

Romans: The Implication of Justification

Romans 3:27-31

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you turn with me to Romans, chapter 3. We come today to our last look at Romans 3:21-31, where Paul is setting forth his teaching of justification by grace through faith alone. Paul has made it very clear in Romans, chapters 1, 2, and 3 that God is a righteous God, and that He expects righteousness from His creatures, and that no one, absolutely no one apart from Christ is righteous. Neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, no one is righteous before God; not the religious, not the pagans, not the Jews, not the Gentiles. No one is righteous before God, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that creates a predicament. In the final judgment of God, how will anyone be found righteous, how will anyone be declared righteous? How will anyone be accepted as righteous? How will anyone enter into everlasting fellowship with God because God is a righteous God, and He cannot fellowship with unrighteousness? The apostle Paul says I have the answer. The answer comes from the Bible. What I'm about to say to you is not new, but it is powerful. And what I'm about to say to you is this. The only way anyone can stand before God is by a righteousness provided by God for them. God accepts them because of His Son, and as they trust in His Son, they are declared to be righteous, as if they were His Son. It's an absolutely astounding thing.

Now I want to stop right there and say that every other world religion gives a different answer than that. Every other world religion that postulates a final assize, a judgment before God, an afterlife in which the lives of today matter, gives some sort of a variation of this answer. Well, how can a man be accepted by God? By being a good person. You've got to do better, you've got to do good things, you need to do good works. Somewhere in their answer is the idea that we ourselves condition God's acceptance of us, that we prompt God's acceptance of it. That something in us, even something that God helps us do prompts God to accept us. To that the apostle Paul says, "Wrong. The only way a man is accepted by God is when God Himself declares that person to be righteous because of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ as that person has trusted in Him." It is that great message, that radical message, that shocking message that we've been looking at for the last several weeks.

Now in verse 27 Paul begins to derive some implications from that. And we've already begun to look at that. Today, I want to focus especially on verses 29 through 31, and four implications that Paul derives from that truth of justification. He tells us that that truth has implications for how both Jews and Christians are saved. Secondly, he says that it has implications for the one way of salvation. Thirdly, he makes it clear that that teaching does have implications for how we live. The freedom that leads to an obedient and holy life, and finally one interesting implication of this teaching is that it always draws a certain accusation. But that accusation actually proves the grace which is contained therein. And I'd like to look at those implications with you today. So let's hear God's holy word in Romans 3, beginning in verse 27:

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man 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 indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

Thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Lord and God, we thank You for Your word. We pray that this day that this would be Your word to our hearts. Cause that word to be spoken clearly, but more importantly, cause that word to be heard clearly. Stir up our *hearts to respond in faith to Your truth. We pray, O God, that some who have never known the peace which comes from knowing the free justification of God in Christ, we pray that some who do not know that would come to know it even this day. We pray that Christians who have struggled with the freeness of Your acceptance of them would be encouraged and strengthened today. We pray that You would be exalted in our hearts, as we understand Your word. That You would display Yourself before us to be glorious and merciful. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

There are four issues raised in these three little verses that close Romans, chapter 3. I'd like to look at those issues with you today.

I. Is God the God of Jews only?

They are all implications of what Paul has been teaching about justification. The first one you'll find in verse 29. Paul asks a question. "Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of the Gentiles also?" He answers, "Yes, He is the God of Gentiles also." Why is Paul saying that? He's telling us that because he wants to reiterate especially to the Jewish audience he's speaking to and to the

Gentiles audience because of what they've heard the Jewish audience say, he's wanting to reiterate that there's not one way of salvation for Jews, and another way of salvation for Gentiles. When it comes to salvation, when it comes to justification, 'different strokes for different folks doesn't work.' In fact, as far as Paul says, it's wrong. There are not different strokes for different folks when it comes to justification, when it comes to salvation, when it comes to God's acceptance of mankind. There's one stroke and there's one folk. There is one way of justification, there's one people of God, and there is not two, there is not a different course of action, a different way of being accepted by God.

Now, of course, no Jew would have denied that there is only one God. Every Jew would have professed that. Indeed that was central to the Jewish faith. However, the Jewish people to whom Paul was speaking were ethnically exclusive, and they were legally external in their religion; and that in and of itself had promoted a climate in which it made it hard for them to accept this divine breakdown of the walls of separation between Jew and Gentile and the divine fulfillment of the Old Testament by Jesus Christ. And that unbiblical spirit of separation blinded some Jews to the truth of the justification by faith that Paul had been preaching. And so Paul is emphasizing once again, and it's not the only time he's done it, that there's one way of salvation for both Jew and Gentile. There's one way of being accepted by God.

