

NO NEED TO BOAST

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ROMANS 3:21–30 PRINT PASSAGE: ROMANS 3:21–30

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition*,
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 3:22–24, KJV

Intro

The Apostle Paul knew that in order for the Christian community in Rome to serve as the base for his ministry, it needed to be convinced of the purpose and power of the Gospel—the very Gospel he was preparing to take to Spain and beyond. The believers there would need to understand its power to save both Jew and Gentile because all stood equally condemned before God. They would need to be clear on how one receives salvation. They would need to know what salvation looks like in the life of the believer (sanctification) and they would need to understand why it was imperative that the Gospel be spread beyond Rome to the Gentile nations, and how his mission related to the promises of God.

Without this corpus of understanding, hostility could easily develop between the two factions—Gentile and Jewish portions of the Roman church as it already had in other places. Finally, the church would need to understand how the Gospel has power to bring greatly diverse peoples together into one body that loves and serves and supports one another while furthering the Great Commission.

Paul's theological view, however, was a sharp departure from the conventional understanding of God for both the Jews and the pagan gods of the Gentiles. The Jews had been convinced for centuries that their heritage made them exclusively entitled to God's righteousness. Further, what their heritage did not cover, their works of righteousness according to the Law would. Gentiles, on the other hand, had no specific knowledge of the true God.

Think About It

How can one boast as having attained something that was given as a gift?

1. Righteousness through Faith (Romans 3:21–26)

King James Version

BUT now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

25 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;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

New Revised Standard Version

BUT now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed and is attested by the Law and the Prophets,

22 the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,

23 since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;

24 they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

25 whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed;

26 it was to demonstrate at the present time his own righteousness, so that he is righteous and he justifies the one who has the faith of Jesus.

Know It

After conclusively demonstrating that every human being, Jew and Gentile alike, is unrighteous (1:18–3:20), Paul now presents the contrast. In verse 22, he writes that the righteousness of God is available to all who believe. This justification is apart from the Law, meaning it is meant to be received by God rather than earned by compliance to religious instruction. Though the prophets of old preached about the importance of compliance to it, the righteousness of God is no longer mediated through the faithful observance of the Law, but rather through faith in Jesus Christ. Before the crucifixion, justification was granted based on one's obedience to the prescribed requirements of the Law as they represented God's standards of holiness. After the crucifixion, however, righ-

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teousness is made available to all who believe in Christ, the incarnation of God's holiness. According to Paul, everyone is eligible for this grace, Jew or Gentile. Everyone needs it as all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

With this bold declaration, Paul challenges both the relevancy and efficacy of the old sacrificial system of sin atonement. To atone means "to cover." A sacrifice was the means by which God "covered" sin so that the broken relationship between God and humanity could be repaired. To facilitate the ritual, the high priest was to take the blood of the sacrificial animal and sprinkle it on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments, representing God's moral and righteous standards, which had been broken. But when the sacrificial animals were killed and their blood sprinkled over the cover of the Ark, the broken laws of God were atoned for by the death of the animals instead of the death of the Israelites.

God took it upon Himself to initiate the exchange of life by the shedding of blood—the life of a "sinless" animal for the life of a sinless Human. God did this, according to verse 25 to demonstrate His righteousness. Why would such a demonstration be needed? Because it would seem that God, in justifying sinners, would not be true to His own law's requirement that sin must be punished (Exodus 23:7; Deuteronomy 25:1; Proverbs 17:15). God's failure to consistently punish sin throughout the Old Testament era may have raised questions regarding the integrity of His justice. How could He claim to be a righteous and holy God and at the same time forgive sins by leaving them unpunished? But when Jesus is set forth as the atoning sacrifice, it is clear that God is punishing sins after all, albeit in the person of His only begotten Son, who suffers the penalty in our place.

2. Boasting Not Included (Romans 3:27)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.	27 Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. Through what kind of law? That of works? No, rather through the law of faith.

Because those who have faith in Christ are justified by God's grace and not by works, Paul challenges his readers with a rhetorical question: Where is boasting then? He uses this rhetorical device to address a common perception held among devoted followers. For those faithful to the Law, compliance to its holy statutes served as a source of prideful self-adulation (Rom. 2:17). Their boasting was not only in regard to their strict obedience to the Law, but also, and perhaps more overtly, that they are chosen by God for a special role in the drama of redemption. They believed their covenant faithfulness gave them a special place in God's heart.

