

The Law of Faith

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Date: 19 October 2014

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- [0 : 00] If you have a Bible with you, I want you to open up to the book of Romans this morning. If you don't have a Bible, there are some Bibles in the chairs around you. The words will also be on the screen. And if you don't know where the book of Romans is, the book of Romans is in the New Testament, which means it's in the latter half of your Bible. I know I get up here every week and I say, everybody open up to so-and-so book, chapter and verse and all those sorts of things and assume that everybody knows where we are. But this week we're in Romans in the New Testament, towards the beginning of the New Testament, in chapter 3 of the book of Romans. And I'm going to begin reading in verse 27. And I want to ask you guys, in honor of God's Word, I want to ask you to stand while we read it together. The Apostle Paul writes, Then what becomes of our boasting? 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.
- [1 : 15] 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. Father, we give you thanks for this word. Amen. And pray that we would have understanding this morning. It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. You guys be seated. It's a story in the Gospel of John. In which Jesus has been sort of surrounded by crowds and crowds of people. The people have been flocking to Jesus sort of from far and wide. Because of the miracles that He's done. And because of some of the things that He's been teaching and telling the people. So He has been drawing large crowds. And then you arrive at John chapter 6. In which Jesus begins to say things to these large crowds. To you might say His fans. That are extremely offensive to them.
- [2 : 21] He says things to them like. You're going to have to eat my flesh and drink my blood. Which is gross enough to anyone. But to a Jewish person is downright offensive. And so Jesus begins to say things that the crowds find offensive. And by the time you get to the middle of chapter 6. The crowds are just leaving Jesus in droves. They've heard about the miracle man. They've heard that He has great teachings. And yet now that they hear Him for themselves. They don't like what they hear. And they begin to leave. And so the dwindling number of followers that Jesus has at that point. Devolves down to the 12 disciples and a handful of others. So that Jesus looks at the 12 men who've been following Him from the beginning of His ministry. And He says, do you want to go also? Do you want to leave also if I've offended you as well? Are you going to take off?

To which Peter responds. Lord, where else are we going to go? You have the words of life. In other words, Peter hears what Jesus is saying.

[3 : 21] He knows that people don't like some of the things that Jesus is saying. But when the prospect of abandoning Jesus at this point comes up. Peter's only response is to think, but where else can we go?

You and you alone have the words of life. We can't find what you have anywhere else. It's in you and it's in you alone. And I feel like week after week, as we come and as I stand up here and I open my Bible and we begin to listen to what the Apostle Paul and other writers of the Scriptures have to say, I feel the same way.

Where else would we turn other than this book to receive the words of life? Because Jesus is not physically present with us anymore. He has ascended into heaven.

And so how do we have access to the words of life? How do we have access to Jesus' own thoughts? We have access through this word. Jesus Himself teaching us in the Gospel of Luke that the entire Old Testament is not simply some antiquated book that teaches about an antiquated God, but indeed Jesus says the entire Old Testament and the history of Israel is really about Him.

The entire Old Testament is pointing to Christ. And so we find within its pages the words of life that tell us about the One in whom we find life. We have the Gospels that record the words and deeds of Jesus.

[4 : 40] And then we have the portion of the New Testament that we are in now. We have the writings of Jesus' very own apostles. Those who testify to the truth of Christ.

And out of all of those apostles, I probably enjoy reading none more than I enjoy reading the Apostle Paul. Because the Apostle Paul, when he writes, he writes in a very systematic, logical fashion.

He raises a point and then he answers objections to that point. Or he raises a point and then he shows you all the things that might come out of that, all the causes that might come out of that.

He is systematic in his thinking. He argues in his letters. He doesn't just say stuff. He argues for a point. And I like that. It helps me to think clearly.

It helps me to better understand the Gospel. And that's what he's been doing throughout Romans. We've now been in Romans since the first week of June. And we've been slowly working our way through these first three chapters.

[5 : 38] Now we've come to the end of chapter 3. And the Apostle Paul has really been laying bare for us the basic facts of the good news of Jesus Christ. We are finding in this book, Words of Life.

