

Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 3:27-4:5 - Sermon Notes



Background

Paul has just gone through a very complete rationalization of why the Jews were falsely confident in the Law, having stated that whether Jew or Gentile, we all have sinned and have come short of God's glory. He further went on to show that the blood of Christ is represented by the mercy seat in that the blood on it "covers" sins, allowing God to pass them by. And, in doing so, God draws attention to His own righteousness, and He credits righteousness to anyone who has faith in the covering blood.

(Slide 42a) Paul now states the conclusion of this part of his dissertation. That is, that we are justified by faith separate from works of law. *(Slide 42b)* In other words, our good works have absolutely no bearing on our justification. *(Slide 42c)* Also, our obedience has absolutely no bearing on our justification.

So, what does "Justification" mean? It simply refers to the action in which God declares a person to be righteous.

The Jewish Christians in Rome had always considered their righteousness to be the result of keeping the requirements of the Law. Because of the teachings of the Law and the Prophets, they waited for their Messiah to come. These converts from Judaism considered themselves Christians because they kept the Law AND believed in their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. Paul now tells them *(Slide 42d)* that keeping the Law has no bearing on justification.

Romans 3:27-28

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

The apostle now goes on to cement in the minds of the Roman Christians that their salvation is not of themselves through acts of righteousness, but completely through the actions of God. He starts off this verse by asking where any of us can find room for boasting. *(Slide 43a)* There is nothing to boast about in having been granted righteousness. Since all have sinned and have failed at being able to justify themselves by obeying the Law, and since all are alike, dependent on the mercy of God, any reason for bragging is, of course, taken away. It is excluded.

This boasting is not excluded by the law of works, but by the law of faith. By this Paul means that we cannot be justified by performing any works no matter how unselfish or self-sacrificing they may be. We cannot be justified by keeping the 10 commandments, and we cannot be justified by obeying all the rules or ordinances set down for us by any church. We simply cannot be justified by this kind of law. In other words, *(Slide 43b)* there is nothing we can do to earn righteousness, nothing! It can only come through faith.

Earlier, we learned that faith means “belief in a truth.” But what does Paul mean by “the law of faith?” This is not a written law or set of commandments, but a principle. The principle here is, “believing in a particular truth.” That is, the truth that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God who, while completely God, is completely man. The truth that He lived a perfect life then offered His life as a sacrifice, as the payment for your sins and mine.

We can only be justified by the principle (law) of faith. In order to satisfy this principle of faith we must humble ourselves before the mighty hand of our sinless God, agree with Him that we are sinners who are undeserving of justification (salvation), and agree with God (confess) that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins.

Our justification does not come about because we perform some work or deed. We are justified in His sight because He reveals His son to us and He draws us to Himself so that we believe. *(Slide 43c)* It’s all His work and none of ours. To a Jew this would imply that the Law is void, otherwise why have they been working so hard for all these centuries to satisfy the Law through works.

Romans 3:29-31

(Slide 44a) **Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that faith, is one. Do we then abolish the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.**

If justification could come from the Law (and only from the Law, as the Jews believed) then He must only be the God of the Jews since they are the only ones who had the Law. That’s why Paul asks the question, “Or is He the God of the Jews only, and not also of the Gentiles?” He then immediately answers the question, “Yes, He is the God of the Gentiles also.”

The Jews knew that Yahweh is the God of all mankind, but they also knew that only the Jews had the Law. This made them selfish about the Scriptures and their relationship with God. They began to believe that Yahweh was their God exclusively, but Paul is bursting that bubble. Not only is He the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles but, as he will state in the next verse, He justifies both the Jews and the Gentiles. That would have come as a shock to many Jewish Christians who believed that God only justifies those who keep the law. It also may come as a shock to Christians today who believe we have to keep a lot of “rules” to be saved or to stay saved.

Since Paul has just demonstrated that Yahweh is the God of both the Jews and the Gentiles and that man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law, he now takes the next step in his explanation. He says that it is one God who will justify both the Jews and the Gentiles, and that justification comes not from keeping the Law, but from faith.

The two points that Paul has been making all along in this chapter are: *(Slide 44b)* 1 - There is no difference between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to justification, and 2 - The only way to obtain justification is by faith.

If you look back through the Old Testament you will see a number of examples where men were justified by faith. For instance, Noah believed God was going to send a flood and demonstrated that faith by building an Ark. Abraham believed that he was going to have a son even when he and Sarah were too old to have children. Moses believed God was going to release the Israelites from bondage when he went in and challenged Pharaoh to “let my people go.”