Now to the Gentiles, that's music to our ears. We glory in the fact that God has made a provision for us Gentiles. We know that God in His mercy chose the people of God in the Old Testament, the Jewish nation, to be the representation of His kingdom on earth, and we know that there was a time when very few in the Gentile world knew anything of the one true God. And so it's music in our ears when we hear that God in His mercy saves Gentiles like us the same way that He saves His people. But my friends, that word grates on the ears of our Jewish friends. It sounds intolerant to them, it sounds mean, it sounds biased, it sounds anti-Semitic.

I want to pause and say there's no way to candy coat this. This is offensive, but just remember this friends. Paul knew that this was offensive. That's why he spent much of this book trying to explain this point. Paul knew this was offensive. You remember he said that the gospel was an offense to the Jew. It was a stumbling block for the Jew, and to the Greek. There were aspects of the gospel which caused the Jewish person to stumble. Now Paul wasn't saying this because he hated Jewish people. He was not a Jew hater, as we would say today. Paul was a lover of the Jewish people. He was a Jew himself. He will later say in this Book, in the eleventh chapter, that he could wish himself accursed if only his people would come to the knowledge of the truth. In other words, he can say I wish that I myself could be eternally damned if only my people would come to a knowledge of the truth. And so Paul's words here are not the words of someone who hates the Jewish people. This is the word of God through Paul, a person who is a Jew and who loves the Jewish people, and he is emphatically

stressing that there's one way of salvation.

My friends, it's very popular in some forms of theology today, even amongst some Christians, to argue there's one way for the Jewish people, and there's another way for Gentiles. That is not the Bible's teaching, it's not Jesus' teaching, it's not Paul's teaching. Contrary to the teachings of many, there is one way of salvation. Jews and Gentiles are justified precisely on the same ground. That's the first implication of what the apostle is saying.

II. There is one way of justification for all.

The second thing is this. You'll see it in verse 30. Because, Paul goes on to argue, God is one, the way of justification is one and the same for all. Because there is only one God, there is only one way of justification, and it's one and the same for all, Jew and Gentile. In other words, when you consider that God is one and when you consider that God is just, and one part of justice is you don't do one thing for one group and another thing for another group. So when you consider that God is one, there is one God, and that God is just, it is clear that there is only one way and no more, there's only one way of justification.

Paul knows that all the Jewish audience that he's speaking to, and all of the Jewish Christian audience that he's speaking to know that central truth found in Deuteronomy 6, verse 4, that the Lord is one. He knows that they know that. And knowing that they know that God is one, that there's only one true God, he appeals to that truth in order to draw an implication about his doctrine of justification. If there's only one God, then there's only one standard of righteousness. And if there's only one standard of righteousness, then there's only one way to satisfy that demand for righteousness and justice. And, therefore, Paul says, both the circumcised, the Jewish people, and the uncircumcised, those who are not Jews, those who are Gentiles, are justified in the same way. Because there's one God, there's one way of justification, Paul argues.

And this reminds us of a second thing, and it's just as unpopular as the first point that we drew. And that is this: There is one way of salvation. Paul is emphatic about that. Now again, I know that there are many people, even people who profess to be Christians, especially those Christians of a more liberal stripe who believe there are many ways up the mountain, there are many roads to the end of the journey. There are many ways of salvation. There are many legitimate teachings of the world religions that will lead you to God. That is not Paul's view. My friends, you cannot rescue Paul on this point. He is unrescuable. Paul is emphatic that there is one way of salvation, and he is emphatically opposed in all his teaching that suggests otherwise. He is emphatically opposed to the idea that anyone can be saved apart from Christ. Now many people will say to Christians who announce something like that in public, "Well, you're narrow minded, you're

bigoted, you're biased, you're intolerant." And the response, of course, would be: "Well, we would be if we have made it up. But we didn't make this up. This is the Bible's teaching. We accept it as God's teaching, this is Jesus' teaching, it's Peter's teaching, it's Paul teaching. It's the teaching of all the apostles. It's not some isolated thing off in a corner in the Bible. It is the historic belief of Christianity, and, in fact, you won't find anyone within the pale of Christianity who has been accepted by mainstream Christianity until about the last fifty years who has dared suggest that there are other ways of salvation outside of Jesus Christ." Paul is emphatically stressing that there is one way of salvation. As unpopular as that is today, that is Paul's teaching.

