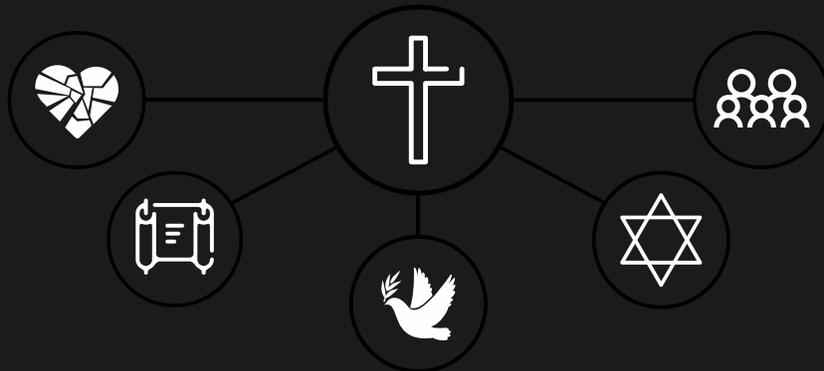




ROMANS AND THE FUTURE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1-7



Title: Justification by Faith is the End of Boasting

Text: Romans 3:27-31

Date: November 13, 2022

Main Idea: Justification is through faith, not through works

Personal Study Guide

READ ROMANS 3:27-31

Highlight – What stands out?

1. How many rhetorical questions are asked by Paul in these 4 verses? List them here:

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

f. _____

2. What is the purpose of rhetorical questions? Why might Paul use them so frequently in Romans?

3. In v. 27 Paul asks “what becomes of our boasting?” and follows by saying it is “excluded”. What is contrasted with boasting in the text?

4. Paul uses the term ‘boast’ or ‘boasting’ more than 40 times in his letters. Go back to Romans 2:17-24. What does Paul say that the Jews were boasting about?

5. What themes or ideas are mentioned here that we have heard up to this point in Romans?

Explain – What does this mean?

In v. 29 & 30 Paul makes clear that God deals with all people in the same way, and that the only way to be justified is through faith. Paul uses circumcision as an example of a work of law that allows for boasting – but reinforces that again justification is through faith.

1. Consider hearing this text as a Roman Jew and then as a Roman Gentile. How would the diversity of the audience effect how the text is received?
2. Why does Paul rhetorically ask about Boasting (v. 27)? “Boasting is the outward form of the inner condition of pride” [Piper]. See Judges 7:2. Why does God reduce the size of Gideon’s army?
3. Knowing that boasting is a deep problem of the human heart, what is the significance of justification being through faith, not through works (v. 28)? How is boasting excluded by God’s acts for salvation and justification?
4. V. 31, Why does Paul quickly reinforce that value of the law? In God’s plan and acts for salvation was the law upheld? Does justification by faith lead to obedience?

5. These verses provide a summary of Paul's claims to this point in the letter. Based on these verses, write a short summary of Paul's claims, but in your own words.

Apply – How does this change me?

1. When Paul says “apart from the works of the law” in v. 28 does he mean that works of the law should not be performed? That the law should not be obeyed?
2. What “works of law” do we perform to try to be right with God? How does this work open the door for boasting?
3. Where does boasting in our own works lead us when we fail? Where does boasting in our own works lead us when we are alone and honest with the condition of our heart?
4. If boasting is a deep problem of the human heart, what does that tell us about our need for a solid foundation for our identity as we face the difficulties and challenges of the world and the inadequacies in ourselves?

Commentary: Taken from Colin Kruse Commentary on Romans 3:27-31

Note to Group Leaders: You also have your F.F. Bruce Commentary on Romans you were given on Team Night. You can use that one, in addition to this one, to help you grasp the text. Reach out to Courtney Reissig if you need one or haven't received yours.

b. Jewish Boasting Is Excluded, 3:27–31

It is important to note that when Paul says that God 'justifies those who have faith in Jesus' (3:26), he implies that there are no distinctions between Jews and Gentiles in this matter. Using the rhetoric of the diatribe again in 3:27–31 (cf. 2:17–29; 3:1–9), Paul poses a number of questions raised by his belief that there are no distinctions in the matter of justification (3:27a, 27c, 29a, 29b, 31) to which he himself provides the answers (3:27b, 29c, 31b).

