

Sola Fide

Brian Carroll / General Adult

Unashamed - A Study of Romans / Ro 3:27–31

Because salvation is God's gift from beginning to end, all human boasting is excluded. Jew and Gentile alike are justified in the same way, through faith alone in Christ alone. Far from overthrowing God's law, faith establishes it by receiving the righteousness the law itself could never produce.

Introduction

- October 31, 1517. Wittenberg, Germany.
 - As the story is usually told, a monk walks up to the door of the Castle Church and nails a document to it — ninety-five arguments against the way the church was selling forgiveness.
 - That's the image most people picture when they hear the word Reformation.
 - A door. A hammer.
 - A single dramatic moment that changed the world.
 - But that's not actually where the Reformation started.
 - That was the announcement.
 - The real story started years earlier, in a much smaller room, with far less drama.
- Picture a narrow cell in an Augustinian monastery.
 - A young monk named Martin Luther, alone, trying with everything in him to become righteous enough for God.
 - Luther didn't take this lightly.
 - He fasted until his health suffered.
 - He kept vigils through the night.

- He punished his own body. He went to confession so often, and so thoroughly, that his confessor reportedly grew tired of hearing it — once telling him, in frustration, to go find some real sins to confess.
- He would spend hours listing every sin he could remember, terrified that he'd forgotten one, because in his mind, an unconfessed sin was an uncovered debt.
- This wasn't a lazy man looking for a shortcut to heaven.
 - By every human measure available to him, Luther was one of the most devoted, disciplined, sold-out monks in all of Germany.
 - And it still wasn't enough.
 - He couldn't outrun the terror that God's holiness was a bill he could never fully pay.
- Here's what made it worse.
 - Luther was also a professor, and part of his job was teaching through the book of Romans.
 - And there was one phrase in Paul's letter that he had come to hate: "the righteousness of God."
 - To Luther, that phrase didn't sound like good news.
 - It sounded like a standard.
 - A courtroom he could never win in.
 - A holy God measuring him against a righteousness he knew, deep down, he could never produce on his own.
- Sometime during those years, as Luther lectured and wrestled with Romans, the meaning of Paul's words began to open to him.
 - He came across the words: "The righteous shall live by faith."
 - And it hit him that the righteousness Paul was describing wasn't a standard God demanded from him.
 - It was a gift God offered to him.

- Not a righteousness he had to produce, but a righteousness he could only receive.
- Luther later described it as though the gates of paradise had opened.
- That discovery — sitting right there in the very letter we've been studying together for weeks — didn't just comfort one exhausted monk.
 - It split Europe in two.
 - It launched a movement that reshaped the church, reshaped nations, and gave us a phrase Protestants have repeated for five hundred years since: sola fide.
 - Faith alone.
- Here's what I want you to see this morning.
 - We've spent weeks in this same letter, watching Paul build the exact case that undid a monk half a millennium later.
 - Two chapters proving that every one of us stands guilty before God.
 - Jew and Gentile alike. No one righteous.
 - No one who seeks Him on their own.
 - No ground left to stand on.
- And then, right in the middle of that verdict, God provided a righteousness apart from the law — received by faith, available to everyone who believes, because there is no distinction.
 - This morning, in [Romans 3:27–31](#), Paul says the part Luther would spend the rest of his life proclaiming — not just that faith saves, but what happens to everything else once it does.
 - "Where then is boasting? It is excluded."
 - Luther discovered that truth while wrestling with Romans five hundred years ago.
 - Paul wrote it two thousand years ago.

- And the only question that matters this morning is whether it's actually reached you yet.
- This morning, we're going to wrap up [Romans 3](#) by exploring one of the greatest truths in the Bible.
- Justification by Faith - Faith Alone.

Scripture Reading

Romans 3:27–31 ESV

²⁷ 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.

²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,

³⁰ since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

- Read that first line again: "Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded."
 - That's not a stray comment.
 - That's Paul closing the case he's been building since chapter one.
 - He's just spent an entire paragraph — verses 21 through 26 — explaining how God can be both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
 - How righteousness comes to us apart from the law, through faith, because of what Christ did on the cross.
- And the very next thing out of his mouth is a question.