For Paul, however, the answer to his question is that boasting is excluded. There's no room for it when the Gift of redemption has been made available to all. It would be the same as receiving a valuable birthday present and then insulting the giver by insisting on paying for it yourself. Once the item was paid for by the recipient, it ceases to be a gift. But when the item is paid for by another, and received, not only is it a gift, it automatically concedes the right for the recipient to boast about how they acquired it.

Paul contends that prior to Christ's redeeming work on the cross, the system of salvation was defined by observation of the Law. Now, under grace, the system of salvation has been redefined by a new law, the law of faith. Verse 27 can be paraphrased like this: "Where, then, is boasting? It has been excluded. Through what system of salvation? The Law system, in which one is justified by works? No, on the contrary, through the grace system, in which one is justified by faith."

3. Justice for All, by Faith (Romans 3:28–30)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.	28 For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.
29 Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:	29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of gentiles also? Yes, of gentiles also,
30 Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.	30 since God is one, and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

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Verse 28 restates Paul's basic premise that he has maintained throughout chapter, declaring that by faith, a person is justified apart from the works of the Law. To show the universal scope of this basic truth, Paul asks his readers another rhetorical question: Is God the God of Jews only?

No Jew of Paul's day would have denied that God was the God of all people in the sense of being Creator and Judge, so the obvious answer Paul anticipated was, "Of course not." This sets up nicely for him to ask a follow-up question: Since there is one God for all people, then is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Given there is only one God and if He were only for the Jewish people, what God is there for the others? These rhetorical inquiries of Paul were meant to reinforce to his readers the redemptive concern God has for all people, not just a chosen few. All of those whom God will justify, both Jews and Gentiles, will be justified in the same way—by faith alone.

It's not that we're justified by faith plus whatever other good deeds we do or commands of the Law we follow. Going to church for 52 Sundays in a year will not save you any more than tithing a certain dollar amount or delivering X number of meals to a homeless shelter. Those are all nice things for Christians to do, but they're not what saves us. These acts are what prove our faith to non-believers, but they are not the saving grace. It is only faith in God that can save, point blank, period.

Since there is only one God, He justifies every person in the same way—through their faith. He doesn't have a certain standard for Jews and a different standard for Gentiles. We are all treated equally in His eyes and the Jews are not entitled to special treatment, which Paul was trying to emphasize repeatedly. We receive faith in the same way and are justified in the same way. The Jews struggled with this concept because there was a long-standing animosity with the rest of the world and a general feeling of superiority. But God makes it clear over and over throughout the Bible that He is for everyone, not just the Jews. The Jewish people were meant to be the conduit of His love and grace to the rest of the world. They were the starting point but they were by no means the stopping point. If you are a Christian today, it is due to the faithfulness of Jews hundreds of years ago proclaiming the Good News to the entire world rather than keeping it to themselves.

Remember It

Paul's intent was to dismantle the divisive constructs of religious heritage between the Jew and the Gentile. He wanted to demonstrate God is no respect of persons as we all have sinned and fallen short of His glory. His righteousness requires a level playing field so that all may have equitable access to His grace. The means to access God's grace of righteousness and acceptance comes through faith, not works, according to Paul. Referring to the believers' efforts to earn the gift of God's righteousness through faithful adherence to the Law, "works" are necessary, though not enough. Faith, on the other hand, refers to the conviction one has to hear and respond to the voice of God.



Share It • Live It • Hear It




For a musical complement to the lesson, consider "Goodness of God" by Cece Winans.

Discuss ways to respond to the grace of God's righteousness.

How would others describe your faith maturity? Explain why.

