

## ROMANS, Part 18 10-16-22

### Gospel FAQs

For three Sundays before my trip west we had been swimming in the gospel-rich waters at the end of Romans 3. This is one of the sweetest passages in all God's word and a delight for me to study and teach. We have discovered the meaning of several key words of salvation – *justification, redemption, propitiation, righteousness, and grace*. Let's enjoy reading from this section one more time.

Romans 3: **23-26** *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; <sup>25</sup>whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; <sup>26</sup>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.*

That is Paul's succinct presentation of the gospel. He will go ahead to unpack it for the next four chapters. But, in the last five verses of this chapter he offers us what strikes me as kind of an FAQ – frequently asked questions – about this gospel he is proclaiming. It does raise several questions and some of them are answered or clarified in our text for today which runs from verses 27 through the end of the chapter. Romans 3: **27-31** *Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. <sup>29</sup>Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup>since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. <sup>31</sup>Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.*

Take a look at these verses and see if you can't break them down with me in this way. Three points – In 27 and 28 Paul says boasting is excluded by the gospel. Then in 29-30 he says all nations are included in the gospel. And in verse 31 he says the law is concluded by the gospel. Boasting excluded. All nations included. The law concluded. That summarizes what the apostle says. Our focus will be largely on the first of those ideas ---but I do want to address the other two briefly as well.

We will handle these in reverse order then – beginning with the FAQ in verse 31. *Do we then nullify the law through faith?* The ESV says **31a** *Do we then*

*overthrow the law by this faith?* The NLT has it as **31a** *Well then, if we emphasize faith, does this mean that we can forget about the law?* Clearly enough, the imagined Jewish reader, whom we have called, *Eli* – is reading about the centrality of faith and wondering about the implications concerning the Old Testament law which has been so central to his life and religion. Now, Paul is saying that our relationship to God is secured by faith and faith alone – apart from the law. Understandably then, *Eli* is wondering where that leaves the law of God? Does it go into the dustbin of history and theology? How does Paul answer? He does so with a Greek expression that is variously translated – *may it never be* or *God forbid* or *by no means*. We might say *No way!* He then says that the law is, by his gospel, established, upheld or fulfilled. That latter term harkens back to the language of Jesus in the sermon on the mount. Remember when He says in Matthew 5:**17** *Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill.* So, the New Testament certainly brings us something new – but it has been a matter of some confusion, from the start, about how the new relates to the old and how the gospel relates to the law. Some there are, even to this day, who dismiss the Old Testament as a non-concern of Christians. These very same folks seem to be high on Paul and his teaching – but, as we see here, they terribly misconstrue what he says. Paul says that the gospel actually establishes, fulfills, upholds the law. Let's think about what that means.

First, this means that what the moral law of God requires of us, we, as grace-centered believers, will do when we pursue an obedience of faith. We go way back to the beginning of Romans. Romans 1:**5** *We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith.* If we get right with God by faith alone, and then live in that freedom of love and acceptance and justification, we will be changed from the inside out and will learn to love the very things the moral law requires so that they become established in our lives as the fruit of real faith and of the Spirit. This will be more plainly affirmed by Paul in later chapters. Romans 8:**3-4** (ESV) *God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* You see that? The requirement of the law is now being done, not perfectly, but truly, by those who found their righteousness through Jesus. Thus, it is established and fulfilled.

Secondly, verse 31 may also mean that the law is established with respect to its purpose of convicting sinners and uncovering their need for a Savior. A chief

gospel function of the law is to expose and condemn sin. Verse 20 already told us that the law brings to us the knowledge of sin. In chapter 7 Paul will share his own experience. There we read Romans 7:7 *I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "You shall not covet."* Oh, interesting! You mean, that I don't have to actually do anything to sin? That just my discontentment with what I have dishonors the Lord? Exactly! Nice, upright people who walk around feeling deprived and envying others, are in violation of God's law. How about that! Conviction – brought to you today by the ten commandments and directing you to the Savior who is able to pardon and cleanse. The gospel works with the law, not against it.

Thirdly now, the law is established or fulfilled in the gospel because the penalty it calls for was met in Jesus. This is how valid the law remains. Jesus had to die. I mean, someone had to – either the sinner or the Savior, either the violator or the God-supplied substituted. Jesus, the lamb of God, said in the Garden of Gethsemane – *Father, if there is any other way...* But there wasn't. The law said that sin brings death and death had to be. When Jesus died He was saying, in effect, *the demands of the law must be met*. His love compelled Him to meet those demands on our behalf. So, no – the law isn't just set aside. Far, far from it.

