

Justification by Faith Alone: So What?

Romans 3:27-31

Studies in Romans #14

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“Do not go where it is all fine music and grand talk and beautiful architecture—those things will neither fill anybody’s stomach, nor feed his soul. Go where the Gospel is preached, the Gospel that really feeds your soul, and go often!”¹ Amen? This is what C. H. Spurgeon once said to his congregation and what I want to say to you today. The gospel or good news of Jesus Christ is the most important thing in the world to the child of God. It is like bread that fills our stomachs; like water that quenches our thirst; like wine that gladdens our hearts; like honey that gives pleasure to our mouths. The good news of Jesus is what Romans is all about.

We saw back in 1:17 that Paul said in the preaching of the good news of Jesus the “righteousness of God” is revealed? God is righteous, meaning, he judges perfectly and impartially. We must be as righteous as he in order to stand acceptable before him. But therein lies our problem. We are unrighteous. But Paul gives us good news because God’s righteousness is not only a demand but a gift to us unrighteous sinners. It is “manifested apart from the law” (3:21), meaning, apart from the demands of the law but by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And this gospel message was proclaimed in “the Law and the Prophets,” meaning, the entire Old Testament (3:21). That’s what Paul is going to demonstrate in chapter 4 with Abraham. But before we get there, I don’t want to

¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “Hearing With Heed” (August 9, 1885).

overlook verses 27–31. Here Paul takes up a practical point: how does it benefit us that we are justified by faith alone? And he answers this question by dealing with three more Jewish objections, but all to give us some of the practical benefits of justification by faith alone.

Justification *Sola Fide* Leads to Us to Humility

Children, Christmas is coming up. It doesn't matter whether you get one small present or one hundred presents, how does it make you feel after opening them up? Do you say to yourself, "I deserved that new bike?" No, you get up and run over to your parents or grandparents and give them huge hugs and say "thank you!" When God accepts us as his children into his family that should lead us to humility.

Look at Paul's question in verse 27: **Then what becomes of our boasting?** Why is he asking this? First, he asks it because it's a question he no doubt asked as he came to faith in Jesus and that his opponents are asking. Second, he asks it because of what he has just said in verses 21–26: God graciously reveals gift of righteousness to us unrighteous sinners; he did so on the cross where Christ satisfied the demands of God's righteousness; and now when I receive Christ I am righteous. As the hymn says,

Let us wonder, grace and justice
Join and point to mercy's store;
When we trust in Christ our fortress,
Justice smiles, and asks no more.²

So how does Paul answer the question? He says boasting **is excluded** (v. 27). Then

² From the hymn, "Let Us Love and Sing and Wonder," by John Newton.

the hypothetical question is asked, **By what kind of law? By a law of works?** Notice how hung up the legalist is. All he can think about is the law. I'm convinced Paul is using their terms to destroy their argument because he answers, **No, but by the law of faith** (v. 27). What's a "law of faith?" Exactly! Stop thinking in terms of the law. This is one of our big problems as Christians, isn't it? We think in such performance categories. I know as a man I do and I know most of you men do, too. "How many people are in your church," I constantly am asked? "How much money do you make," you are constantly asked. What are you doing to keep up with the neighbors, whose three kids all have private coaches and private tutors to get an edge?

So why is there no boasting in the law? **For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law** (v. 28). **Faith** and **works**: you can't make a more diametrically opposed set of words. Faith simply receives; works try to achieve. Faith is given as a gift; works are our trying to gain. Faith reaches out to Christ; works dig deep within self. I want to say to you, brothers and sisters, that in a Reformed church with such a clear understanding of the gospel, we should be striving to be the most humble people on the planet!

Justification *Sola Fide* Leads to Us to *Unity*

And this humility should be joined with unity in us who are justified by faith alone. Paul asks a question of his objectors in verse 29: **Or is God the God of Jews only?** Remember back in 2:17 that one of the Jews' boast was that their God was the true God, implying that the Gentiles were all just a bunch of idol worshippers? So Paul asks, **Is he**

not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also. And notice this proof: **since God is one** (v. 30). The basic confession of faith from the Old Testament is Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Since there is only one God, he is the God who made all people. But notice Paul’s main point in citing the oneness of God. Since there is one God he has only one method of salvation: he **will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith** (v. 31).

Children, how many of you have ever gotten into a fight with your brother or sister? All of you! And have your parents ever said something like this: “Why are you fighting, that’s your brother, that’s your sister?” Your mom or dad’s point was that you have the same parents and the same last name, so you shouldn’t fight. In the church it’s the same, but even more so. We are all unique individuals, but when we place the same faith, in the same Savior, and receive the same gift of justification, we become spiritual brothers and sisters. As Paul says later in 12:5, “we, though many, are one body in Christ.”

I want you to look around right now and recognize your brothers and sisters. This is not just your church; this is your family. And like I said last Lord’s Day, just like you don’t get to choose your family members in life, you don’t get to choose your church family members. God does. A good friend recently said to me after visiting here, “Why does your church attract such a motley crew of different people?” Do you know what I said to him? “Ask God!”

Let me also say to you today that in addition in recognizing our unity in Christ that we need practice unity. How? One way is through prayer. Are you praying for unity in OURC? Paul prayed in 15:5 that we would be “like-minded toward one another” (Rom.

15:5). Are you praying that everyone who is a member of this body and those who are among us not yet members of this body would be unified in doctrine? Are you praying that we would be unified in our inter-personal relationships? You need to! And if you are praying, and recognize something unresolved between yourself and another, as a member of the family you are obligated to go to that person in love, to bring unity. I just talked to a close friend this week who recently took up a new call as a pastor and had someone leave the congregation because they were unhappy with someone. That's never happened here, has it? It is a sin. It injures the body. And if you are offended by someone, if you have been hurt by someone, you need to say something. If you leave and go somewhere else, without resolution, you will infect another church with your sin and injure it too. We are united as a body, but because of our sin, we need to strive for that unity as well.

Justification *Sola Fide* Leads Us to *Piety*

So you can see that justification leads to sanctification. In other words, your being accepted by God leads you to be changed and to live a godly life. I want to end on that note with a brief third point. We see it in verse 31 where Paul says justification by faith alone leads to piety, or, godliness: **Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?** He asks this because he's just said we are justified by faith and not by works. So do we as Christians believe God's law in the Old Testament is invalid for us now? Look at his answer: **By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. By now means!** Do you remember what that phrase means? We saw it in 3:4 and 3:8 and I said that it is the strongest way to say not merely, "No way," but, "Not on your life; not in a thousand years!"

We absolutely reject the idea that the law is irrelevant for the Christian. We are not antinomian, that is, against the law. We'll see more of this in chapter 6, but for now, Paul says we actually **uphold the law**. And we do so in at least three ways: first, because we understand the law's proper role to show us our sins as in 3:20; second, because we understand the law's purpose is Jesus Christ as in 10:4; and third, because we understand the law's essence is love as in 13:8–10, which we seek to express to one another.

Conclusion

This doctrine of justification is so important, brothers and sisters. It's important to know, so that you have assurance before God that you are accepted by him, and it's important so that you can live for him. Once old writer said it beautifully, when he said, "Before justification we have no right to joy; and after it no reason for misery."³ Let's go forth today in the "so what" of our justification: humble before God, unified together, and together, expressing piety in acts of love and service to the glory of our Savior! Amen.

³ John Angell James, "Religious Joy," in *The Works of John Angell James: Volume 15* (London: Hamilton Adams & Co., 1862), 282. As found at http://quintapress.macmate.me/PDF_Books/John_Angell_James_Volume_15.pdf (Accessed September 27, 2015).