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Devotional Readings for May 6–12, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
God Is Generous to the Unworthy	A Great and Blessed Nation	A Promise of Countless Heirs	Little Children, Your Sins Are Forgiven	God's Abundant Forgiveness	Trust God, Who Justified the Ungodly	Christ Was Raised for Our Justification
Matthew 20:1–16	Genesis 13:14–18	Genesis 15:1–6	1 John 2:12–17	Psalms 32	Romans 4:1–12	Romans 4:13–25

FOR OUR SAKE

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ROMANS 4

PRINT PASSAGE: ROMANS 4:13–25

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition*,
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. Romans 4:20–21, KJV

Intro

Nat Turner was an enslaved plantation preacher who led the only effective, sustained slave rebellion in U.S. history. He was born on October 2, 1800 in Southampton County, Virginia, where he learned to read and write, and became a religious leader among his fellow enslaved people. He believed that God had chosen him to free his people from bondage, and he was inspired by signs and visions to start a revolt.

For Black Christians living in an America, Nat Turner is much like our Abraham. For the Jewish people, Abraham is the father of faith because of his unwavering belief in God and in the promise of deliverance for his people. In like manner, Nat Turner—fueled by a conviction of faith in God and the hope of freedom—never wavered in his determination to fulfill God's will. He sacrificed his life. His faith in God and hope in the promise of freedom ultimately became a match that lit the flames of Civil War, which eventually brought about Emancipation. He and countless others gave their lives in faith so that today we enjoy the freedoms we have. In other words, our enslaved ancestors believed in God, not just for their sakes, but for ours as well.

In his attempt to provide further evidence of the need for and eligibility of the righteousness of God, Paul turns his attention to the Law of Moses in comparison to the promise of God. This he does to establish for his readers that the promise of God is for all people—both those under the Law and those outside of it. The key to acquiring it, however, is through faith—a faith such as Abraham's and Nat Turner's.

Think About It

Through faith, Abraham lived in the assurance of God's promise, so much so that God's promises outlived him.

1. The Law vs. the Promise (Romans 4:13–15)

King James Version

FOR the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

New Revised Standard Version

FOR the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

14 For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

15 For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

Know It

Verse 13 begins with Paul's declaration that the promise of God given to Abraham as the heir of the world was acquired not through Law, but rather, through faith. The promise he is referring to is the blessing of Genesis 12:1–3, where God vowed to make Abraham a great nation, to bless him, and eventually to bless the entire world through the heritage of his seed. Paul cites the Pentateuch in this correspondence to the Christians in Rome as an attempt to stress the difference between having faith in the promise of God versus having confidence in the Law of Moses.

Because Paul is writing to a mixed Jew-Gentile audience, the question of who they and what is required of God's people needed to be addressed, particularly since Jews had been identifying themselves exclusively as God's people. They assumed that because of their faithfulness in following the Torah, their obedience automatically made them righteous and acceptable by God. On the contrary, Paul contends in verse 14, that if those who are heirs of the Law are made eligible to receive God's promise because of their faithful compliance to it, then their faith is made void and the promise of God is meaningless. From Paul's perspective, the Law of Moses and the promises of God are incompatible in that they are mutually exclusive. Both have their place but are not meant to function within the same capacity of God's grace. Law language ("you shall") demands obedience, but promise language ("I will") demands faith. What God said to Abraham was not "Obey this law and I will bless you," but "I will bless you if you believe in my promise."

According to Paul, the transgressing the Law draws God's anger and demands His wrath in response. Since the only purpose of the law is to reveal transgression, it is incapable of being the basis for fulfilling promises. Once the Law has been violated, the promise would be retracted automatically. But where there is no Law, says Paul, and the inheritance of the world is based on promise instead,

there is no transgression. This means in the Law's absence there can be no violation of it triggering God's wrath and disqualifying one's eligibility to receive His promise. The root of sin isn't in breaking the law, but rather in breaking trust with God. He created the commandments as a loving Father trying to discipline His children. But when we break those rules, we're implying that we don't trust Him and that we know better than He. This kind of arrogance is what got Adam and Eve in trouble in the Garden of Eden, and we still struggle with this arrogance today.

2. The Faith of Abraham (Romans 4:16–21)

King James Version

16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

New Revised Standard Version

16 For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us,

17 as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"), in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

18 Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So shall your descendants be."

19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), and the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

20 No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

21 being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

After demonstrating how the Law of Moses and the promises of God are not compatible, verse 16 shows how grace and faith are compatible. According to Paul, believers are made eligible for the promise of God through faith according to grace. While the Law punishes, grace forgives. By grace the transgressions that trigger God's wrath and void His promise are omitted. God's grace is expressed through forgiveness that He has made available to the seed of Abraham, those who are of the faith and those of the Law.