Okay then, that explains the FAQ in verse 31. The law is established or concluded. Next up we look at 29-30 about the Gentiles being included. The question there? *Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also?* And the answer comes back that God is one. There is no God for the Gentiles and a God for the Jews. But Paul goes on to reiterate that the way of salvation, of justification is by faith and has no reference to Jewish ceremonies. One God. One way of salvation in Him. This is not a contemporary question for us in the church today. For almost all of its existence the church has been largely constituted of Gentiles, but not so when Paul wrote. The church was conceived in a Jewish context. All the apostles were Jews, so the question of how to regard the Gentiles was a huge issue in the early days of the church as we have seen. The disposition of Jonah still has sway. What do I mean by that? In the Old Testament book of Jonah, the prophet of that name, was told by God to go to the Gentile city of Nineveh to preach to them, commanding them to repent or face judgment. And Jonah, didn't want to go. Worse still – he didn't go. He hopped a boat in a different direction to get away from this calling. Wow! What was Jonah's concern? Was it the hardship of going to Nineveh? Was it having to leave his family? Was it his fear of failure there? No! Jonah makes this amazing confession to God. He says, *I know*

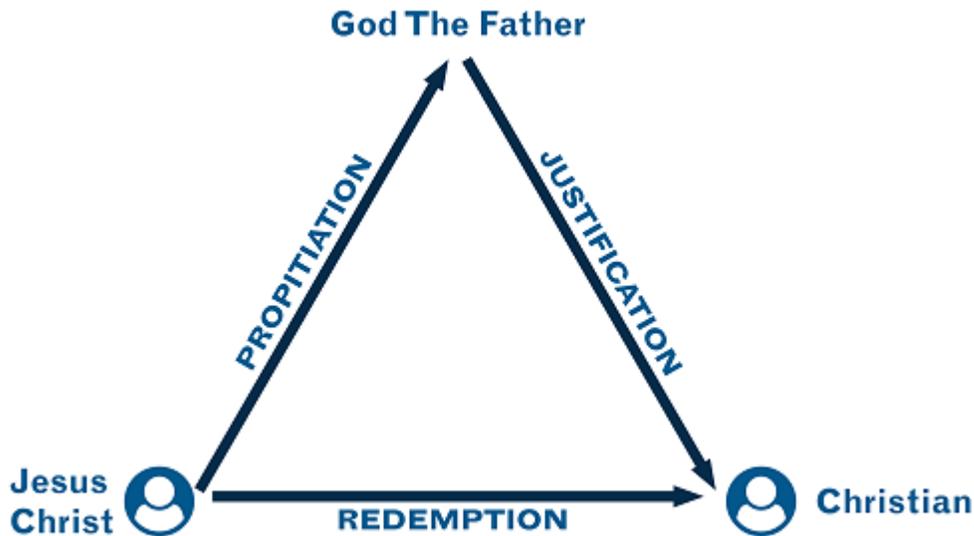
*you – if I go preach to the Ninevites they might repent and it would be just like you to forgive them.* Jonah is pondering the possibility of a Gentile revival and he did not want to be a part of that. Oh no! Jonah was not fearful of being disbelieved or even persecuted – he was fearful of great ministerial success. That is how deeply the Jewish exceptionalism ran. There was a huge cultural divide that the apostle has to speak to over and over again. Remember that Paul had a run-in with Peter about the same matter. Peter had embraced the Gentiles – but not fully. At his conferences they had a divided lunchroom. Jews over here – Gentiles over there. But Paul rebuked him. It took a lot to get past this prejudice. For Jonah what did it take? God decided to let him marinate in some fish juices to soften him up. How I pray that gospel of grace and faith will be enough to keep us from this kind of wrongful exclusion. So, our second FAQ reminds us that, in the gospel, all races are included, and that is a beautiful thing.

Then finally, we come to this first FAQ which I will spend a bit more time on. This is the question – *where then is boasting?* Kind of an odd question. I mean, at least, we wouldn't say it out loud. But, in truth, our hearts are always looking for something to boost our ego, some way to make us feel better about ourselves. We have this awful tendency toward pride, toward self-credit. *So, is there a way for this gospel to exalt me?* The answer to that is an emphatic NO! Gentiles included, but boasting? Excluded.