(Slide 45a) Throughout the ages, men (and women) have been saved by faith, not by works. That is precisely what Paul is teaching these Jewish Christians in Rome.

Paul now asks another rhetorical question which is one of transition. He knows that any devout Jew would be spiritually put off balance by his previous arguments because the Jews have been taught from childhood that obeying the Law is the only way to be justified. So - they would very likely be asking themselves, “But what about the Law? Does it mean nothing?” There are even those people today who say that justification by faith only leads to licentiousness because it does away with the Law.

Paul does not agree. In fact, he declares, “May it not be!” He realizes that justification by faith alone not only does not negate the Law, in fact it establishes it as true and right. You see, by the Law God demonstrated that there is a penalty to be paid for sin and that the Law had to be satisfied in order for anyone to be justified. Jesus Christ came to show that only He could perfectly satisfy the law and that He is the fulfillment of the Law. He is the Passover lamb. He is the lamb without spot or blemish that was demanded by the Law to be the offering in payment for sins. He, the One who satisfied the Law, is the only offering that could be made to pay for our sins. And His payment is made possible to us only if we believe that He is the sinless Lamb of God who has given Himself in payment for our sins. We can’t satisfy the Law by obedience to it, we satisfy it by faith in the one who did satisfy it.

This is precisely what Paul is showing to the Jewish Christians in Rome and to all Christians throughout the ages. When we believe Jesus Christ died on the cross as our Lord and Savior, we are justified by faith, and we actually establish the Law as good and right and holy.

Having now satisfied the assertion that the Law is good and right, in the coming chapter Paul will proceed to use the patriarch Abraham as the example of righteousness by faith apart from the Law. After all, Abraham was declared righteous by God some three hundred years before Moses received the law on Mt. Sinai. Abraham was even declared righteous by God years before the sign of circumcision.

Romans 4:1-3

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about—but not before God! For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”

(Slide 45b) Paul is now going to use Abraham, the father of all the Jews, to show how justification has always been by faith. Since Abraham lived before the giving of the Law, Paul will lead his readers to see that he was justified by faith, not by obedience to the Law. This becomes a particularly potent argument since all Jews trace back their ancestral lineage, as well as their spiritual heritage, to Abraham.

The main object of this chapter of Paul’s letter is to demonstrate that the doctrine of justification by faith was taught in the Old Testament. The argument is addressed to the Jewish Christians in Rome,

but it would apply to any Jew. The argument is derived from the fact that Abraham was justified by faith rather than works. Then, in this same chapter, Paul will show that even David, the greatest of all Jewish kings, declared that righteousness results from faith rather than works.

Paul now continues on with the rhetorical question that he posed in the previous verse. Although this might look like circular reasoning at first glance, here's what John Calvin said about the sense of this verse,

(Slide 45c) If Abraham was justified by his works, he might boast of his own merits. But he has no grounds for boasting before God. Therefore, he was not justified by works.

You see, if Abraham did have some grounds for boasting, he would have boasted about them to God. But he never did because by his own acts he knew he was not worthy of justification. Therefore, he was not justified by works. If you read Genesis chapters 11 through 25, you will see that, although Abraham did some amazing and faith-filled things in his life, he had a problem with lying, especially concerning Sarah, his wife. This is not the sort of thing that would qualify someone to be justified by works, is it? But does James contradict Paul?

(Slide 46a) On the surface it may appear that what Paul and James teach with regard to faith and works are at odds with each other, for James said:

(Slide 46b) And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. *(James 2:23-24)*

This is the problem with quoting Scripture out of context. For you see, James is not teaching that righteousness is achieved by works. He is teaching that works are the proof of faith and its resultant righteousness. If a person has genuine faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, then his or her works will give evidence of saving faith. I'm sure that we all can think of someone who claims to be a Christian but doesn't act like one. James would say that this person has no faith because they have no works to prove it, and Paul would agree.

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior through faith, then you are recorded in God's record book as having the righteousness of Christ himself. This means that you are completely saved from your sins, now and forever. *(Slide 47a)*

Romans 4:4-5

Now to the one who works, his wage is not counted according to grace, but according to what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes upon Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

If Abraham had been justified by a work of righteousness, then he earned his righteousness. If he earned that righteousness by doing something, then God owed the righteousness to him for doing the righteous act. That is, God owed him a debt. If God owed him that righteousness for doing a righteous act, then Abraham earned it; it wasn't freely given to him.

But that's not the way it happened according to Paul. Abraham didn't receive righteousness because God owed it to him. Abraham received his righteousness from God by God's grace, not because God was obliged to, but because in His great love and by His marvelous grace, God chose to credit it to him.

