to that charge by saying that if that is so then they are preaching 'expensive grace,' saying that if one sins then he is not really saved to begin with. That to me is rubbish. One must never confuse the legal verdict that God makes in heaven upon the instant of faith in Christ with what happens in a believer's experience after that instant. It is, in fact, the fact of His instant legal verdict that sets us free to be thankful to Him so that we have the proper motive to live a new life in dependence upon Him. Let me put it simply, I do not think that telling people salvation is an entirely free gift will lead them to sin as much as they like. I think it will rather lead them to be thankful to God and I think telling them that they must do good works to evidence that they had the right kind of faith only leads to doubt and a striving when Jesus said, come, ye who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest! If men only knew how pleased God was with them because they are in Christ then they would know true freedom and be motivated to truly live by grace in dependence upon Him.

Now in verse 27 Paul asks, **Where then is boasting?** He says **it is excluded.** What are you going to boast about if it is all of grace? Now Paul did boast. You and I didn't do anything! And yet there is a passage that says that Paul boasted. What is it? 1 Cor 1:31. What did Paul boast in? The LORD! "Let him who boasts, boast in the LORD!" But as far as himself, Paul had nothing to boast. Now you may say, "Yes, but Paul was terrible, he arrested and even killed Christians. I have not done that. I am not as bad as Paul." You may not be as bad as Paul in practice but you are just as bad as Paul in heart. We are all under sin. And no one can say that they have continually done good and never sinned. So we have nothing to boast about. Do you really think that when we get to heaven we are going to sing praises to ourselves? That is what you are saying if you think you have done something to help Christ. You didn't help Him at all. What you did and I did is why He went to the cross. You haven't even helped Him by having faith because your faith doesn't do anything. Your faith is receiving something from Him. We can't boast about it. Faith is non-meritorious. This must be understood and Paul drills it into us over and over and

over in these chapters. Faith is not a work! Note how he says it here, **By what kind of law** is boasting excluded? **Of works? No, but by a law of faith.** You see there is no room to boast in faith. Faith is not working. If faith was a work then yes, we would have every right to boast in our faith. But it is set here in opposition to **works**. The two are completely incompatible. I also hope you see that faith is not a work because there are many theologians and Christians that do not see that. I have talked with some of them till I am blue in the face and when I talk to them I camp right here in Rom 3 and 4 because there is no better place in the whole word of God to show them that faith is not a work. The argument is that if we have faith then we are contributing to our salvation. Then salvation becomes a cooperative effort. You see they are thinking that faith is some kind of a work that contributes and so we must be given credit for it and that they say is salvation by works. Now the argument is entirely based on the idea that faith is a work, but you see here that Paul sets it in opposition to works and he will continue to show this in chapter 4. Nevertheless they have decided that faith is a work and so they must have a passage that says that faith is the gift of God. Now when I say they say faith is a gift of God let me clarify what they mean. They mean that God gives a man faith in the sense that you walked into a bakery and the baker gives you the money to buy the bread and then you give it back to him. This is their idea. God must give us faith in regeneration so that we can give it back to Him.

Now to support this silly idea they turn to Eph 2:8-9. They will always make this argument. It is the same silly argument I have read and heard a hundred times. But I also read the Greek text of the word of God and there is no possible way the gift of God here is faith. It doesn't matter how many people say faith is the gift of God or write it in a book. Paul does not say that and Paul did not think that. There are four views of Eph 2:8-9 and what is the gift of God. The reason there are so many views is because it is so difficult. Dan Wallace, one of the greatest Greek scholars in the world, says, "This is the most debated text in terms of the antecedent of the demonstrative pronoun, το το."<sup>1</sup> What he means is that where it says, and "that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, the demonstrative pronoun, "that" is in the neuter while "grace" and "faith" are feminine and "salvation" is masculine. The problem is what does "that" refer to? There are four common views. First, those who say it refers to faith. Faith is the nearest antecedent but the problem is that faith is feminine and does not agree with the demonstrative pronoun in gender, which is neuter. Second, others say it refers to grace. But the problem is that grace too is feminine and does not agree with the neuter pronoun. Third, others argue that it refers to the concept of the by grace through faith salvation. This is possible, a neuter demonstrative pronoun has been shown to refer to a complex of ideas. Many able grammarians like A. T. Robertson hold this view. Tom Constable and Harold Hoehner also maintain this view. A. T. said, "Neuter, not feminine ταυτη [tautē], and so refers not to πιστις [pistis] (feminine) or to χαρις [charis] (feminine also), but to the act of being saved by grace conditioned on faith on our part."<sup>2</sup> A. T.'s comment is a good explanation of this view because it maintains that God's part is to save us by grace and man's part is to have faith. The only