Now, this question about boasting can sort of serve as a diagnostic tool. Do you understand the gospel rightly? If your understanding elevates you in some way, if it amplifies your pride – than no – you are misconstruing something. A useful tool that relates to the Reformation of the church, which was the restoration of the gospel, is what we may call the five Solas. You can remember these five which sum up the teaching of Luther, Calvin, all the reformers. They are Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fides, Solus Christus, Soli Deo Gloria. Here is what they mean. First, Scripture alone is our authority and guide. Secondly, salvation is by grace alone, by Christ alone, through faith alone and unto the glory of God alone. The common and important word in each point is what? Sola – only, alone. The doctrine of Scripture alone means that we don't accept the ultimate authority of the teaching magisterium of the church or the various councils, or the pope. We can learn from many sources, but for our authority, we look to the word of God – alone. Then the five solas mean we look to Christ alone – not His mother, not the saints, not our priests. Christ alone is our mediator and Redeemer. Grace alone means that all we contribute is our sinfulness. We are dead in trespasses and sin.

We cannot cooperate with grace, at least not initially. We are entirely dependent on God to make us alive, to give us spiritual life and sight and hope. Then, we affirm that the work of God in us that connects us with Christ is simply our faith. Faith alone – as Paul said – apart from legal obedience or anything we do. It is not partly what Jesus does and partly what we do. It is all Christ – and we connect to His merit and mercy by our faith – which itself is His gift.

Sola Scriptura, Solus Christus, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide – then there is one more. What is that? Soli deo Gloria – Glory to God alone. Alone! Because who pulled off this amazing salvation? Jesus! Romans 11:**36** *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. To Him! To Him! Not to us, not to us O Lord, but to thy name be glory. We don't sing *Amazing Me how great I am*. What do we sing? Amazing grace! Amazing love! We have shown a diagram that should remind us of that. Here it is once again – the salvation triangle. The top point of the triangle represents God the Father. The bottom left point represents Jesus, with ourselves on the bottom right. Each of the three sides of the triangle represent one of the three salvation doctrines from Romans 3. The line at bottom stands for redemption. It links Jesus with human sinners and describes what He does for us. He redeems us. He purchases us with His blood. We show that with an arrow pointing from Jesus to us. It is what He does for us. The line on the right side of our diagram, of the salvation triangle, connects God the Father with us and this represents justification. God justifies us because of what Christ has done with regard to Him. So, this diagram speaks to how God saves sinners. You will see that we contribute nothing. We are “saved.” That is a passive verb. We are the recipients, the beneficiaries of justification and redemption – both of which flow to us from the work of Jesus on our behalf.*



So then, as Paul says – where is boasting? It is not available in the gospel. Paul says this is because the salvation comes to us through faith and faith is perfectly designed to eliminate all credit for us. Remember our advantage card that I spoke about some time back? We have an advantage now that we are Christians – So, carry the Christian advantage card if you like but you don’t get one of these – (Credit card) No credit for you! I love what Isaac Watts says in his classic hymn. *When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died; my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride. Contempt on my pride. Disdain, mockery, ridicule, derision. Any pride that wells up within me should be derided. It is nonsensical and ridiculous. Completely without basis. And yet, I sadly must admit, it keeps showing up. Kill it. Deride it. When your pride starts mouthing off, pour contempt on it. Watts goes on to say ---Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ, my God.*

In Chapter four of Romans Paul will go on to give us models for our conception of salvation. Interestingly, they are old Testament models – Abraham and David. Look at this Romans 4:**1-6**  
*What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup>For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” <sup>4</sup>Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. <sup>5</sup>But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as*

*righteousness, <sup>6</sup>just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works. So, does Abraham get a credit card? No. Does David? No. But they get eternal life. They get intimacy with God – through faith just as we do now. Abraham is Mr. No-Credit and we are his children if we too learn of the gospel that, apart from Jesus, we are nothing, we can do nothing, we have nothing and we stand in need of all things. But in Jesus we have a gift, a grace, a righteousness that lands us in God’s family and seats us at His table, drained of our pride but full of His joy and His love and His goodness for time and eternity.*

In this gospel we rejoice and so in Jesus and His cross we boast. We rest in the Solas – Sola Scriptura, Solus Christus, Sola gratia, Sola Fide, Soli deo Gloria. Say it with me – To God Alone Be Glory!