

*All Roads Lead Here: Justified By Faith Alone*  
*By Jason Huff*  
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*Genesis 15:1-6; John 1:9-13; Romans 3:27-4:8*

Friends, our final Scripture reading today comes from Romans 3:27-4:8. Hear now the Word of the Lord. “Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about -- but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."”

What do you brag about? We’re taught it’s not polite to brag, but everyone does it. Maybe you remember the playground. “I’ve got 40 Superman comic books.” “Well, I’ve got all 107 original Star Wars comic books.” “My dad’s really strong – he could beat up your dad.” “Well, my dad’s a lawyer – if your dad beat up my dad, he’d sue you and take all your money!”

As we get older, we brag indirectly. We post pictures of our kids and grandkids on Facebook and show pictures from places we’ve been. On the one hand, we want to know what our friends are doing; we’re glad to hear about those we love. If we didn’t want to hear about those folks, we wouldn’t be on Facebook; we wouldn’t call them! We like seeing each other’s families and their adventures. On the other hand, we all know friends who can’t be joyful for you unless they’re getting in a “me too!” or a “well, my kid is a black belt in karate and yours is just a purple belt.” The difference between sharing good news and bragging can be a fine line.

And because as Christians we receive the good news of Jesus’ death on the cross for us and we continue to share that good news, the fine line applies to us as well. What we say about our faith can welcome people into a relationship with Jesus or scare them away. And so in today’s passage, Paul teaches us how we are justified by God and why the best response to our salvation is not bragging or boasting but praise.

In last week’s passage, we learned that righteousness from God comes through Jesus to all who believe in Him. This righteousness takes the place of our own. Because of our sin, we have no inherent righteousness; we don’t have any inside of us. It has to be given to us; it has to come from the outside. In Galatians 3, Paul teaches that when we are baptized, we are clothed with Christ. By Jesus’ death, through faith, we are forgiven our sins and are seen as righteous in God’s sight. We are accepted by God through Jesus’ righteous life and death on our behalf.

But misunderstanding faith and how we are justified can create big problems. In Paul's day, the Jewish people were taught by their religious authorities that they were truly better than everyone else. God had chosen their people, out of all others. God made Himself and His ways known through the Hebrews. Even more than that, they believed that they could be righteous in God's sight by following the ancient Law God had given their ancestors. They believed they could follow it perfectly. They boasted about their righteousness to God Himself! They boasted that they and they alone knew God and could be close to Him. It was crazy talk to them to think that anyone outside of their people could experience God's salvation.

That's what Paul was dealing with in his day, but it's still on display in Christianity today. The question Paul is dealing with first and foremost is this: does God owe you anything? As he writes, "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation." If we can follow God's law perfectly, if we can do everything God requires of us, if we can do works that will *earn* us salvation, is salvation a gift? No. If we contribute to our salvation, then it's not a gift.

There are times on big ticket items, like a game system, where I've made a deal with one of the boys – I'll pay half, you pay half. (I'm paying half because I like to play the games too!) You might say that I am giving a gift of my half. But is the half they contributed a gift? No, not at all! They earned that money – they got it from someone other than me. And there's no question legally that they own half of it outright. That portion isn't a gift. You could even say that they gifted me their half!

God does not owe us anything. He doesn't owe us for a portion of our own justification. We contribute nothing to our justification. It is trying to contribute to it that brings about our own downfall. Because we either accept the gift of Jesus' righteousness counted to us as our own, or we must pay in full the debt we owe. It's not a lot of His and a little of ours. It's all or nothing. God does not help get you into the new heaven and new earth. He either brings you in or He does not, but He does not help you cross the finish line after you've done all you can do.

Yet that's what we hear from many Christians. It's not a Protestant vs. Catholic thing; it's a huge issue throughout all of the universal church. I have been told by different people, "I deserve to go to heaven because I have faith. Those people who don't have faith don't deserve to go to heaven." I've had it told to me that bluntly, though some people are gentler about it. It's boasting. I'm in and you're out. I deserve; you don't. I earned; you didn't.

But if we've learned anything over our study of Romans so far, it's that no one deserves eternal life. Everyone deserves death. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But through Jesus, all those who have faith in Him, who throw their lot in with Him, are counted as His, with His righteousness. As Paul says, "we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." The very faith we have is a gift. We cannot boast about it because we don't create that faith; God creates that faith in us through His Holy Spirit. In both letters to the Corinthians, Paul repeats Jeremiah who wrote, "Let anyone who boasts boast in the Lord." In his letter to the Galatians, Paul states, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Our only boast is that Christ saved a wretch like me, not that I earned anything.

Paul shifts his conversation a little when he makes sure that everyone knows the Gentiles, the non-Jews, are included in salvation. God is God of everyone since there is only one God, Paul says, “who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.” That statement alarmed Paul’s Jewish audience. Circumcision was the mark of God’s covenant with the Jews. If God justifies everyone through faith in Jesus and circumcision has nothing to do with it, then the Jews – Christians and non-Christians – had a real concern. If circumcision isn’t required to be righteous, what about the rest of God’s law? Are we lawless? Is Christianity actually an immoral religion that destroys and ignores God’s law?

Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about -- but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

Bragging and boasting – intro

We boast in Jesus Christ alone (give Paul’s examples)

Judaism had a history of boasting – partially because they had the law, partially for following it

The law is good – it teaches what true morality is and established Israel

Paul was accused of saying the law didn’t have value – it absolutely does

So after Noah, who is the chief person of faith – Abraham the father of Israel

Abraham didn’t have the law, so he couldn’t follow it – and he did things that the law condemned (lying to others)

Abraham’s belief in God’s promises are why Abraham is called righteous, not what he did as a good person

His faith saved him, not his works

We need the credit of righteousness apart from works

Major thoughts:

1. Stop justifying our own actions and trust in God
2. God saves the same way throughout history – credit of Christ before and after
3. The OT is just as important as the NT – the OT gives weight to NT arguments
4. We must make sure we are living out our faith, not just thinking it (chair discussion)
5. We share our faith with humility – we don’t believe because Jesus is making us better, but because He rescues us despite our failures