To Paul, Abraham is the father of us all, Jew and Gentile. Those who are of Jewish heritage have grown up under the tutelage of the Torah and are followers of Christ. They are considered by him as "people of the Law." According to them, their lineage (which can be traced back to Abraham) legitimizes their claim to God's promise. Gentiles, on the other hand, who have no knowledge of Law or direct heritage with Abraham but believe God based on belief, are also eligible for the promise. They are those who Paul identified as "people of faith." Different than the Jews, their connection to Abraham is not by lineage, but rather, by faith.

Using the patriarch's example, Paul emphasized the intensity of conviction that should undergird one's faith in God. Abraham, he writes, believed God. After calling his attention to the multitude of stars in the heavens, God said to him, "So shall your seed be." Abraham was more than 75 years old and Sarah, his wife, was 66 at the time. Being well-aware of their advanced age, Abraham did not consider his own body or the deadness of Sarah's womb as an impediment to the promise of God. On the contrary, Abraham had hope in God's promise, which cannot die. He had a hope contrary to hope, meaning that he had a hope that went beyond natural expectation of fulfillment. His was a hope so resolute that even without evidence to validate a reason to believe, Abraham still had confidence that God would be true to His promise.

Different than our current understanding of wishful thinking for a desired result, hope, in Scripture, is the expectation of a preferred future outcome based solely on the conviction of God's promise. It was in this assurance that Paul says Abraham did not waver at the promise through unbelief. Abraham's belief meant that he did not allow unbelief to position him as a judge wherein he would weigh evidence to make a logical decision. Instead, he strengthened his resolve to believe in faith, giving God the glory.

3. For Our Sake (Romans 4:22–30)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.	22 Therefore "it was reckoned to him as righteousness."
23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;	23 Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone
24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;	24 but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,
25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.	25 who was handed over for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Abraham's faith in God was accounted to him as righteousness, meaning that his faith in God not only graced him with an heir (Isaac), but also established him as being made righteous in the sight of God. His experience of faith in the promise of God and the grace of receiving the blessing was not for his sake alone, but for ours as well, says Paul.

Those who believe in Him who raised Jesus from the dead, after being crucified for the sins of humanity, also will be made righteous, as Abraham was. Jesus died on our behalf and was resurrected for the right to be made justified in the sight of God.

It's not enough to believe in the historical account that Jesus was a real man, or a real teacher. It's not enough to believe that Jesus was a good guy who performed nice deeds for people during His lifetime. It's not enough to say He had good ideas in His sermon, or that He demonstrated a positive way for people to live their lives. We must have faith in what He did on the cross—that He was sinless yet died the death of a criminal and rose again three days later. Without this fundamental truth, our entire religion loses its legs to stand on. This is pivotal for any believer, which is why Paul hammers home this point repeatedly.

Paul also wanted to point out that the Resurrection in no way contradicts the Old Testament or makes it obsolete. Rather, the Gospel is the fulfillment of Old Testament Law and prophecy. Just as Abraham was justified through faith, so are we.

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Application & Review

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Remember It

Jesus died for our sake; not just to offer blanket forgiveness of sin, but also to provide for us the covering of grace under which we currently live.

There are three themes in today's lesson that Paul emphasizes as factors that establish our connection with God: faith, grace, and promise. By His grace we have been made eligible to receive God's promise of forgiveness, salvation, etc. But it's only through faith that these promises from God can be claimed. Grace and promise come from God, but faith requires participation on our part. Different than the Law, faith is predicated upon one's personal conviction of belief that can only be nurtured within the context of a personal relationship with God.



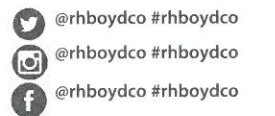
Share It • Live It • Hear It

For a musical complement to the lesson, consider "You Paid It All" by Wes Morgan.

Who are the heroes and heroines in your life that have inspired your faith?

How can you be the inspiration of another's faith?

