

# Pentwater Bible Church

*Romans Message 15*

*August 28, 2022*



John the Baptist and Herod Antipas by Pieter de Grebber Cir 1640

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# Pentwater Bible Church

## The Book of Romans

### Message Fifteen

No One Can Brag over Justification

August 28, 2022

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Romans 3:27–4:3

*<sup>27</sup> Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.*

*<sup>28</sup> Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. <sup>29</sup> Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: <sup>30</sup> seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. <sup>31</sup> Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.*

*4. <sup>1</sup>What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?*

*<sup>2</sup> For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. <sup>3</sup> For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness (KJV).*

NO RIGHT TO BE PRIDEFUL

Romans 3:27–28

*<sup>27</sup> Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.*

*<sup>28</sup> Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law (KJV).*

To summarize the entire first three chapters of this epistle, Paul writes that there are no exceptions in God's plan. All people must begin with the same realization and pass by the same way. He goes on to say that there is no room for personal pride. At this point, Paul begins to focus on the word *law* in a way that anticipates his further discussion of the fact that the requirement of faith was already in place when the Law was given. He writes, literally, "So, where is the boasting? Excluded. On the basis of what law? Of works? No, but on the basis of the law of faith." Paul is confronting the reduction of God's standard of a list of actions by emphasizing a deeper "law," the requirement of faith.

There can be no boasting by Jews or Christians about their heritage, their Law, or their works. There's no room nor reason for it, either in Jews or Gentiles: not in the Jews, who were prone to boast of their being Abraham's seed; of their circumcision; of their being Israelites; of their having and keeping the Law. They further thought that God was exclusively their God. And because of how God had chosen them He gave them a superior knowledge of Him. They believed that someday He would bring the Gentiles into the commonwealth of Israel as their servants. Instead, God's Law is to be understood in terms of faith, and is opened up to a new commonwealth of both Jews and Gentiles as co-equal heirs in The Church. The Gentiles, who boasted of their philosophy, which included wisdom, and learning; of their self-sufficiency, free-will, and of the things they had in their own power. Now Paul says, *it is excluded*; it is shut out of doors, it is not allowed it is entirely useless for salvation. The text continues saying, *by what law? of works? nay*; for that establishes boasting when men seek life, righteousness, and salvation by its works, and desire to be able to attain them this new way: *but by the law of faith*: not by a law requiring faith; nor as if the Gospel was a

Law, a new Law, a remedial Law, a law of milder terms; but the word *law* here answers to the Hebrew word *torah*, which also signifies any *doctrine* or *instruction*. This means particularly the doctrine of a sinner's justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ, according to which doctrine the most unlikely persons can be justified, even ungodly persons, the worst and vilest of sinners, and that without any consideration of works, by faith only, which is freely given them; and by faith in Christ's righteousness only. There is no room for boasting in the persons personal justification, but all their boasting is in Christ, who is made unto them righteousness, and by whom they are justified. The Law of Christ is observed by faith. In fact, Paul writes to the Ephesians and emphasized this very subject.

Ephesians 2:8–9

*<sup>8</sup> For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest any man should boast (KJV).*

So even though our salvation is a *gift of God* regardless of our backgrounds pridefulness creeps in and seeks to destroy what God has given us as a gift, eternal life in Heaven with Christ Jesus.

A person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the Law. Most religions prescribe specific duties that must be performed to make a person acceptable to God. Christianity is unique in teaching that the good works we do will not make us right with God. No amount of human achievement or progress in personal development will close the gap between God's moral perfection and our imperfect daily performance. So, there can be no basis for pride. Good deeds are important to perform after salvation, but they will not earn us eternal life. We are saved only by trusting in what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

This is now the final conclusion or the sum-total of the whole doctrine of justification: *that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law*. The subject of justification is *man* to show that Christ's righteousness is available to all, and every man, that believes, that is, that every man that is justified is justified by faith. The means is *by faith*, and all this is done *without works*, of any sort; not by a faith which is without works, for such a faith is dead, and of no advantage, but by faith without works joined to it, in the achieving of justification; or by the righteousness of Christ imputed by God the father, without any consideration of them, and received by faith, and relied upon by the believer, without any regard unto them. Paul's references to the Law (3:20, 28) could lead some to conclude that it was useless. On the contrary, it fulfills an important role in confronting people with their sin and accountability before God. The law is vital and currently operative as a means for conviction (I Timothy 1:8) but not as a means of salvation. Think of the Law a God wrapping His moral order in the 613 specific practices to impart His Law to the nation Israel.

