

Romans 3:21-31

The Results of the Gospel

I remember some while back following a prayer meeting, having quite a lengthy discussion with one of our members at the time on the subject of preaching. This member told me that of all the books that had effected him – perhaps no other book had had such a profound effect on him than Martin Lloyd-Jones book – *Preaching and Preachers*. I guess you could have called this that man's island book – the book he would want if he could have just one other book beside the Bible on the island he'd be stranded on.

I had read that book a long time ago and only remembered it as having a slight impact on me. So I revisited that book after our discussion and read about 5 chapters out of it. I was especially interested in the 3-fold use Lloyd-Jones enumerates when it comes to preaching. He basically views preaching as serving 3 different purposes.

Preaching is to evangelize. Preaching is to instruct the saints. And preaching is to contribute to experiential Christianity. One of the reasons I find Paul's epistle to the Romans to be so rich may be due to the fact that this epistle contributes to all 3 of these areas Lloyd-Jones mentions.

Romans can certainly be used to preach the gospel with an aim toward evangelizing. Romans can be used to instruct the saints. Arguably Paul's epistle to the Romans could be said to be Paul's volume on systematic theology. You think of all the great works that have been written on theology. You have Calvin's Institutes. You have Charles Hodge's 3 volume work. You have Louis Bekhoff's single volume work. Add to these works a work which would be condensed and comprehensive – Paul's epistle to the Romans.

It's with good reason that this epistle is called a Bible within a Bible. And in the portion we've been studying we have what might be called the Bible within Romans. These 11 verses in Romans 3 give us what I would consider to be one of the most concise yet comprehensive portions of all the Bible. That's why it's a good section to read and re-read. It's a good section to memorize and it's a good section to think upon often.

We can use this section of Romans to evangelize. We can use it to instruct ourselves in the glorious truths of salvation. And we can use it in the realm of experimental religion – or experiential Christianity.

Since this is our final study on this section let me leave before you one more time the analysis that we've been following of Charles Hodge. Hodge divides these verses under 4 headings. I have added one heading to his which gives us then:

1. The Universal Need of the Gospel. That need is presented most clearly in 3:23: *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God*. No one can take exception to this statement. All men are sinners and the entire man has been effected by sin. This is why we need the gospel.

2. The Nature of the Gospel. It is righteous in its nature and presents salvation as being by grace through faith in contrast to our works. Verses 24,25: *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.* Verse 28: *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.*
3. The Grounds for the Gospel. The gospel is grounded in the righteousness of God. Too many Christians don't understand this. Too many don't know how to distinguish between the means to salvation and the grounds for salvation. And because they don't know how to make such a distinction they become vulnerable targets to ecumenism. And so let me point out again that the Bible is grounded in the righteousness of Christ. It's because He is the propitiation for our sins that God can be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (vv. 25,26).
4. The Aim of God in the Gospel. His aim is demonstrate or declare His righteousness – {3:25,26}. When God sent forth His Son to be the propitiation for our sins He demonstrated the righteousness of His justice. He demonstrated His impartiality – He's no respecter of persons – not even of His own Son when His Son took our place. He demonstrated the righteousness of His judgment and the righteousness of His love. He did not lower the standards of His law in order to save us – that would not be becoming to the character of God. What He did instead was to fulfill that standard of righteousness in the person of Christ. So it's Christ's life that counts for our lives because He's our covenant head. And it's His death that counts for our death because He was sent to represent us. So in meeting every obligation for us that we've failed to meet ourselves God declares His righteousness in salvation.

Let me say again, what I've said along the way a number of times – unless we can see the relationship between our salvation and God's righteousness – the gospel will carry no credibility to our hearts. We know in the depth of our hearts that God is the judge of the universe and the judge of all the universe must do what's right. God cannot and will not lower the standards of His righteousness for the sinner's salvation. What He will do is fulfill those standards.