3:27 That God 'justifies [all] those who have faith in Jesus' causes Paul to ask: *Where, then, is boasting?* If Jews and Gentiles are treated in the same way by God in the matter of justification, Jews might well ask what has become of their grounds for boasting. In Paul's letters there are both legitimate and illegitimate grounds for Jewish boasting. The most comprehensive Pauline statement of Jewish privileges which constitute legitimate grounds for boasting is found in 9:4–5: 'Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah'. However, while it is legitimate for Jews to boast about their possession of the law and their relationship to God (2:17), it is illegitimate to boast of their works as a basis of justification (cf. 4:2). The illegitimate boasting Paul has in mind does not appear to be restricted to Jewish boasting based on their covenantal privileges but also includes boasting in works done. In chapter 4, where Paul discusses the case of Abraham, he shows that the patriarch was not justified by the works he did but only through faith. His faith was credited to him as righteousness as a gift, not as wages due to him for works done (4:2–5). The contrast there is between faith and works, not faith and covenant privileges.

Paul's response to the question, 'Where, then, is boasting?' is: *It is excluded.* Already in 2:17–24 he took his hypothetical Jewish dialogue partner to task for boasting in the law (2:17, 23) because by his disobedience to the law (2:21–22) he dishonored God, causing God's name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles (2:23–24). In that case the boasting of Jewish people was excluded on the basis of their disobedience to the law. However, here in 3:27 Paul takes a different

tack when he raises the question of the basis for the exclusion of boasting. He asks: *Because of what law? The law that requires works?* He answers: *No, because of the law that requires faith.* Jewish boasting is excluded, not only because of their failure to obey the law, but also because ‘the law requires faith’ (lit. ‘[the] law/principle of faith’), as the apostle will explain in the following verses (3:28–30). (See ‘Additional Note: *nomos* in 3:27’, below, for a discussion of the question whether *nomos* here should be taken as a ‘principle’ or as a reference to the Torah.)

ADDITIONAL NOTE: NOMOS IN 3:27

The issue is the way *nomos tōn ergōn* (‘law of works’) and *nomos pisteōs* (‘law of faith’) ought to be understood. The word *nomos* itself may carry three different meanings. It is used frequently in Romans (74 times in 50 verses), predominantly denoting the law of Moses (2:12 [4×], 13 [2×], 14 [3×], 15, 17, 20, 23, 25 [2×], 26, 27 [2×]; 3:19 [2×], 20 [2×], 21 [2×], 27, 28, 31 [2×]; 4:13, 14, 15 [2×], 16; 5:13 [2×], 20; 6:14, 15; 7:1, 2 [2×], 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 [3×], 8, 9, 12, 14, 16, 22, 25a; 8:3, 4, 7; 9:31; 10:4, 5; 13:8, 10) or OT Scripture as a whole (7:1), but on seven other occasions it appears to denote a principle (7:21, 23 [3×], 25b; 8:2 [2×]), as it does here in 3:27.

Not all commentators agree that *nomos* in 3:27 should be rendered ‘principle’ rather than ‘law/Torah’. Some argue that Paul’s use of *nomos* in Romans consistently denotes the law of Moses. Wright, for example, contends: ‘Paul is thus distinguishing, not for the last time in the letter, between the Torah seen in two different ways. On the one hand, there is “the Torah of works”—this is Torah seen as that which defines Israel over against the nations, witnessed by the performance of the works that Torah prescribes—not only Sabbath, food-laws and circumcision, though these are the obvious things that, sociologically speaking, give substance to the theologically based separation. On the other hand, there is the new category Paul is forging here: “the Torah of faith”, in a sense yet to be explained (like many things in chap. 3)’. Cranfield also interprets *nomos* as a reference to the law of the OT, describing it as ‘God’s law, not misunderstood as a law which directs men to seek justification as a reward for their works, but properly understood as summoning men to faith’. Ito suggests that the deeper meaning of the *nomos tōn ergōn* is ‘the part of the Torah which reveals the Jewish failure to live up to the standard demanded of them in the Torah’, and *nomos pisteōs* denotes ‘the part of the Torah that presents Abraham’s faith’.