- Not a statement — a question, almost like he's thinking out loud.
- If that's how salvation works... then what's left for us to boast in?
- And Paul answers his own question immediately.
 - Nothing.
 - Boasting isn't reduced.
 - It isn't managed. It's excluded. Locked out.
 - There's no version of this gospel that leaves you a corner to stand in and point to yourself.
- That's exactly where Luther landed in that tower room.
 - He'd spent years assuming there had to be something left for him to bring — some measure of discipline, devotion, or merit that tipped the scale in his favor.
 - Paul says there isn't one. There never was.
- So the first thing we see this morning is this:

We have nothing to boast about (vv. 27-28)

- Paul is particularly concerned with the national pride of his people.
 - You've likely heard the term "Christian Nationalist."
 - It gets used as a kind of pejorative term in our generation and different people mean different things by it.
 - But beneath the arguments is an old spiritual danger: confusing national identity with favored standing before God.
 - That danger isn't new.
 - Paul is confronting a first-century form of religious-national boasting — the belief that Jewish identity and possession of the Law gave someone privileged standing before God.
 - He spoke about this back in [Rom. 2:17-24](#).

- There was the idea that keeping God's law would place God under some kind of obligation to grant life.
- That's exactly the idea that Paul has been dismantling.
- There's nothing to brag about — on either side of salvation.
 - I've made my disdain for driving through our capital city known.
 - I've got the sticker on my windshield that lets me pay to use the toll lanes (although it seems that they're never going the direction I need them to go).
 - But on the rare occasion they're open and I'm zipping by the stopped traffic on the "peasant highway," there's a kind of smugness that comes over me that says, "Look at all those poor people sitting in traffic."
 - Because I'm willing to pay whatever the state of Georgia tells me to pay, I subtly boast about the privilege a little RFID sticker on my windshield affords me.
- Salvation doesn't work that way.
 - Salvation is not an express lane purchased by people with greater resources.
 - There is no toll you can pay, no privilege you can leverage, and no religious credential that moves you ahead of anyone else.
 - That's the same problem Martin Luther had with the church.
 - They were selling salvation like tolls on an express lane and that's exactly the point here.
 - It's not earned through good works.
 - It's not bought with superior spiritual resources, superior effort, or superior privilege.
 - And it certainly can't be paid for with money.

- Instead of being earned, Paul introduces us to something altogether different.

- Look at the end of v. 27 again...

Romans 3:27 ESV

²⁷ 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.

- What exactly is the law of faith?
- It's not like law in the sense of the Ten Commandments.
 - Paul is using a rhetorical device.
 - He is contrasting the law of works with what he calls the law of faith.
- So what exactly is Paul doing when he calls faith a "law"?
 - He's not saying faith is a new rulebook you have to keep perfectly, the way Israel was called to keep Leviticus.
 - Paul actually does this elsewhere. Later, in [Romans 8:2](#), he'll talk about "the law of the Spirit of life" setting us free from "the law of sin and death."
 - Nobody thinks the Spirit handed down a new set of Ten Commandments there.
 - Paul is stretching the word "law" to mean something more like a governing principle.
 - An operating system.
 - A logic that something runs on.
- So when he says "law of works" and "law of faith," he's not describing two different sets of rules.
 - He's describing two entirely different operating systems for how a person could possibly relate to God.
 - Think about it this way.

- Gravity is a law. It doesn't care how hard you try.
- It doesn't negotiate.
- It pulls everything down, every time, no exceptions, no shortcuts.
- That's the law of works.
 - Under that system, everything depends on you — your effort, your output, your performance.
 - And if it worked, if you actually could climb high enough on your own effort, you'd have every right to stand at the top and boast about the climb.
- But there's another principle in nature that operates on a completely different logic.
 - Lift. Buoyancy.
 - The same forces that let a massive piece of steel rise into the sky, or a ship the size of a small city float on water instead of sinking to the bottom of it.
- That's not the absence of gravity.
 - Gravity is still very much active, still pulling down exactly as hard as it always does.
 - It's a different system altogether, working according to a different principle, doing something gravity alone could never do.
- That's the law of faith.
 - It's not the absence of a standard.
 - God's righteous standard hasn't gone anywhere.
 - It's an entirely different system for how you relate to that standard — one where you're not climbing.
 - You're being carried.