Romans 5–8 will further set forth to establishing the Law (See Matthew 5:17). Surprisingly, to maintain the Law is to maintain faith. The Law continually reveals mankind's need for Christ and reminds them of their forgiveness and perfection in Him. Paul's work of establishing the Law was to help his readers see the Law, not as a way of attaining righteousness, but as a means of discovering their sinfulness and our need for God's gracious forgiveness.

IS HE THE GOD OF ONLY THE JEWS?

Romans 3:29

*<sup>29</sup> Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also (KJV).*

Here Paul looks at these issues from the standpoint of monotheism. Since it is generally accepted that there is only one God, why should He only have revealed Himself to only small proportion of the people on the earth, namely the Jews? The Jews insisted that there was only one God, and they rejected the gods of the heathen as no more than idols. Paul invites them to reflect on what that means.

These questions cover the same issue of Jewish distinctiveness from a different angle. Because the Gentiles worshiped false gods through idols, the Jews concluded that Jehovah, the true and living God (Jeremiah 10:10), was the God of Jews only. That was true in the sense that the Jews were the only people who acknowledged and worshiped Jehovah (except for a few proselyte Gentiles who joined with Judaism). But in reality, Jehovah, as the Creator and Sovereign of all people, is the God of all people. Before God called Abraham and his descendants in the nation Israel to be His Chosen People (Deuteronomy 7:6) God dealt equally with all people.

And even after God's choice of Israel to be His special people, God made it plain (e.g., in the Book of Jonah) that He is the God of everyone, Gentiles as well as Jews. And now since there is no difference among people for all are sinners (Romans 3:23) and since the basis for salvation has been provided in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, God deals with everyone on the same basis, that there is only one God. Paul no doubt had in mind here the "Shema" of Israel: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD [*Jehovah*] our God [*elōhīm*], the LORD [*Jehovah*] is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4). This one God over both Jews and Gentiles will justify all who come to Him regardless of background (circumcised or uncircumcised) on the same human condition of faith.

Again, the Jews cannot claim sole propriety of God or deny that Gentiles can also receive God's saving grace. The Old Testament consistently recorded God's inclusion of the Gentiles in His plans. God had promised Abraham, "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). The fact that the Jews had been chosen for special service to the rest of the world had become twisted into prideful separation from the world. Paul reminds his readers of this fact and develops the thought in the next part of his letter. Therefore, we must not think that God belongs to any one group only. One church or denomination cannot contain all of Christ's fullness. Only the complete body can complement the head, Jesus Christ.

It is important to point out that the argument here is a continuation of the one begun in verse 27. To Paul's question (*What, then, can we boast about?*) two answers are given. Paul says a man has nothing to boast about because (1) *a man is put right with God only through faith, and not by doing what the Law commands;* and (2) God is not only the God of the Jews, but he is also the God of the Gentiles.

There is a complex and subtle problem involved in the phrases *the God of the Jews* and *the God of the Gentiles*. This might appear to be the same kind of construction as so-called possessives "my God" or "our God" rendered in some languages as "the God in whom I believe" or "the God in whom we believe." However, it would not make sense to say "is God only the God in whom the Jews believe?" In some languages one must restructure this relation somewhat more explicitly as "is God related only to the Jews?" or "does God exist only for the sake of the Jews. The answer is simply, "God exists for both Jews and Gentiles."