In fact, I preached a sermon, I think two weeks ago, that was actually titled, Words of Life. In which we looked at three key terms in the verses that precede these verses and tried to understand what these words mean.

We looked at the word justification or justified. To see, what does Paul mean when he talks about God justifying people? And we said that to be justified is to be declared righteous by God.

Not to actually be righteous or be made righteous by God. But by God's judicial decree to be declared righteous so that we are sinners. We are fallen people.

We mess up all the time. And yet, by faith in Jesus, His righteousness counts as our righteousness. And God views us as if we had completed all the perfect deeds of Jesus Himself.

[6 : 41] That happens by faith. We saw the word redemption, which speaks of Jesus buying us out of our slavery to sin. We have been born slaves of sin.

Enslaved to the power of sin so that we find ourselves sinning over and over. And more importantly, slaves to the penalty of sin. Death, hell, and the wrath of God. And Jesus, by offering up His own life as a payment for our sins, buys us out of the penalty that we ought to have to pay ourselves.

He has redeemed us. And then finally, we talked about the word propitiation in that same passage. Propitiation being essentially a sacrifice that absorbs and removes wrath.

So that Jesus, in His death on the cross, took upon Himself the wrath that we deserve for the sins that we have committed. Jesus took on Himself, on the cross, the wrath you and I ought to have to receive in hell.

Those are words of life. They teach us about the great work of Christ and what He has accomplished. And the Apostle Paul even moves on in that passage to tell us that Jesus has substituted Himself for us.

[7 : 57] He has substituted His righteousness for ours. He has bought us out of sin at the penalty of His own life. He has absorbed in Himself the wrath that we deserve. He has done all of that for a very clear purpose.

To preserve the righteousness of God. In fact, I want you to look back up at a couple of verses we looked at last week. In the middle of verse 25, where Paul is speaking of the death of Christ and why Jesus died on the cross.

And he said this, the death of Jesus. 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 God Himself might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

The death of Jesus, Paul says, is all about preserving the righteousness of God so that God, the just judge, the righteous judge is still righteous even though He lets sinners off the hook.

Even though He offers us forgiveness of our sins, He still remains the good and just judge because our sins don't go unpunished. They are punished in Christ on the cross.

[9 : 16] And that kind of a teaching leads to all sorts of questions and all sorts of potential objections to that. Three of which Paul is going to deal with here in the paragraph that we're looking at this morning.

He's going to ask three basic questions that stem from everything that he has said so far about the death of Christ and how we get right with God through faith. Just look at the questions real quickly.

In verse 27, he asks a simple question. In light of this teaching, then what becomes of our boasting? Question number one. Verse 29.

Question number two. Is God the God of Jews only? And then question number three in verse 31. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?

And so, I want us this morning to do something really simple. I want us to look at each of these questions, see how one question flows from the previous one, and I want us to try to understand the Apostle Paul's answers to these very important questions.

[10 : 16] So, question number one. What becomes of our boasting? Because, as fallen sinful people, we are predisposed to boasting. We are predisposed to being prideful people.

All of us are. Even if you have a sort of down on yourself kind of attitude, even if you are more of a quiet, shy person, your boasting, your pridefulness may not have as outward and outlandish as a display as other people, but inwardly, we are all geared towards thinking much of ourselves, making a big deal out of ourselves, thinking that we have done this right, and oftentimes at the cost of others, so that in order to elevate ourselves, we have to demote other people to make us look relatively better than them.

That's just how we are wired. We are wired as sinners, and as sinners, we are boastful, prideful people, even if that doesn't come out in an external, verbal sort of way. That's just how we are if we're really honest with ourselves.

And so, Paul is asking a really simple question. If God does indeed save us from our sins by faith alone, and not by anything that we do, then what becomes of this natural tendency that we have to boast?

What happens to our boasting? And his answer is really simple. It is excluded. It's done away with. It's no more. There is no more room for prideful boasting in the life of a person who has been redeemed by Christ and justified by faith in Jesus.

[11 : 49] There's no room for boasting. Though we all may still carry within us that prideful seed and that desire at the end of the day to find something in ourselves to boast about, the Apostle Paul says, when it comes to matters of salvation, there's no wiggle room left.