When Abraham returned from defeating King Chedorlaomer and the kings with him, he was met by the king of Sodom who told Abraham that he could keep all the spoils of the war if he would just return the people to him. But Abraham did not keep any of the “spoils.” It was perfectly lawful for Abraham to keep it because he earned it, but he gave it back to the king of Sodom. Here’s what Abraham said to the king of Sodom:

Then Abram said to the king of Sodom, “I have raised my hand to Yahweh God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, so that you would not say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’ (Genesis 14:22-23)

Then in the opening verse of Genesis chapter fifteen, God said this to Abraham:

... “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.” (Genesis 15:1)

Do you see that? God said that Abraham’s reward would be very great. Abraham refused the reward from the king of Sodom that was due him because he wanted to give God all the credit. Then, when he believed God’s promise, God credited him with the righteousness that he couldn’t possibly have earned. That’s grace!

Remember, Paul just said, if Abraham earned his righteousness, then God had to give it to him because He owed it to him. But God doesn’t justify those who have earned righteousness! Why? Paul told us earlier that there is no one who is righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks after God. In other words, there is no one who has earned righteousness.

He now says that for the one who does not obtain righteousness by working (that’s all of us) but who believes God’s promises, He reckons that faith as righteousness. Again, it is not because He has to, but because He wants to.

Do you see? It was God’s choice to credit Abraham with righteousness as a result of his faith just as it is God’s choice to credit us with righteousness because we believe His promise to us. It was God’s choice that Abraham is saved, not Abraham’s, and it is God’s choice that we are saved, not ours. God did not have to declare Abraham righteous when he believed, and He does not have to declare us righteous when we believe the gospel message. God did it for Abraham, and He does it for us because he chooses to. That’s why it is by grace and not by debt. (Slide 47b) We don’t earn our salvation by believing the gospel, God grants it to us, as a gift!

That’s what Paul is talking about in the book of Ephesians where he said:

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Salvation is God’s gift to us, not because of any deed that we have done, not because of any sacrificial offering that we have given, but because He chose to give it to us.

So What?

(Slide 48a) It’s easy to boast about all the things we have done to earn something, but salvation isn’t one of them. It requires humility to accept salvation and become a Christian. It can’t be bragged about. A humble person doesn’t brag about his humility.

Once again, we can see a strong parallel between the attitude of the Jewish people at the time of Christ and the attitude of Christians today. The Jews believed they had exclusive rights to God and were unwilling to share Him with Gentiles, building a wall between Jews and Gentiles. Since Christians have been given the Great Commission, we are commanded to share the Gospel with the whole world.

But many denominations believe that only they have “the correct” truth, thus building walls between Christians.

The message of salvation is very simple: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. It's not, believe and keep the Ten Commandments. It's not, believe and join the church. It's not, believe and be baptized. It's simply “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.” That's all there is to it – just believe.

When we get saved by faith, we aren't required to keep the law or rules of a church in order to stay saved. Instead, we are to walk by faith, doing the good works that God has ordained for us to do as His children and ambassadors. Do your actions and good works reflect the glory of your Heavenly Father?

(Slide 48b) All Christians should be doing good works. Not to gain salvation, or to receive complete sanctification, and certainly not to keep from losing salvation. We should be doing good works because it's what our Heavenly Father does and it's what He wants us to be doing. It demonstrates our family resemblance. It's part of the family business!

No matter how heroic our actions and no matter how much we give away of what is rightfully ours, we can't earn our own righteousness. It only comes as a gift from God when we believe His promise.

This truth about God's gift of salvation should not make us proud. On the contrary, it should humble us.

(Slide 49a) Pride has always been a hindrance to a close relationship with God. It was Satan's pride that caused his fall:

Thus says Lord Yahweh, “You had the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.” ... “Your heart was lofty because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor. ...” *(Ezekiel 28:12, 17a)*

It was also pride that caused Nebuchadnezzar, the great king of Babylon, to be humbled before God:

“The king answered and said, ‘Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal house by the strength of my power and for the glory of my majesty?’ “While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is said: the kingdom has been removed from you, *(Daniel 4:30-31)*”

(Slide 49b) Both the Old Testament and the New Testament give us the key to a close relationship with Almighty God:

Though He scoffs at the scoffers, Yet He gives grace to the humble. *(Proverbs 3:34)*

Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you. *(James 4:10)*

(Slide 49c) ... for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. *(1 Peter 5:5b)*

Thank you, Lord, for crediting me with righteousness. I didn't deserve it, and I don't deserve it, but you gave it to me nonetheless! You are my Lord and my Master, O God!

Let's pray.