The Jews made their boast of Him as such, and would not allow the Gentiles any interest in Him: but *is he not also of the Gentiles? yes, of the Gentiles also;* God is the God both of Jews and Gentiles; not only as the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of them, or as He has a right to demand worship and service of them, but as He is their covenant God; not by virtue of the covenant of circumcision, or by the Sinai covenant, but by the covenant of Grace. It also appears by His loving them in Christ, choosing them in Him, putting them into His hands, providing blessings of grace for them in Him, and sending His Son to redeem them; by calling them by His grace; by their sanctification, adoption, pardon, and justification; by taking out of them a people for His name with whom He dwells, and of whom He takes care, and will never leave nor forsake.

All this leads us to see the grace of God, the happiness of our state and condition, and what encouragement we have for faith and hope in God.

Romans 3:30–31

*<sup>30</sup> seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. <sup>31</sup> Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law (KJV).*

There is only one God. A key Hebrew scripture again reads: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4)—a prayer uttered by pious Jews every day. Paul simply states the logical necessity. If God really is the one and only God, then He is God of all His creation and calls both Jews and Gentiles to faith in Him. The question of justification will not be settled by God according to those who have or have not been circumcised, but rather by their faith, whatever their physical lineage. The final question is, do we, then, nullify the Law by this faith? Paul responded in his characteristic exhortation; God forbid! (Greek *mē genoito*) and then explained, rather, we uphold the Law. The purpose of the Mosaic Law is fulfilled and its place in God’s total plan is confirmed when it leads an individual to faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:23–25). Paul repeatedly affirmed that faith, not works of the Law, is the way of salvation. He wrote the word “faith” eight times in Romans 3:22–31.

Paul envisions the shadow Jewish critic raising these last concerned and valid questions: “Does faith wipe out Judaism, cancel our Scriptures, end our customs? If we are saved by faith, does that mean we no longer need to obey God’s laws?” Paul answers, “*God Forbid!*” In fact, only when we trust Jesus can we fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law. The Law is not something that only the Jews can “do” for God; the Law is for both Jews and Gentiles and can only be “done” through faith in Christ. Faith returns the Law to its proper place and role in God’s plan for people. Faith does not wipe out the Old Testament; rather, it makes God’s dealings with the Jewish people understandable. (Romans 5:20–21; 8:3–4; 13:9–10; Galatians 3:24–29; I Timothy 1:8.) Therefore, the law is not made void, so as to be destroyed and abolished in every sense, or to be rendered idle, inactive, useless, and insignificant; but, on the contrary, is made to stand, is placed on a sure basis and firm foundation, as the words used signify.

In order to show the priority of faith, Paul turns attention in chapter four to the origins of the Jewish nation as evidence. He references Abraham by providing proof that faith was already the sole requirement between God and His creatures long before the Mosaic law was given.

ABRAHAM

Romans 4:1–3

*4. <sup>1</sup>What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? <sup>2</sup> For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. <sup>3</sup> For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness (KJV).*

Paul proved that there is no justification before God by the works of the Law, from the depraved state and condition that all men are in by nature, both Jews and Gentiles. The Law discovers sin, arraigns men for it, and convicts of it, and then pronounces us guilty before God. Now Paul shows that it is by another

righteousness, which he describes, that men are justified in the sight of God. In doing so he proceeds to confirm this by an example of Abraham, the father of the Jews.

Paul continues his conversation with his shadow Jewish questioner by mentioning Abraham, the great patriarch of the Jewish nation, and calling him “our” forefather. But Paul’s intended audience is much broader. He wants to make it clear that Abraham is forefather to all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles. So, his question, “What did Abraham discover?” while appealing to Jewish readers, introduces the possibility of Abraham’s fatherhood in other ways. Paul does this by literally calling Abraham “our forefather after the flesh.”

According to Jewish tradition, Abraham had been chosen by God for his unique role in history because he was the only righteous man alive at the time. Abraham was the epitome of what it meant to be a Jew, and he was the first Hebrew, the father of all Jews. John the Baptist had warned that being descendants of Abraham did not settle matters with God (Luke 3:7–9). Jesus had anticipated the broader application of Abraham’s faith when he told certain Jews, “If you were Abraham’s children ... then you would do the things Abraham did” (John 8:39). Clearly there was more to being a child of Abraham than simply being able to trace one’s genealogy back to him.