So we have these points under Hodge's analysis – the need of the gospel; the nature of the gospel; the grounds for the gospel; the aim of the gospel. The last point of analysis really ties into what Lloyd-Jones calls experimental preaching. Because this last point of analysis ties so much into our day to day walk with the Lord. We need to consider, then –

The Results of the Gospel

There are 3 results presented in our text. The first one is:

I. The Result of Excluding Boasting – v. 27 *Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.*

The law of faith excludes boasting. Now it could be argued that the law of works – rightly understood would also exclude boasting. The very purpose the law served according to Paul back in v. 19 was to stop every mouth – *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*

The Jews, however, did not have a right understanding of the law. This is evident from 2:17 which says – *Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God.* They had deceived themselves into thinking they had something to boast about. And if they had kept the law they would have something to boast about. *For if Abraham were justified by works Paul writes in 4:2 – he hath whereof to glory.*

This boast is made very vivid by Christ Himself when he tells the parable of the publican and the sinner. {**Lk. 18:9-14**}. Will you notice that the soul that went away justified was the soul that found no place for boasting. Boasting was excluded. The man who thought he was justified was self-deceived. He had no idea how far short he really came of measuring up to the glory of God. We could place such a person in the category of people that reduce religion to mere externals.

You come to see that when it comes to eliminating boasting the law works with the gospel. The law will stop every mouth. The law – rightly understood – will leave no place for a guilty sinner to boast about anything. It may lead him to cry for mercy but it will not lead him to boast. We find an illustration in the Old Testament that shows us very plainly that God’s dealings with the Israelites were to eliminate boasting. In Ezek. 16:62,63 *And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I [am] the LORD: That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD.* This is the purpose the law serves. It doesn’t give us room to boast it produces rather a sense of shame.

To those who think otherwise – they dishonor God. And so Paul asks rhetorically in 2:23 *Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?* And the answer was, of course, that they did dishonor God. The very notion that willful, rebellious sinners can somehow keep the law dishonors God. It makes man look better than he really is and it makes God look to be something far less than He really is. So the law serves the purpose of shutting mouths.

And the gospel will not allow the mouth to be opened again, once the law has shut it – certainly not in the sense that men can boast of who they are or what they’ve done. Now the gospel does give us something to boast about – but it’s not ourselves. We’re able instead to make our boast in Christ.

I like the way this is expressed by Paul in 1Cor. 1:30,31 – *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth (boasteth), let him glory (boast) in the Lord.*

There is a realm for us to glory or boast. We boast of our Savior and we boast of Him because He has fulfilled the law. He has accomplished in His life and death what we haven't accomplished in our lives and what would take us eternity in hell to accomplish in our deaths. We boast in the Lord.

This becomes the theme of the opening verses in Rom. 5 {5:2,3,11}. You see then the difference between right boasting and wrong boasting? Wrong boasting is based on something we are or something we think we've done. Such boasting only reveals ignorance of the nature of the law and the character of God. Right boasting glories in Christ – who He is and what He's done. We glory in His provision and are able to glory in His love – no matter what the circumstances of life bring our way.

When Paul says the law of faith excludes boasting, then – he's saying in essence that the sinner who knows what he is and what he deserves and then closes in with Christ to the saving of his soul will walk humbly with his God.

The first result of the gospel, then, is to eliminate boasting – carnal boasting in particular.

II. The next result of the gospel is to establish God as being God of all the world – Jew and Gentile alike. – {cf. 3:29,30}

In our last study we looked at some of the verses that establish the unity of the gospel. {1:1,2; 3:21}.

Paul also makes the case in Romans that the people of God are unified also. Look at what he says in {2:28,29}. Later in this epistle he'll devote a whole section to dealing with this issue. In chapters 9-11 he's dealing with the problem of the Jews. Aren't they the chosen people of God? What about the promises to them? Have those promises been nullified? Was God unable to do what he promised because of their unbelief?

And Paul will demonstrate that the problem is not with God. The problem is in understanding who the real people of God are. And so his thesis statement for that section of Romans is given in 9:6-8: *Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.*

He says the same thing very plainly in Gal. 3:29 – *And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* Dispensationalism, of course, builds a whole system of speculative prophecy on the foundation of a denial of these statements by Paul. That's why I'm not a dispensationalist.

Now if you understand what Paul is saying in these verses then you'll also understand why the Jews hated Paul. You think of it – here was a Jewish missionary going to Gentiles – telling them about a Jewish Messiah – preaching to them from a Jewish Bible. It's not hard to see how the question would naturally arise in the minds of Gentiles – *where do we fit into the scheme of things?* And Paul's answer to them was that God had broken down

the middle wall of partition (Eph. 2:15). And that now *the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel* (Eph. 3:6).

This result of the gospel, therefore, is that Christ is God, that He rules over all, that He has a single people that were given to Him in eternity past by His Father – that this people would believe in Him and would come to Him and that this company of believers would be secure in the love of Christ forever. Nothing would separate them from the love of Christ.