There's not an ounce of space given over to our own boasting in ourselves. Why is that? How can that be? Why is it that the way in which God saves us leaves us no room for boasting?

He tells us exactly. Because he asks follow-up questions. He says, how is this excluded? How is boasting left out? By what kind of law? What kind of principle?

By what kind of rule operative in the world is boasting excluded here? Is it by a law of works? No, he says.

It's by the law of faith. Which is logical. It makes sense. Because if we were right with God, if on judgment day, imagine yourself on judgment day, and you stand before God's throne because everyone will answer to him, the writer of Hebrews says, it is appointed for every man to die and then comes the judgment.

[13 : 01] It's happening. It's going to happen whether you like it or not. Stick your head in the sand. It doesn't matter. It's going to happen. Alright? Imagine yourself on that day, and God says, why do you think you should be acceptable in my sight?

Why should I allow you into my kingdom? Why? On what basis? And you stand and you say, well, I've done all of these good things. Here's my list.

Here are all of my works. The works which wait out next to sin will be like a drop of water in the ocean and will not count and will not help on that day.

And even if somehow they could help you, they would lead to your own prideful boasting and further sin on that day which would bring His judgment. They cannot help you on that day.

Paul says boasting is not excluded by works because if works had a part in this, if works had a part to play in your rightness or wrongness before God, then you would have a reason to boast.

[14 : 08] Boasting is excluded not because of anything to do with works. Boasting is excluded because of the law of faith. Because of this very simple principle that he goes on to spell out that he's been arguing for throughout this entire book.

Look at verse 28. For, or because. Here's how the law of faith works. For, we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

You notice how clear that is? A person is justified, that is, declared to be righteous by God, which is necessary in order to not receive His wrath.

You must be declared righteous by God or you receive wrath. And the only way you get justified, Paul says, is by faith apart from works of the law. Not faith, not believing in Jesus, plus hoisting up all the good things that you've done in your life.

No. Paul says, faith alone, faith by itself, faith apart from works of the law. There can be nothing added to your attempts to be justified, but simple faith in Jesus Christ.

[15 : 17] Nothing else will do. And when you come to realize that that's the only way you get right with God, not through anything that you do, but only through what Christ has done for you and trusting in that, there will be no more room left for boasting.

It would be as ridiculous as the person who's trapped in a burning building, unable to get out, the walls having fallen upon them and broken their arms and their legs and they can't move, they can't do anything to help themselves and they're hopeless and the fire is about to crash in on them when suddenly, the fireman comes in, breaks down the door, uses all of his strength to remove the debris and he picks them up and he carries them outside and as they walk outside, they say, everybody, I got myself out.

I did it. I'm a hero. Somehow, I dug myself out of the rubble with broken legs and broken arms and I've done it. I'm here. I'm okay. No one would do that. No one would boast in their own ability when they had no ability.

They could do nothing. There was nothing for them to add. They would only sing the praises of the firemen. They would get interviewed on the news and they would talk about the brave firemen who saved them when all hope was lost.

The same is true when it comes to salvation. We have nothing to boast about in it because we don't have anything to contribute to it. We are justified by faith alone apart from works of the law, apart from any obedience we might render.

[16 : 45] No boasting is allowed. All boasting is excluded for the one who is trusted in Christ alone for their salvation.

Paul goes on to ask another question that is related to this issue of works and faith or we might say the law and faith because Paul has been arguing up to this point throughout Romans that the function of the law and when I say the law and when Paul talks about the law most of the time he means the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

You've seen Charlton Heston in the Ten Commandments or the Prince of Egypt movie where they get the Ten Commandments and all the laws and all those sorts of things. That's the law that Paul is talking about that was given to the Jewish people through Moses on Mount Sinai.

And Paul has been arguing throughout this book that that law cannot save you as a sinner. Perfect obedience is required and sinners can't render perfect obedience.

That law cannot rescue you from God's wrath. It cannot do it. It cannot do it for the Jew. It cannot do it for the Gentile. It cannot do it for any single person. And now he's bringing this to a head.