Other scholars argue in favor of interpreting *nomos* in 3:27 as ‘principle’. Fitzmyer and Byrne favor this view, as does Witherington, who suggests that in Romans ‘the principle of faith’ (*nomos pisteōs*) is equivalent to ‘the obedience of faith’ (*hypakoē pisteōs*). Moo also supports the view that *nomos* in 3:27 should be understood as ‘principle’, arguing against the view that it consistently denotes the Mosaic law. He says:

An even more serious objection to this interpretation [that *nomos* denotes the Mosaic law throughout] is the close relationship between the law of Moses and faith that it assumes. For such a positive relationship between these two contradicts both the movement of this passage and Paul's larger teaching about the law. In both 3:21–26 and 3:28, the faith that gains a standing with God is explicitly distanced from the Mosaic law ('apart from the law'; 'apart from works of the law').... A second interpretation is, then, to be preferred: Paul is contrasting two different 'laws'. On this view, the word *nomos*, in both its actual occurrences in this verse, has a metaphorical sense: 'principle', or 'rule'.... Paul's question, while meant to have a general reference—'what "rule" or "system of demands" excludes boasting?'—would naturally bring to mind the law, the torah. Paul then adds the contrasting modifiers to make clear his point: no, it is not through the torah, that law which demands works, through which boasting is excluded; it is through the 'rule' of faith, the 'ordinance' or 'demand' of God for faith as the basis for justification (v. 28).

3:28–30 In these verses Paul explains how the principle of faith excludes Jewish boasting. To begin he says: *For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.* By casting this statement in the first person plural ('we') the apostle includes his readers among those who with him have accepted this view. If God justifies those who believe in his Son without their having to observe the law, then Gentiles are placed on the same footing as Jews, and Jews can no longer claim possession of the law as a ground for boasting of superiority over Gentiles.⁷¹

To reinforce his point that Jewish boasting is excluded by the principle of faith, that all people may be justified by faith without the works of the law, Paul asks, *Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too?* The form of the latter question expects the answer which Paul himself then provides: *Yes, of Gentiles too.* There is only one God, and he is God of all creation and the entire human race, Gentiles as well as Jews. Despite the special place of Israel in salvation history (cf. 11:25–29), she cannot claim an exclusive relationship to God.

To reinforce his point Paul adds, *since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.* Paul's 'since there is only one God' (lit. 'since God is one') reflects the fundamental belief of Judaism, encapsulated in the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4: 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one'. Paul refers to the oneness of God also in 1 Corinthians 8:6 ('yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live'). Appealing to the fundamental belief that God is one, he argues that the one God will justify Jews ('the circumcised') and Gentiles ('the uncircumcised') in the one way—by faith. Paul employs the future tense, 'will justify', here, reflecting the fact that justification

belongs properly to the end time, the final day of judgment, when God will adjudicate in favor of all those who have put their faith in his Son.

There has been some debate concerning possible distinctions in meaning between the justification of the circumcised 'by faith' and the uncircumcised 'through faith'. Early church fathers were divided in their views about this matter. Theodore of Mopsuestia was of the opinion that 'Paul says *the ground of their faith* with respect to the Jews because, although they had other ways of seeking righteousness, they could not obtain it except through their faith. When speaking about the Gentiles, he says *through their faith* because this is the only claim to righteousness which they have'. However, Augustine said: 'The difference of preposition (*on the ground of* versus *through*) does not indicate any difference of meaning but serves simply to vary the phrase'. Most likely, these expressions are stylistic variations.⁷⁷

3:31 If, as Paul argued in 3:28, people are justified by faith 'apart from the works of the law', then the question arises: *Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith?* The word Paul uses for 'nullify' has a range of meanings, but here means 'to invalidate'. To this question, whether his teaching about justification by faith nullifies or invalidates the law, Paul responds emphatically: *Not at all!* This expression denoting strong denial, used here for the second time in Romans, is found frequently in this letter and in other letters of Paul where the apostle expresses strong disagreement (cf. 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; 1 Cor. 6:15; Gal. 2:17; 3:21; 6:14). When introducing this whole section dealing with 'the righteousness given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe' (3:21–31), Paul insisted that it was something 'to which the Law and the Prophets testify' (3:21). This he foreshadowed also in the opening paragraph of his letter when he described the gospel of God that he was set apart to preach as 'the gospel he [God] promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures' (1:2). Clearly, then, Paul would not say that faith nullifies the law.