The Jews remembered that God had said, “Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws” (Genesis 26:5). But this estimate of Abraham’s life came long after his initial venture by faith, acting on the basis of God’s promise. Along his way Abraham became God’s friend and received promises and covenants, especially the covenant of circumcision. Yet Paul wants to impress upon his readers the point that what Abraham had discovered about faith and righteousness is worth being discovered by everyone.

The apostle proved that there is no justification by the works of the Law. In order to make this appear clearer and more evident to the Jews, he provides an example of the greatest person of their nation, and for whom they had the greatest value and esteem, Abraham, who was not a righteous and good man, but the head of the Jewish nation. In fact, He is described before conversion as an idol worshipping Gentile by Joshua (24:2–3). Paul answers the question being put to his argument by the shadow Jewish conversation concerning him is, *what he, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?* The phrase, *as pertaining to the flesh*, may be connected with the word *found*; and to find anything is by seeking it. This is to ask, “did he find out the way of life, righteousness, and salvation by carnal reason?” Or in other words, “did he obtain these things by his own strength? or were these acquired by his circumcision in the flesh, or by any other fleshly privilege he enjoyed? Or was he justified before God by any services and performances of his, of whatsoever kind?” This as a rhetorical question is not answered, but it is evident from what follows, that the meaning of the apostle is, no not at all.

If Abraham was justified on the ground of his own merits, he would have reason to boast, or to claim praise. He might regard himself as the author of it, and take the praise to himself. The inquiry, therefore, was, whether in the account of the justification of Abraham, there was to be found any such statement of a reason for self-confidence and boasting. *But not before God.* In the sight of God. That is, in his recorded judgment, he had no grounds of boasting on account of works. To show this, the apostle appeals at once to the Scriptures, to show that there was no such record as that Abraham could boast that he was justified by his works. As God judges right in all cases, so it follows that Abraham had no just ground of boasting, and of course that he was not justified by his own works. The sense of this verse is if Abraham was justified by his works, he might boast of his own merits. But he has no ground of boasting before God. Therefore, he was not justified by works.”

*For what saith the Scripture?* The inspired account of Abraham's justification was final, and settled the question. This account is found in Genesis 15:6. *Abraham believed God.* In the Hebrew, "Abraham believed *Jehovah.*" The faith which Abraham exercised was, that his posterity should be like the stars of heaven in number. This promise was made to him when he had no child, and of course when he had no prospect of such a posterity. The strength and nature of this faith is manifested in that it was counted to him for righteousness. And that it was a strong, direct, and unwavering act of confidence in the promise of God. *And it.* The word "it" here refers to the *act* of believing.

Faith is uniformly an act of the mind. It is not a created essence which is placed within the mind. It is not a substance created independently of the soul, and placed within it by almighty power

To underscore his point, Paul quotes directly from Genesis 15:6. Having given the human answer in verse 2, Paul now introduces God's answer. Jewish teachers interpreted this Old Testament verse to refer to Abraham's faithfulness to God's covenants. Paul, however, puts this verse in a new light with his understanding of the gospel. Abraham's works or obedience were not credited as righteousness, but his *faith* was. From this verse, Paul goes on to emphasize that belief, or faith, on Abraham's part did not earn right standing with God; instead, Abraham's faith was simply an affirmative response to God's promise that Abraham's seed would be multiplied as the stars in heaven and the sand on the seashore (Genesis 15:5).

Paul uses the term *it was counted unto him for righteousness (elogithe)* to describe how God treats human faith. God credited righteousness to Abraham's account. God gives us everything based on our allowing Him to do so. The moment that we stop trying to be good or pretending to be good and simply submit ourself before God's mercy, he responds by saying, "Now, that's genuinely good!"

Next message: ROMANS CHAPTER Four.

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