But let me pull back and make one further comment. Oftentimes, those who deny that teaching pit themselves as the people who are open-minded and tolerant. And those who believe there is one way of salvation, are posed as the Neanderthal. It's like an international wrestling match, and we're the bad guys. Now the problem with that is to deny that Jesus is the only way of salvation cannot be done without either denying the necessity of His death or the sufficiency of His death. In other words, you can't be neutral about Jesus and deny that He is the only way of salvation. It's not that you think, well, He's one option. Oh, no, the minute you say He's one option, you have either denied the necessity of His death or the sufficiency of His death.

Now let us reason together for a moment. Suppose Paul is right, and he is. And you show up on the last day, and you stand before God and you say there are many roads up the mountain. Jesus is one of those ways. I just don't happen to think that His death was necessary or sufficient. What do you expect the response will be. You see, you can't be noncommittal. You can't be open to Jesus. You've either got to be for him or against him. He won't let you be open to Him. There are only two options. You either bow the knee to Jesus, or He will bow your knee forcefully. There are only two options when it comes to the Lord. You either accept His claims, or you openly reject them. And the apostle Paul presses that home. Because of this truth of free justification, we need to recognize this is the only way a person can be reconciled to God.

III. Justification by faith does not nullify God's commands

Thirdly, Paul, everywhere he went, got this objection to his teaching. You'll see it in verse 31. He gives us a paraphrase. This is clearly language that Paul has heard over and over. He gives us a little snippet of it after explaining his teaching of justification. Someone says, aren't you nullifying the law through faith, Paul? Aren't you making void the law of God? Aren't you making void the commands of God? Aren't you suggesting that people go and live wild lives and sin so that grace can abound? Aren't you suggesting that obedience doesn't matter? Aren't you suggesting, Paul, that holiness isn't a necessary part of the Christian life? Aren't you saying that there's no place for works in Christianity? And Paul's

response is, "May it never be. On the contrary, my doctrine of justification by faith actually establishes the law." Justification by faith, in other words, Paul says, rightly understood, doesn't lead you to neglect the law. It doesn't lead you to negate the law. It doesn't lead you to hate the law. In fact it will lead you to say with the Psalmist, how I love your law, O Lord.

But on the other hand justification by faith doesn't lead you to believe that you can do anything that you want. I mean, you're saved by grace now. You can live any way you want. You can sin boldly so that grace will abound. And so Paul, in verse 31, raises and then briefly answers this question saying that God's free justification does not mean that works or obedience or love does not have a place in the Christian life. Paul wants you to hold two truths simultaneously in your understanding. You must understand first that there is absolutely no contribution whatsoever on your part to your justification. There is no work that you do that contributes to your justification. There's no obedience that you do that contributes to your justification. There is no love that you show that contributes to your justification. There is nothing in you that conditions God's justification. There's not even anything in you that God does that conditions your justification. Justification is done on the basis of the work of Jesus Christ. It's received by faith alone. So your works contribute absolutely nothing to your justification.

He wants you to understand that on the one hand, on the other hand he wants you to understand that obedience and works, love which flows from a renewed heart, those things are a necessary part of the Christian life. We could see him argue that case in I Corinthians 13, but I can't think of a shorter place where he does it than Ephesians, chapter 2. So turn with me there. In Ephesians 2, verses 8 through 10, he says these marvelous words: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast." So there's verses 8 and 9 and what has he just said. Your works contribute absolutely nothing whatsoever to God's acceptance of you as righteous. Your works contribute absolutely nothing whatsoever to God's declaring you as righteous, and to be part of His family. You contribute nothing at all to that. And then look at the next verse. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." Good works, obedience, holiness, love, all flow from the work of God in us, but contribute nothing to our being accepted as righteous before Him. Those are two glorious truths which Paul is happy to hold right together and ask all Christians to believe them fervently. Works contribute nothing to our acceptance by God. Works are always present in the heart that has been renewed by the grace of God, but contribute nothing to God's acceptance, His declaration of us as righteous. And so those two truths Paul sets forth in response to anyone who says well, Paul, you're teaching nullifies the place of obedience, the place of the law, the place of holiness in the Christian life. Paul's response is oh, no, it's doesn't. In fact it's the only way it's established in it. And he'll explain that a little bit later on. But there's one sort of flipside truth.

