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*“By Faith, Alone”*

ROMANS 3:27-28

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## BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

Did you know that you have nothing to do with your salvation? Paul tells us that one is justified (declared righteous) by faith, alone. There is nothing you or I can point to and say, “Well, I had to...” Nope. In Christ, sinners are the unwitting and undeserving recipients of God’s grace and mercy. He makes a legally binding and permanent declaration that the sinner is righteous simply by faith in His Son. Wow!

## INTRODUCTION

Friday evening I had the privilege of attending the Rock Island vs. Moline boys varsity basketball game at Wharton Field House. What an experience! In that game one of the players broke the school’s all-time scoring record and another crossed the 1000-point threshold. The latter was recognized after the game with a trophy. It’s good to recognize hard work, talent, dedication, and skill. It was right for us to applaud for this young man as he stood center court holding his trophy. He earned that. It was right for him to receive the recognition for all the hard work he did to get there!

In a similar way, if you and I had done anything to earn our salvation, anything at all, it would be right for us to receive some recognition, some praise, some glory for that, too. It would be right for us to boast. But, since we did not, Paul asks in verse 27...

**<sup>27</sup> Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.<sup>28</sup> For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.**

## WHERE IS BOASTING?

**<sup>27</sup> Then what becomes of our boasting?** Literally, “where is boasting?” Paul challenges us, “In what do you place your confidence?” Where is your hope of salvation on the day of judgment? He has already charged that all are under sin. By works of the Law, no one is justified. No one is declared righteous by observing the Law.

*“But now the righteousness of God is manifested apart from the Law,”* Paul says in Romans 3:21. God has achieved what man can never achieve. He gives us His righteousness as a gift of His grace “so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (3:26)

What then becomes of our boasting? **It is excluded.** The righteousness of God, manifested in Jesus **excludes** any reason we have to boast in our salvation.

**Verse 27** continues, **By what kind of Law? A law of works? No, but by the law of faith.** Is there a means by which we are able to attain to the righteousness of God? No, Paul says. Our boasting is excluded because a right relationship with God is dependent upon faith in the substitutionary atonement of Jesus on the cross, not human works.

The law of faith excludes our boasting because faith is simply an empty-handed receiving of God's grace. We are saved by faith, alone. It is not by doing the right things that we are saved, but by believing the Gospel.

## BY FAITH, ALONE

**For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law**, Paul says in **verse 28**, **We hold** implies this is a shared conviction of all believers. This is what we call a closed-handed doctrine. If you disagree with this principle, you break with faithful believers everywhere. Namely that **one is justified by faith apart from works of the law**.

Again, we come to that important doctrinal term, **justification**. Recall from last week that justification is a legal declaration of righteousness. Though you are a sinner, God declares you righteous by faith.

This doctrine of justification by faith alone was the source of great conflict and division in the church, known as the Protestant Reformation. On October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the doors of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. He could no longer deny what scripture clearly taught. We are saved by faith, alone.

When the Roman Catholic Church abandoned the Greek New Testament and read only from the Latin Vulgate, they developed their doctrine of salvation based on the Latin term *instificare* – from which we get the English word justification, which means “to make righteous.” But the Greek word here *dikaisune* means “to declare righteous.”

## SIMUL JUSTUS ET PECCATOR

We don't have to wait to be made righteous before we are acceptable to God. Rather, the moment we come to faith, we are declared righteous, once and for all. A permanent and binding legal transfer takes place. This is why Luther coined the slogan *simul justus et peccator*, “simultaneously righteous and sinner.”

A Christian is someone who is simultaneously a sinner, one who was saved while in his sin and continues to wrestle with it, and yet stands perfectly righteous before God. And this is based upon nothing you or I could ever do. It is by faith, alone.

This was the conviction of Martin Luther when he translated this verse and added the word *alone* – what we know as *sola fide*. Luther understood Paul's intent, “One is justified by faith *alone*, apart from works of the Law.” That is *sola fide*.

This concept was not original to Luther, though. Origen, who died in 253AD, commented on Romans 3:28, “the justification of faith alone suffices, so that the one who only believes is justified, even if he has not accomplished a single work.” I might add that the thief on the cross is exhibit A! “Today you will be with me in paradise!” said Jesus. For what? His faith, alone.

**For** at the beginning of verse 28 ties it back to verse 27. It shows us that the reason our boasting is excluded is that you and I are declared righteous by faith, not by anything we do. This is a call for humility.

For those who are in Christ it is a call to remember that their righteousness was and is in no way associated with their life choices. And for those not in Christ, it is a call to admit that you have nothing to present to the Lord except empty hands, reaching out to receive His grace.

## PLEASANT DISRUPTIONS

I had intended to continue to verse 31 today, but I have run out of time and will stop here and pick up in verse 29 next week. This affords me the opportunity to share some thoughts from my heart today that were not otherwise going to fit. So I thank the Lord for the adjustment.

What ought this knowledge of our salvation by faith, alone do for us? How ought this to motivate us, impact us, and change our lives?

First, I hope this sets some people free from legalism and moralism. I know all too many Christians who, like the Galatians, began in the Spirit but believe it is incumbent upon them to be perfected by the flesh. Observe what Paul said to the Galatians, *...Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" Galatians 3:2-3*

This idea that somehow I am the unwitting and undeserving recipient of God's grace and I am declared righteous by faith yet from that point onward I have to maintain my own righteousness is nothing new. Paul recognized this in the first century church. I think grace is so amazing and so other-worldly that Christians struggle to accept who they are in Christ without feeling obliged to point to some effort on their part to be worthy of it.

This creates moralists and legalists who go through the motions hoping to justify their justification. Paul calls it a false gospel. It's an affront to God. So stop trying to prove you're worthy of His grace. Embrace who God has made you in Christ. You are righteous!

Granted, sanctification is coming. We'll get to Romans 5 and 6 soon enough. And the Lord will prune us and correct us, because we still sin. But, let's embrace what the bible teaches about justification first and then move to sanctification.

Secondly, I hope this inspires you to consider how great a salvation you have received due in no part to your effort. Then I hope it inspires you to take this Gospel that saved you to other people.

Let me give you an example. I know my son and I know what is important to him. Why? Because I spend time with him, and I listen to him. He tells me what is important. And I care about the things he cares about. If I didn't, I'd be a distant father. Our relationship, though technically intact, would be distant and there would be lack of intimacy and closeness. When you love someone and value the relationship, you spend time with them and seek to know what matters to them.

## THE MISSION OF JESUS

Now, tell me, what is important to Jesus? Or let me ask you this, how important is the mission of Jesus...to Jesus? Ultimate, right?! He came and died, and He said He lived only for the glory of the Father and He came to seek and to save the lost. That's what mattered to Jesus 2000 years ago and I argue it is still what matters to Jesus today. After all, He told His disciples that if anyone would come after Him, let him deny himself daily and take up his cross and follow Him.

Jesus invites people to follow Him, and He is on mission to seek and save the lost. My question is, if this matters so much to Jesus, why does it not matter so much to you? What might that suggest about your relationship with Him? What do you need to do today to surrender your whole life to Jesus in appreciation of the great salvation you have received?

Have you come to a personal relationship with Jesus by faith in Him? If not, I want to hear from you today! Reach out to us at Wildwood Church or find your local pastor and ask what it means to follow Jesus! But right where you are, right now, give your life to Jesus. The Bible tells us that *"if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be*

*saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Romans 10:9-10*

Would you do that today? Today can be the day you, a sinner, are declared righteous by God...by faith, alone.

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