strange thing about this view is that it says later in the verse that this gift is “not of works” and if faith is included then this is the only place the Scripture expresses the idea that “faith is not of works.” Fourth, others argue that it refers to salvation. Wallace says, “A fourth view is that κατὰ τὸ τὸ is adverbial, though this view has surprisingly made little impact on the exegetical literature.”<sup>3</sup> “If this is the force in Eph 2:8, the text means “for by grace you are saved through faith, and [you are saved] especially not by your own doing; it is the gift of God.” The issues here are complex and cannot be solved by grammar alone. Nevertheless, syntactical considerations do tend toward one of the latter two views.” Grammarians Vincent and Wuest seem to prefer this fourth view. I think it has equal support to the third view grammatically and better support from the rest of Scripture. Repeatedly the Scriptures teach that eternal life is a free gift. It would not be out of keeping with the Scriptures for Paul to say here what is said so often elsewhere, namely, that salvation is the gift of God. Therefore it is not faith that is the gift of God but salvation that is the gift of God. If faith was meritorious we could see an argument for why it must be a gift of God. But because it is not meritorious, but instead the reception of the gift of salvation, there is no need to manipulate any verses to say this. Over and over Scriptures attribute faith to man or say that a man had faith. “Abraham believed and it was credited to Him as righteousness.” “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” “Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.” Never once do we read that God gave someone faith. Notwithstanding we do read that the Lord opened Lydia’s heart to respond in faith. We gather then that God does do a work upfront of our believing the gospel in order to woo us to Himself. But that work is not giving us faith in the sense of the analogy with the baker. In the end it is simply not scriptural to say that God must give us the faith because if we have faith then we are contributing to our salvation. Our faith does nothing of the sort. Faith is not doing something; it is receiving something. There is no work in receiving something. When you give me a gift and I receive it I did not work for it. Until this is understood a great deal of confusion will only continue. But Paul in Rom 3-4 is so clear that if men would simply accept the straightforward word of God confusion would desist.

Also verse 28, **For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.** Whether you call faith a work or a work of the Law, both are impermissible expressions. Faith is entirely independent of works. Faith is receiving something; works is doing something. Paul returns to the thought of verse 21 that “apart from the Law a righteousness of God has been manifested.” This is the truth that helped Martin Luther break through. He thought before that the law and gospel were one and the same. When it came to him in Romans that they were distinct he was set free. God declares a man righteous solely through faith separate from any works of the Law. Note the expression **justified by faith**. The construction is a dative of faith meaning, in, at or by. It could mean either by means of faith referring to the channel or it could mean at the time of faith. Either is acceptable. I said last week, it is best to say we are justified by grace since the expression justified by faith can give the impression that

God justifies us because of our faith. If you don't understand it that way but rather as a channel then that's fine by me. In any case, this justification is completely **apart from works of the Law**. By the Law no flesh will be justified; only faith in Jesus Christ! Criticism is often leveled against those who say this verse teaches it is faith alone because the verse does not say alone. No, it does not say faith alone, but it does juxtapose faith with works. Therefore justification is by faith alone apart from any works.

Verse 29, **Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also.** If all men are justified the same way then the Jewish idea that they could come to God another way was illegitimate. What the Jew could not deny was that God was the God of all men, both Jews and Gentiles. It was part of their conception of God that He was the universal God. If this is the case then no matter who has faith God will justify him. There cannot be more than one way of justification unless there were more than one God, a conception hideous to the Jew who quoted the great shema of Deut 6:4 three times a day, "Hear O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is One."

Since this is true then justification is the same for both Jews and Gentiles. As Paul says in verse 30, **since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.** The difference between **by faith** and **through faith** is the difference between prepositions *ἐκ* and *διὰ*. The first means springing forth out of faith or in response to faith; the second simply means through faith. The difference is not intended to draw a contrast. Paul's point is to say that God justifies both Jews and Gentiles in the same way. There is not a God of the Jews who justifies by works and a God of the Gentiles who justifies by faith. There is just one God and therefore He justifies all men through faith.

Verse 31, **Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.** Some may conclude that since God does not justify by the Law then Paul was nullifying the Law. The word **nullify** means to be useless, a waste. Paul argues to the contrary in the strongest terms, **May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.** The word **establish** means "to reinforce the validity of." Paul is saying that faith reinforces the validity of the Law. This part of the verse has been the most difficult to understand for interpreters. How does justification through faith reinforce the validity of **the Law**? It does so by showing that one of the purposes of the Law was to bring the knowledge of sin. 3:20 already asserted this thought saying, "through the Law comes a knowledge of sin." Therefore faith does not do away with the value of the Law because the Law still serves the purpose of showing people their sin. This is what convicts them and brings them to faith. So faith, rather than making the Law invalid actually reinforces the importance of the Law in serving the purpose of convicting men of sin which leads to faith.

In conclusion, in verse 27 Paul has shown that because we are shut up to faith and faith is not meritorious then we have no room to boast. The only one we can boast in is the Lord. In verse 28 the reason is because a man is justified by faith apart from works. Faith is juxtaposed with works in order to

make the point clear that faith is not a work. Therefore faith is not a contributing factor to our justification. Faith is not the gift of God, salvation is the gift of God. The Bible could not state this in clearer terms. In verses 29-30, since God is the God of all men then this way of justification through faith is true for all men. Finally, in v 31 some may think faith made the Law invalid. Paul on the contrary says that it establishes the Law, most likely because it serves to show us our sin and therefore our need for faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 1999), 334.

<sup>2</sup> A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Eph 2:8.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 1999), 335.