- Under the law of works, you move yourself, and effort is the only thing doing anything.
- Under the law of faith, something else entirely does the lifting.
- You're not achieving your way up.
- You're not George Jefferson headed up to the deeee-lux apartment.
- You're being carried by a righteousness that isn't your own.
- And that's exactly why boasting isn't just discouraged under the law of faith. It's structurally impossible.
 - You cannot boast about being carried the same way you might boast about climbing.
 - Nobody stands at the top of an elevator and talks about how hard they worked to get there.
- So here's Paul's whole argument in one sentence: if salvation ran on the law of works, boasting would make sense. You'd have earned it. You'd have every right to point at yourself.
 - But salvation runs on an entirely different law.
 - The law of faith. And under that system, there's nothing left to point at except the one who did the lifting.
- [Ephesians 2:8–9](#) says the same thing in plainer language: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."
 - Not a result of works.
 - Not a highway you paid a toll to bypass.
 - Not a law you kept well enough to earn your way up.
 - A gift. Received, not achieved.
- We have nothing to boast about — because the very system salvation runs on was never designed to produce boasting in the first place.

- And just to make sure, Paul restates it again.

Romans 3:28 ESV

²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

- But that raises another interesting question...If we are justified by faith, doesn't that make faith just another work?
 - We have a tendency to treat faith as if it is some kind of work that we do that secures salvation.
 - You've heard people talk this way, maybe even talked this way yourself.
 - "I just need to believe hard enough."
 - "My faith needs to be stronger."
 - "Do I really have enough faith for God to save me?"
- Do you hear what's happening in that kind of thinking?
 - We've quietly swapped one law of works for another.
 - Instead of asking "have I obeyed enough," we start asking "have I believed enough" — as if the strength or quality of our believing is what tips the scale.
 - That's not faith apart from works.
 - That's just works wearing a different outfit.
- Here's the difference.
 - Think about a light switch on the wall.
 - Flipping that switch doesn't generate a single volt of electricity.
 - You're not producing power.
 - You're not contributing energy to the system.
 - All the switch does is connect you to a power that already exists, generated somewhere else entirely, by someone else entirely.

- A weak flip of the switch turns the lights on exactly as well as a strong, confident flip.
- The power isn't coming from the intensity of your flip.
- It's coming from the source you're connected to.
- Of course, every illustration eventually breaks down.
- Faith is not a mechanism that activates Christ.
- The point is simply that the power is not found in the strength of your faith, but in the Savior your faith receives.
- That's what faith is.
 - Not a work that generates righteousness.
 - A connection to a righteousness that already exists, accomplished somewhere else entirely, by someone else entirely.
- Even Luther, after that tower experience, spent years still fighting the temptation to measure himself by the strength of his own faith instead of resting in the object of it.
 - Old habits die hard, and this is one of the oldest habits sinners have.
 - So when Paul says "apart from works of the law," don't hear that as only something to do with the Jews.
 - Hear it ruling out every version of "if I just do this well enough" — including the version that quietly turns faith itself into the last work you have to perform.
 - Faith isn't the one good work God accepts instead of all the others.
 - Faith is the empty hand that receives what someone else has already done.
- But this law of faith has implications beyond our own personal salvation.

We have one God and one way of salvation (vv. 29-30)

- The law of faith means that the ground is perfectly level here.

- We talked about this last week.
- There is no distinction - all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
- Just like all have sinned, that also means that all must come to salvation by the same law.
- That's exactly what Paul says next.

Romans 3:29–30 ESV

²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also,

³⁰ since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

- The gospel refuses to let us turn God into the mascot of our nation, our culture, or our political tribe.
 - God does not belong exclusively to America—or to any other nation.
 - He is not the God of one people only.
 - He is the one God who justifies Jews and Gentiles in exactly the same way—through faith in Jesus Christ.
- One law. One door. One God, justifying every single person who walks through it by the exact same means.
 - Not a Jewish way and a Gentile way.
 - Not a respectable way and a scandalous way.
 - Not a version for people who grew up in church and a different version for people who didn't.
 - If the law of faith is real — if righteousness really is received and not achieved — then it was never going to work any other way.
 - If justification is God's gift, then everyone receives it on the same basis.