The question, then, that each one needs to consider very carefully – because of the eternal ramifications of the question is simply this – *are you a believer in Jesus Christ? Has your mouth been stopped by His law – so that you see you have no place for glorying before a thrice Holy God. Have you responded to His invitation to come to Him? Or will you respond to that invitation?*

If you have responded, or you will respond – then you have whereof to glory – you glory in Christ, the Savior of sinners. This is the second result of the gospel, then – God is God over all.

III. The Third Result of the Gospel is given to us in the last verse of chp. 3 {3:31}. We see finally that the result of the gospel is to fulfill the law.

It's interesting, isn't it, that the rhetorical question Paul raises in this verse is the very thing the Jews accused him of – i.e. making void the law. I can remember as a young Christian that I took Hebrew lessons from a Jewish Rabbi. And as I feebly tried to witness Christ to him – he expressed his view of Christianity to me. He took Christianity to be a cop out on the part of Gentiles who didn't keep the law. Through Christianity they invented a way around the law. That was his view and I suppose that has historically been the view of Jews throughout history.

If only I knew then what I know now I would frankly admit to him that he's right about Gentiles failing to keep the law. But I would hasten to add that Jews haven't kept it either. And if the law is the way to heaven then heaven's gates are barred to guilty lawbreakers, Jews and Gentiles alike.

But in fact – as Paul says in this verse – the law is not made void. It is rather fulfilled. And this has been accomplished in a couple of ways. It was accomplished quite literally by Christ Himself. Mt 5:17 *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.*

And what Christ came to do He did do. This is why we say of Him that He did no sin. He knew no sin. In Him there was no sin. He was and is the sinless, holy, spotless Lamb of God. His Father's testimony regarding Him was and is – *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.*

He pleased His Father in all that He did and said. And He was never diverted from that course. He faced many temptations yet He was without sin. He was without sin in His life. And it is the righteousness of His life and His death – His life fulfilling what we've failed

to fulfill and His death fulfilling what we could not fulfill apart from everlasting condemnation – This is the righteousness that Paul writes about in Romans.

This is the righteousness of God without the law being manifested and witnessed to by the law and the prophets. This is the righteousness that was earned for believers and is imputed to them when they believe the gospel. It is because Christ fulfilled the law in His life and death that Paul would write in 10:4 that *Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*

And so the law is not made void by the gospel – the law rather is fulfilled by Christ. And His righteousness is imputed to us. His imputed righteousness gives us a standing with God that is perfect for time and for eternity because it is Christ's righteousness. And since God views us in Christ He could no more deny us heaven than He could deny it to His Son. It would be unbecoming to His character. It would be in violation of His law. So the fact that the law is established by Christ's person and work is what opens the way for us to heaven's shores where we'll enjoy everlasting life.

But then there's a sense in which the law becomes established practically by the gospel. When you think about it – if you have no power to meet the law in all its demands – what would be the point of even trying? The most you would accomplish would be to deceive yourself and come across to others as being self righteous.

But when you see all that your Savior has done for you – when you behold Him living for you – fulfilling for you what you've failed to fulfill and then paying for your failures by His atoning death – when you see Him doing these things out of love for you – then what will – or what should be the response of your heart?

Lord, thou hast loved me and shed thy blood for me. Thou hast saved me from the everlasting hell that I deserved. I owe you everything. I owe you all I have and all I am – what wouldst thou have me do?

To which the word of the Lord answers - John 14:15 *If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

John 15:10 *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.*

And so this is how we establish the law in the practice of our lives. We strive for obedience from hearts that are filled with praise and thanksgiving. We come to love the law – because we're delivered from the dread of the law. Being set free from its condemnation and from sin's dominion we find ourselves free to strive for the obedience of faith.

We know, of course, that our best efforts still fall short of the law in its essence. When you think that the essence of the law is to love the Lord with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength – who among us would lift anything to God and suggest that it was done with perfect execution and perfect motives?

We don't therefore look to the law as the basis of our standing – we look to Christ for that. And in gratitude to Christ who has met every obligation for us and will never remove His love from us we strive to obey the gospel.

And so the results of this glorious gospel are that boasting is eliminated – God is God over all and the law of God is established. I trust that you'll walk with the Lord in the light of the gospel and that your hearts will be filled and thrilled that what's been provided for you by Christ.