Having rejected emphatically the suggestion that the law is nullified by faith, Paul asserts, *Rather, we uphold the law*. There are two suggestions concerning the way Paul upholds the law by preaching that people are justified by faith without observing the law: (i) In 8:3–4 Paul writes: 'For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit'. The apostle implies that, while people are justified without having to observe the law, nevertheless there is a sense in which the law is fulfilled in the lives of the justified who live according to the Spirit (see the commentary on 8:3–4 below). (ii) In the very next chapter (4:1–25) Paul shows from the law that Abraham was justified by faith without works and argues that this will also be the case for all who have faith in Christ, for Gentiles as well as Jews. It may be best to say that in both these ways Paul's teaching about justification by faith upholds the law: it enables a fulfillment of what the

law sought to bring about in human behavior, and it fulfils what is foreshadowed in the law's account of Abraham's justification.

Paul does not spell out here what is involved when he says that God 'justifies those who have faith in Jesus' (3:26). Later in the letter he will show that there is no condemnation for believers (8:1) because God justifies (i.e. adjudicates in favor of) those who believe in his Son and as a result will entertain no charges against them in God's presence (8:31–34). This adjudication belongs properly to the end time (cf. 3:30), but now with the death and resurrection of Christ it may be said that it has already been made in favor of believers (5:1; 8:1).

ADDITIONAL NOTE: JUSTIFICATION

Because the whole world is held accountable to God, and because no one will be justified by the works of the law (3:19–20), God has revealed his saving righteousness apart from the law. By his grace alone he justifies freely sinners who believe in his Son on the basis of the redemption effected through him (3:24). Redemption was made possible when God set forth Christ as the atoning sacrifice for sins, and by doing so demonstrated his justice, which would otherwise have been compromised when justifying sinners. By setting Christ forward as the atoning sacrifice, God could be both just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus (3:25–26). From all this it is clear that when Paul speaks about justification he is doing so in legal terms, in terms of the judge acting justly when declaring righteous those who believe in his Son. The doctrine of justification is itself not the gospel. The gospel is the message concerning what God has done through Christ to deal with the effects of human sin (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–4) and to liberate humanity and the whole creation from the effects of sin (cf. 8:19–24). Those who believe the gospel and give their allegiance to his Son God justifies, that is, he declares them to be in the right. They enjoy the status of those for whom God has made a favorable adjudication.

Sanday and Headlam agree that justification is essentially a judicial verdict but, because God treats sinners as though they were righteous, they argue that 'the Christian life is made to have its beginning in a fiction'. However, to declare a person righteous, as God does in the case of sinners who believe in his Son, is no legal fiction, but 'a legal *reality* of the utmost significance'. It means that God has acquitted believers of all charges that could be brought against them for their sins. Paul says that this verdict of acquittal, understood in Jewish theology to be hoped for at the last judgment, is made when people believe.

The apostle Paul employed the doctrine of justification by faith when defending the right of Gentiles to be numbered among the people of God without the need to submit to circumcision or take upon themselves the yoke of the Mosaic law. Being justified by faith, as Abraham was, they are numbered among his children, and become inheritors of the promises God made to him, including the promise of the Spirit (Gal. 3:6–9, 14). Though Paul used this

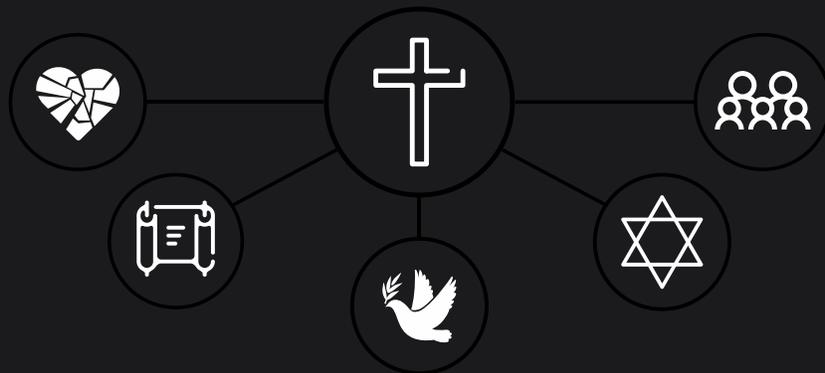
doctrine against the Judaizers, those who would deny a place for Gentiles in the people of God unless they were circumcised and obeyed the Mosaic law, it was not for him simply a fighting doctrine that could be set aside when he was not involved in that dispute. This is indicated by the fact that he speaks of justification in passages that do not deal with the question of Gentile inclusion (cf. 8:29–30; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Cor. 3:9; Phil 3:9; Tit 3:7).¹