[18 : 00] He will finish this argument in chapter 4 with examples from the Old Testament. But he's bringing it all to a head now at the end of chapter 3 with this simple statement summarize his doctrine justified by faith apart from works of the law to which the question arises then why the law?

Why do we have the law? And he will get to that question later but first he wants to address something else connected to that. Because there would be those who would say no, no Paul we can't have this faith alone business.

We can't have that. Because God gave the law to Moses and he gave it to him for a reason and God commands us throughout the scriptures to obey the law particularly through the Old Testament which was their Bible at this time.

God commands us throughout the scriptures to obey the law so no Paul we don't want to hear this business of justified apart from the law. We don't like that. That doesn't fit with our thinking.

That doesn't make sense to us. God gave the law so the law must be somehow in some way tied to the way that God saves people from their sins.

[19 : 07] It's got to be they would say. So Paul asks the question is God the God of the Jews only? Because if you're going to argue that obedience to the law is necessary to be saved right?

If you're going to say we've got to obey these commands if we want to have any hope at all. If you're going to argue that point that to get right with God you must obey say the Ten Commandments.

Okay? Never mind the food laws and all the other things. Let's just say just the Ten Commandments. Paul's answer to that is if that's the case then God is the God of the Jews only because only the Jews possess the law.

Now of course we live in 2014 and anybody can go buy a Bible with a copy of the Ten Commandments. Right? But in the first century go walk up to anybody other than a Jew and they have no idea what the Ten Commandments are.

No clue. They don't have them. For centuries the Jews and the Jews alone have possessed the law of Moses. And so Paul says is God the God of the Jews only? Because if you're going to say that obedience to the law of Moses is necessary then God only rules over the Jews and everybody else is just helpless out there.

[20 : 21] They have no hope. To which Paul answers is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes. Of Gentiles also since God is one.

The Old Testament while we think of it as a Jewish book and it is very much a Jewish book and while it is true that it was given to the Jews through Moses the Old Testament and the law itself points to the salvation of the Gentiles so that even when God chose Abraham the father of the Jewish people even when God made His covenant with Abraham He said to Abraham that it was through Abraham's family that all the families of the earth would be blessed.

So all the way way back there before Moses ever gets the law on Mount Sinai Moses isn't born yet God says to Abraham the father of the Jewish people through your family all families of the earth will be blessed and so there is ingrained into the Old Testament this view to God being the God of all the world all that He has made He is Lord and sovereign over and He has a concern and a care for all the families of the earth and He chooses Abraham and Abraham's descendants so that through them blessings might come to every nation every family every people group and we see that come to fruition when Jesus the descendant of David and of Abraham Matthew 1.1 begins the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David the son of Abraham we see that come to fruition when Jesus the descendant of Abraham makes available to all people through His sacrifice on the cross grace and mercy and forgiveness to people from every tribe tongue people and nation and Paul is saying here you know you very well know that God is not merely the God of the Jews only

God is not a tribal deity he is the God of all peoples everywhere all of them owe their existence to Him and He rules over them all and He has a care and a concern for people from every nation and every people group and you know that Paul says because of the most central confession of the Jewish faith which is hear O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one that's known as the Shema it comes from Deuteronomy chapter 6 and it is something that the Orthodox Jew the faithful Jew will say every day of their life multiple times a day and Paul says your most fundamental confession that God Himself is one bears witness to this reality that God God is not divided into parts or God does not treat one people in this way and another people in this way God as Paul says in Romans chapter 2 is impartial He will judge everyone based on the same basic standard God is one now some of your translations I know in verse 30 say that there is one God anybody have that in their translation see that down there a few of you because it can be translated either way since God is one or since there is only one God which the difference being if Paul is saying there is only one God then Paul's point is there is only one God and there are no other gods and God Himself the one God rules over all nations that's a possibility but I think