- There cannot be one way for Jews and another for Gentiles.
- By the end of verse 30, Paul has closed off every last exit ramp for boasting.
 - Not in your effort. Not in your heritage.
 - Not in your position relative to somebody else's failure.
- But that raises an obvious problem.
 - If Paul has spent this much energy tearing down the law as a path to righteousness, is he tearing down the law itself?
 - Look at how he anticipates the objection in verse 31.

Romans 3:31 ESV

³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

- That's not a small thing for Paul to say.
 - He knows exactly what it sounds like to say righteousness comes apart from the law.
 - It sounds obsolete.
 - Like an old computer that doesn't cut it anymore — set it aside, we've got something newer now.
- Paul's answer isn't "sort of."
 - It isn't "in a manner of speaking."
 - It's "by no means" — the strongest denial in his vocabulary.

Faith doesn't tear down the law, it upholds it. (v. 31)

- So what does "uphold" actually mean here? Two things.
- First, upholding the law means the law was never the problem. It's still exactly what it always was.
 - Later in this letter, Paul calls the law "holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good."

- Faith doesn't demote the law. Faith just refuses to treat a holy standard as a ladder you can climb.
- The law was always a true diagnosis.
- Faith doesn't argue with the diagnosis.
- Faith is what happens after you finally believe it.
- Second, upholding the law means its purpose actually gets fulfilled, not thrown out.
 - The law never had the power to justify sinners or produce the righteousness it demanded.
 - That was never a flaw in the law.
 - The law reveals God's righteousness, exposes our sin, and directs us toward the only one who could fulfill it.
- Paul will say it plainly a few chapters from now in [Romans 8:2-4](#): God did what the law could not do by sending his own Son, "in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us."
 - In Christ, the law's judgment against us has been answered; and through the Spirit, the kind of life described by the law begins to take shape in us.
 - Not by us gritting our teeth and trying harder, but by the work of Christ for us and the work of his Spirit in us.
- Here's why this matters for you, and not just for a first-century argument about Jewish law-keeping.
 - This verse cuts off two different escape routes people take when they hear "saved by faith alone."
 - Some people hear it and think, "Then none of this obedience stuff really matters.
 - I'm covered either way." That's not upholding the law.

- That's the same old boasting, just wearing a new disguise — boasting in your freedom instead of your performance.
- Other people hear "faith alone" preached, nod along on Sunday, and then walk back into the rest of the week still trying to earn what they were just told is a gift.
 - Still measuring. Still exhausted.
 - Still quietly convinced that God's posture toward them depends on how the week went.
- Paul says both of those are wrong, for the same reason.
 - The law was never overthrown, and it was never something you were carrying on your own in the first place.
 - Someone else fulfilled it for you.
 - And that same Spirit is now producing in you a life that actually looks like what the law always asked for — not to earn a seat, but because you already have one.
- Faith doesn't overthrow the law — and faith doesn't satisfy the law.
 - Christ does.
 - He fulfilled its righteous demands and bore its curse on our behalf.
 - Faith simply receives him and all that he has accomplished.

Transition to Table

- So what becomes of our boasting?
 - It's excluded. Not reduced.
 - Not humbled. Gone.
- Who may come to God?
 - Jew and Gentile.
 - Respectable and ruined.

- The one who has been around church his whole life and the person who walked in off the street this morning still unsure what she believes.
- All of them, through the same law — the law of faith.
- Has God ignored his own righteousness to let us in the door?
 - No. Christ has fulfilled what we could not, and borne what we deserved.
 - The law hasn't been set aside.
 - It's been satisfied — by Someone else, on our behalf.
- Remember Luther, in that tower, pounding on a door he thought was locked, only to discover it had been standing open the whole time?
 - That door opens onto a table.
 - In a few minutes, we're going to come to it together.
 - This Table is not for people who have made themselves worthy.
 - None of us has. It's for those who have stopped trusting their own worthiness and are trusting Jesus Christ instead.
- If you belong to Christ and have identified with him in baptism — then you are invited to come to this table.
 - Not because your faith has been flawless this week, but because your Savior has been faithful.
 - There's no résumé check at this table.
 - There's no ranking of whose faith is strongest or whose obedience is cleanest.
 - Just empty hands, reaching for what Someone else has already done.
- If you're not yet trusting Christ, let the elements pass.
 - But don't let Christ pass by.
 - Consider what this bread and cup proclaim, and receive him by faith.