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Devotional Readings for May 13–19, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Trusting in God Brings Perfect Peace	The Penalty Has Been Paid	God's Spirit Poured upon All Flesh	The Firstfruits of Reconciliation	Brothers at Long Last Reconciled	May God Bless Us with Peace	through Jesus Christ
Isaiah 26:1–11	Isaiah 40:1–11	Acts 2:1–4, 14, 16–24, 36	Acts 2:37–47	Genesis 33:1–15	Psalm 29 Peace with God	Romans 5:1–11

REMAINING STRONG

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: ROMANS 5:1-11

PRINT PASSAGE: ROMANS 5:1-11

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition,*
Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School

KEY VERSE: Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1, KJV)

Intro

Because its origins can be found within the ancient language of the biblical text, the term “faith” is usually associated with being a product of religion. But this is not the case. Though religion is designed to nurture faith, it is not the source of it. Faith is ultimately about having an awareness of God and a personal conviction regarding His will. Regardless of one’s religious affiliation or any affiliation for that matter, faith is not restrictive to anyone or limited by anything.

Our enslaved ancestors demonstrated faith through the fundamental belief that one day God would deliver them from the cruelty of their enslavers and grant them freedom. It was a belief not based on what they read in the Bible, given that most didn’t know how to read, but rather, on their desperation for deliverance. Despite the inhumane conditions they endured, their trust in God remained vigilant. In their own unique ways, our ancestors practiced communion with God through the connection of community.

Unwittingly, our enslaved ancestors provided for us a great example of what faith looks like when lived out loud. It’s not about religious affiliation and much stronger than a casual belief. Faith is the confidence of conviction that strengthens the resolve to live according to those convictions even in the face of peril. This is, at least in part, Paul’s agenda with his letter to the Christian community in Rome. After explaining the availability everyone has to be justified by God, Paul explains God’s grace in a way that permits believers to engage in a more intimate communion with God.

Think About It

It is a fair question to ask: which is most accurate? Justification by God’s grace through faith or justification through faith because of God’s grace?

1. Faith Brings Peace (Romans 5:1-5)

King James Version

THEREFORE being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

2 By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope:

5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

New Revised Standard Version

THEREFORE, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

3 And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance,

4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Know It

All of what Paul has written so far (chapters 1-4) is summarized in the first few words of the opening verse, “Therefore, having been justified by faith....” It undergirds the overall objective of the letter. Paul wanted to reinforce the availability and eligibility of God’s grace of forgiveness and justification for both the Jew and the Gentile. He goes to great lengths to demonstrate that the whole world stands under the present and future judgment of God, but is also worthy of His grace. But God has responded to the need of humanity by offering justification in a way that preserves the integrity of His own innate righteousness—through sending His Son to be the ultimate sacrifice for sin.

Because of this assurance of faith, Paul says that we have peace with God. The peace he is referring to involves the state of inner tranquility born from a relationship of deep communion with the Divine. According to Paul, our sinful state prohibited such intimate access to God, as He cannot have anything to do with sin. But through Jesus and His sacrifice, the bridge of peace has been erected between our unworthiness and God’s acceptance. Because we have been granted

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access by faith into this grace, we have reason to rejoice. In our celebration, we rejoice in the hope of His glory.

Just as he encourages rejoicing in the hope of God's glory, Paul also urges his readers to glory in their tribulations. The idea is that the believers' joy is not just something they hope to experience in the future, but also a present reality in times of trial and distress. While hope is generally understood as the confident expectation of something not yet seen (Heb. 11:1-2), Paul posits an additional thought: hope is knowing that God is never absent in our waiting for its fulfillment. While we wait, He is working in our hearts, building our character and transforming us into becoming more like Him.

According to Paul, tribulation produces perseverance, which means difficult circumstances occasion opportunities to believe in God and witness His power to deliver. The patient endurance of trials builds the believer's confidence in God's ability to deliver. In turn, this developed trust in God enhances our ability to tolerate uncomfortable situations while strengthening our overall resolve to hope.

The hope of God's glory does not disappoint, says Paul, it will not let the believer down. His explanation as to why this is true is simple: God floods our hearts with His love through the Holy Spirit who was been given to us. In other words, hope is rewarded with an enhanced awareness of the incomprehensible love of God. The Holy Spirit, who enters the believer's life in response to faith, is at work helping to provide insight into the reality of what it means to be encircled by the love of God.