IV. Our good works do not cause God to accept us.

One last implication that you also see in verse 31, and I want you to think about it. It may be a little mind stretching, but think with me here for a moment. This is an accusation that Paul's teaching consistently got. He got this accusation in Galatia. He had apparently received this accusation from the time of his ministry in Asia Minor because he's already writing it in the book of Romans. We know that people followed him around, attacking him about this teaching because we learned that from Luke in the book of Acts. So Paul consistently got this accusation. But think about it. Think about it. It is clear that many people who heard Paul teach on justification, thought that he was saying there was no place for works in the Christian life. Now think about that. We know that they were misled by that. But think about it. Why were they misled? They were misled because one thing that was clear about Paul's teaching is that there was no place for our works in justification. There was no place for our works in how we are accepted by God, and how we are declared righteous by God. And, therefore, think about it, my friends. If you are teaching Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. If you believe the Bible's doctrine of justification by faith, set forth here by Paul, you must be able to be accused of having no place for works in your doctrine of justification, because Paul himself was accused.

I want you to pause and think for a minute here, because what I've been saying for the last several weeks as we've worked from Romans 3:21 to Romans 3:31, would be positively denied by many people who are affiliated in one way or another to Christian churches. If there was someone from say, a Church of Christ background in a strong traditional Church of Christ setting, there would immediately be this retort: No, no you're not saved by faith alone. You're saved by faith and baptism. You must be baptized by immersion by a Church of Christ minister. Because Peter says, you know, repent and be baptized. Baptism is necessary for acceptance by God. And Paul's retort is no, it isn't. No it isn't. And you're saying where did Paul say that? He said it in I Corinthians 1. You remember? There were people in Corinth who were arguing whether they were of Paul or of Apollos. And Paul says I didn't come here to baptize. I came here to preach the gospel. Now friends, if baptism was necessary for salvation, you couldn't have said that. Paul, you see, makes it clear that there's nothing that conditions the acceptance of God. Faith is how we receive the acceptance of God. And so there are some Christians that would argue oh no, it's faith, but it's something else. Perhaps there would be a traditional Roman Catholic person who would say, oh no, the way you are justified by God is you have faith, but you also have to do works which are enabled by the grace that you receive through the sacraments. And they would disagree with what we've been saying.

And the apostle Paul says, no, there is absolutely no contribution whatsoever from our works to our acceptance of God. And anytime you begin to mix your works into your basis of acceptance by God you do two things. You diminish the

fullness of the provision of Jesus Christ, and you undercut your possibility of assurance of salvation. Why? Because if you mix your works into the bag on that which causes you to be accepted by God, then you can never, ever, ever be assured of that acceptance, because you know that your works are filthy, you know that they are shot through with sin, you know that they are corrupt, you don't know the bottom of your motives. Paul says the glory of my teaching is yes, obedience is important, but it has nothing to do with your free justification in Christ. God in His mercy accepts you not because of something in you, but because of something in His Son and something that His Son did. And so when He accepts you, He looks at His Son, not at you. Do works flow from the work of God in you? Of course they do. Can any true Christian say let us sin so that grace may abound? Absolutely not. Paul himself in Romans 5:21 is going to say grace reigns in righteousness. But does the righteousness that flows from God's grace contribute to your justification? Here's Paul word. No. No.

There are lots of people who don't like this teaching. They think that it will lead to lawlessness, disobedience. But think of it. If your doctrine of justification has a place for works in it, it can't be Paul's doctrine of justification. Because his doctrine of justification didn't have any place for works in it. And, therefore, any church that teaches that there is any component of works whatsoever in the justification of the believer is not teaching what Paul is teaching.

Don't miss that my friends. Paul was dead serious about this. It's so vital because any looking to our works turns our face away from our Savior, who is the only hope of salvation. When John Bunyan, that great Baptist minister, came to Romans 3:24 and the truth of Romans 3:24. He wrote these words as if God were speaking these words to him as a sinner. Listen to them: "Sinner, you think that because of your sins and your infirmities that I cannot save your soul. But behold, My Son is by Me and upon Him I look, not upon you, and I will deal with you as I am pleased with Him." Every sinner needs to recognize this. The only way you will ever, ever, ever be accepted of God and assured of it is when you say, Lord, don't look at me. Look at the One who is standing at Your right hand, because I have put the whole of my confidence in Him. And don't look at me, look at me through Him. Let's pray.

Our Lord and Our God, there's nothing more marvelous than your free justification. Help us to understand it. We pray, O God, help us to embrace it, to live it, to be transformed by it, in Jesus' name, Amen.

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