Paul's allusion back to that central Jewish confession is what's happening here I think it should be God is one because the point that Paul goes on to make in the rest of this verse and the rest of this passage is that God in fact does treat everyone without partiality God saves everyone in the exact same way notice exactly what he says since God is one verse 30 who will justify the circumcised that's the Jewish people by faith and the uncircumcised that's the non-Jewish person the Gentile by faith God is one and He treats all people according to the same basic principle you want to get right with God you want to be saved Jew Gentile it doesn't matter the color of your skin your ethnic background your family background your social status you want to get right with God you want to survive judgment day you want the wrath of God removed from you there's one simple answer to that and it is faith in Christ alone where is boasting it's excluded by justification by faith alone who is God the God of

[24 : 54] He's the God of all peoples everywhere because God only justifies people by faith alone and then the last the third question that springs out of this teaching lastly then what do we do with the law what do we do with it because Paul keeps saying that the law is not necessary to be right in God's eyes so what how do we do with it you can almost hear Paul's Jewish opponent saying to Paul you're just you're just getting rid of the law you don't even care about you don't even care about our heritage you don't care about our history you don't care about what God said to Moses and all the prophets you're just in one fell swoop you're just sweeping the law aside as if it doesn't matter anymore and Paul doesn't ignore that he says in verse 31 do we then since God's going to justify those who have the law by faith and those who don't have the law by faith do we then do we overthrow the law that is have we done away with the law by this faith by saying that people are saved by faith and not by their obedience to the law are we just getting rid of it it's pointless now we don't need it anymore and Paul's answer is no not at all rather we are the ones who are upholding the law we're not getting rid of the law we're not overthrowing the law we're not trampling the law down we're not treating the law as if it doesn't matter in fact we ourselves as those who have been saved by faith in Jesus apart from works of the law we are the ones who are upholding the law now I think

I spent a good deal of time thinking about this week asking the question okay in what ways do Christians uphold the law we know we're not justified by obeying the law so what could Paul possibly mean here in what ways do Christians genuine followers of Jesus how do we uphold the law or literally how do we make the law to stand how do we give the law a place how does that happen and I came up with four possible answers to that four ways that I think that we really genuinely as followers of Christ it can be said that we're not getting rid of the law but we are in a sense upholding the law try to think through and figure out which one of these Paul had in mind you could say in one sense Christians uphold the law because we have the true interpretation of the law given by Jesus himself so for instance in Jesus most famous sermons called the Sermon on the Mount it's in Matthew chapters 5 through 7 in Jesus most famous sermon that he preached the most well-known sermon that he preached

Jesus asked over and over a simple question about the law and Jesus says over and over I have not come to abolish the law I have not come to do away with the law but I have come to fulfill the law and then Jesus begins to ask these questions you know the law says you shall not murder you know that right it's clear and then Jesus moves on to give a clearer more in depth understanding of what God means by that commandment so Jesus says I say to you whoever is angry with his brother without cause is guilty of murder Jesus is concerned with the law and its effects upon our hearts not just our outward actions or Jesus says you have heard it said in the law quoting from the ten commandments you shall not commit adultery but I say to you whoever looks at a woman and lusts after her in his own heart has already committed adultery you see so Jesus offers to us a more in depth understanding of the law itself so we might say that Christians uphold the law because we have a more in depth more spiritual

Christ centered understanding of the law that Jesus himself gives us in his teachings and I think that that's true if all you have is the surface level do not murder then you're missing something there's more to that command than don't shoot your neighbor there's more to it than that and Jesus helps us to see it but I'm not sure that that's exactly what Paul has in mind here when he says that we uphold the law so perhaps what Paul means is simply that those who have been justified by faith alone then go on because the Holy Spirit comes to live within them they go on to actually obey the law so that we're not justified by our obedience to the law but if we've trusted in Christ and he's declared us righteous because the Spirit comes to live within us the Holy Spirit starts to do stuff he starts to mess you up inside and he starts to make you into a new person and then you become an obedient person you become a kind of person who follows those those teachings of Christ about the law slowly over time you find yourself more and more conformed to the teachings of Christ so it could possibly be that the apostle Paul was saying we uphold the law because we don't believe that we're saved by our obedience to the law but we believe that those of us who have been saved by faith are so radically transformed that we begin to obey the law in fact