¹ Colin G. Kruse, [*Paul's Letter to the Romans*](#), ed. D. A. Carson, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2012), 193–201.



ROMANS AND THE FUTURE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1-7



Group Study Guide

*This lesson is for the Group Leader to use to teach the lesson and facilitate the discussion. It is not intended that you will use every question in this guide during your group time. You will likely only be able to cover 4-5 questions, depending on how discussion goes. This guide is longer than what you will need but provides the freedom and flexibility to pull questions out for discussion that will best serve your group time.

Tip: You may want to pull one question from each section for discussion or spend more time on a particular section than another on. It's totally up to your discretion.

Introduction

Icebreaker Question:

Have you listened to a football locker room speech before a rivalry game lately? Is there any boasting in those pump-up speeches? Any taunts? What are those boasts and taunts intended to do for the players?

READ ROMANS 3:27-31

Highlight – What stands out?

1. How many rhetorical questions are asked by Paul in these 4 verses? List them here:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____

2. What is the purpose of rhetorical questions? Why might Paul use them so frequently in Romans?

3. In v. 27 Paul asks “what becomes of our boasting?” and follows by saying it is “excluded”. What is contrasted with boasting in the text?
4. Paul uses the term ‘boast’ or ‘boasting’ more than 40 times in his letters. Go back to Romans 2:17-24. What does Paul say that the Jews were boasting about?
5. What themes or ideas are mentioned here that we have heard up to this point in Romans?

Explain – What does this mean?

In v. 29 & 30 Paul makes clear that God deals with all people in the same way, and that the only way to be justified is through faith. Paul uses circumcision as an example of a work of law that allows for boasting – but reinforces that again justification is through faith.

1. Consider hearing this text as a Roman Jew and then as a Roman Gentile. How would the diversity of the audience effect how the text is received?
 2. Why does Paul rhetorically ask about Boasting (v. 27)? “Boasting is the outward form of the inner condition of pride” [Piper]. See Judges 7:2. Why does God reduce the size of Gideon’s army?
 3. Knowing that boasting is a deep problem of the human heart, what is the significance of justification being through faith, not through works (v. 28)? How is boasting excluded by God’s acts for salvation and justification?
 4. Look at v. 31, Why does Paul quickly reinforce that value of the law? In God’s plan and acts for salvation was the law upheld? Does justification by faith lead to obedience?
 5. These verses provide a summary of Paul’s claims to this point in the letter. Based on these verses, ask someone to explain a short summary of Paul’s claims, but in your own words.
-

Apply – How does this change me?

1. When Paul says “apart from the works of the law” in v. 28 does he mean that works of the law should not be performed? That the law should not be obeyed?
2. What “works of law” do we perform to try to be right with God? How does this work open the door for boasting?
3. Where does boasting in our own works lead us when we fail? Where does boasting in our own works lead us when we are alone and honest with the condition of our heart?
4. If boasting is a deep problem of the human heart, what does that tell us about our need for a solid foundation for our identity as we face the difficulties and challenges of the world and the inadequacies in ourselves?

Respond – What’s my next step?

1. Identify 3 areas in your life where you are leaning on works of the law for justification:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
2. Identify an area in your life where boasting is being used to cover a part of your life that is rotting on the inside.

3. Pray and ask God to fill the area of your life that is being covered with boasting with the solid foundation of his justification that is through faith alone, not through works.

Additional Resources:

Sermon: John Piper. Justification by Faith is the End of Boasting. May 30, 1999. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/justification-by-faith-is-the-end-of-boasting>

Sermon: Tim Keller. Boasting and Faith. March 22, 2009. [Boasting and Faith - Gospel in Life](#)