Paul is going to argue that very point in Romans chapter 6 and 7 but I don't think that he's there quite yet I don't think that's the point that he's making here in this passage what does he mean to say we uphold the law I'll just cut to the chase and tell you what I think it is I think what Paul means here in this particular passage is that the gospel that Paul preaches of justification by faith alone is the same message and the same gospel that the law was always pointing us to after all in other words Paul's message is not new it's not some new message that no one had ever heard of before it's not a new thing what Paul is saying is exactly what the prophets said it's exactly what the law said the law was never given by God to be a means by which we could get right with

[31 : 15] God the law was given to be a means by which we would learn that we only get right by faith in the Messiah Jesus himself so Paul is saying I think here we uphold the law because we preach a gospel that is the final fulfillment of the law the whole law was pointing toward this why do I think it's that a couple of reasons because he's already said if you look up in verse 21 Paul says there the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law so that's that justification by faith apart from works the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law although he says the law and the prophets bear witness to it so he's already said once the law and the prophets they bear witness to the gospel that I'm preaching now and then if you move down to chapter 4 which we're going to spend some time in later on if you move down to chapter 4 Paul begins to look back to the Old Testament and he chooses the two probably most crucial figures outside of

Moses in the Old Testament Abraham and David and he points to Abraham starting in verse 1 what shall we say was gained by Abraham our forefather according to the flesh if Abraham was justified by works he has something to boast about but not people before God what does the scripture say now he's going to quote the Old Testament Abraham believed God it was counted to him as righteousness so Paul's going to go to the Old Testament to the law itself to prove that the law teaches justification by faith alone and he's going to take another example David and he'll quote from one of David's Psalms verse 7 blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered blessed is the man whose sin against him the Lord will not count his sin so he's going to go to the Old Testament to prove what he's been saying all along and he's already told us once that the law and the prophets bear witness to the gospel that he's preaching so I think that when the apostle Paul says we're not overthrowing the law we're upholding the law

I think the point that the apostle Paul is making is that we are the ones who have understood and are preaching the full significance of the law and the full significance of the law is you don't get saved by obeying the law you get right with God by trusting in the one to whom the entire Old Testament both law and prophets was pointing the entire time which means for us living in the 21st century not the first century it means for us that the law still has that job the law shows us that we're fallen people the law shows us that we're inadequate how many have ever tried to do something that you just could not do that no matter how much you worked no matter how much you trained at it you there's no way in the world that you could do it

I'm 37 years old alright never once in my life have I successfully completed a cartwheel I've tried alright embarrassingly and shamefully tried to do a cartwheel several times when I was a kid teenager even foolishly as an adult and it just looks ridiculous it doesn't even it doesn't even approach anything that someone might identify as a cartwheel I think people might think that I'm trying to do an in the air barrel roll in which I land on my face at some point there's no way I don't think that it matters I think that I could go to one of these gymnastics classes which I won't do because I won't be the only adult surrounded by tiny kids trying to learn to cartwheel I won't do it I just can't do it but I don't think it's going to happen there's something about the way that my body throws its weight around it's just not going to happen I just lack the coordination of something I cannot do it and it doesn't matter how many times

I've tried to do it it's never going to sometimes there are much much more important things in our lives that we have really tried maybe you really tried to do a certain job and you just found yourself lacking the skills lacking the knowledge lacking the ability to do that particular job whatever it might be you find yourself to be inadequate unable to complete the task well that's what the law teaches us do not murder do not commit adultery worship only the Lord your God do not steal do not covet all of these things and then on top of that the true understanding of the law that Jesus offers us about anger without cause and about adultery in the heart and lust and all those sorts of things they aim to show us that we cannot do it you cannot do enough in your life so that at the!

[36 : 22] end of it all you cannot and the law shows you that you cannot and the law exists to point us to one thing Jesus and all that he has done for us and what simple faith alone in him can do that all your effort will never accomplish and I urge you stop trying to earn it before him stop thinking that you are a pretty good person and pretty good is okay on judgment day or stop trying to convince yourself that God is some other God than the God of the Bible who does not call people to account for their sins because he does stop all of those things stop all of those attempts to avoid the reality that what you need to do is repent! will justify you and he will redeem you and he will take upon himself the penalty that you deserve if you trust in him let's pray to