2. Faith as a Bridge (Romans 5:6-8)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.	6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.
7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.	7 Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.
8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.	8 But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

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Being bound by sin and destined for an eternity apart from God, we were helpless and without strength to do anything to save ourselves, says Paul. No amount of struggle on our part could free us from condemnation. Prior to our salvation, all of humanity was mired in this state of moral sickness. But in due time, Christ died for the ungodly and for a new state of existence for believers, a state of grace.

As a means to emphasize the depth of love Christ has for us to make such a sacrifice on our behalf, Paul compares the likelihood of one's willingness to give his or her life for another. He writes it is unusual and therefore unlikely for someone to give his or her life for a righteous person, and more unlikely that one would dare to die for a good person. Yet, though we were neither righteous nor good, Christ died for us. God demonstrated His love toward us, that while we were guilty and unworthy to be accepted by Him, He gave the best that He had to cover, through grace, the worst of who we are.

How is this a demonstration of His love? Because Jesus was His only Son! Can you imagine for a moment offering your only child as a sacrifice for the world's sins? Any parent would say no immediately out of love for the child. But God's love was so great for the entire world that He was willing to make this incredible sacrifice. It boggles the mind if you stop and truly ponder these implications.

3. Faith as a Relationship (Romans 5:9-11)

King James Version	New Revised Standard Version
9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.	9 Much more surely, therefore, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God.
10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.	10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.
11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.	11 But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Paul continues with his explanation of what it means to be reconciled to God in last verses of the passage. In verse nine, he says that by the blood of Jesus we are now put right with God, implying that until His death, we were misaligned with God. The access we are now eligible to have with God rivals the kind of connection Adam and Eve enjoyed with Him prior to the Fall.

Different than justification, which is a forensic term establishing the legal basis upon which the believer is freed from sin, reconciliation is a relational concept. When two parties are reconciled, it means they are no longer hostile toward one another. Whatever had been a matter of difference between them has been removed. They have reconciled their differences and are prepared to move into the future together. According to Paul, we were God's enemies, but through the death of His Son, He made us His friends. Our reconciliation with God is expressed through personal relationship; it cannot be a unilateral action on the part of God alone. He has provided forgiveness for all people through the once-and-for-all death of His Son. Only when that forgiveness is accepted by faith is the compact completed and reconciliation takes place. God's part is finished; our part is a matter of individual decision.

Both justification and reconciliation are accomplished through the death of Christ, but the former focuses on death while the latter on life. It is for that reason that Paul says (verse 10) that having been reconciled, we will be saved by Christ's life! At the heart of God's redemptive plan stands one solitary figure—Jesus Christ, His Son, our Savior. Through His death, He has made it possible for those who believe to receive forgiveness for their sins and enter into an eternal relationship of joy with God the Father.

According to Paul, God's grace expressed through justification and reconciliation not only validates our faith, but through faith, it invites a deeper awareness of His love for us. More than a strong belief of God, our faith deepens our belief in God and in His will for our lives. The difference is proximity to His presence. The more aware we are of God's invitation to get closer to Him, the more our faith draws Him closer to us. To exercise our faith, then, is not just to hope in the fulfillment of God's promise, but also to anticipate the experience of His presence. How will you draw closer to Him this week?

Remember It

Faith is about being in relationship with God. This was the thematic centerpiece of Paul's message to the Christian community in Rome. Before Paul, the concept of faith, for most Jews, was understood as a transactional arrangement between God and the believer. Though their commitment to God was sincere, it was filtered through an interpretation of Mosaic Law and sustained by strict compliance to it. Paul's explanation of faith, however, disabused believers from the burden of compliance to Law and put in its place a Gospel of grace. By grace through faith believers are given opportunity to forge a new arrangement with God, one that engages the heart more than the head.



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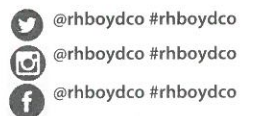
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider "Only One Night Tho," by Tye Tribbett.

Explain how you live your faith.

Discuss how you share your faith based on how you live it.

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DDR

Devotional Readings for May 20–26, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Call On God and Be Saved	Striving on the Basis of Faith	All Israel Will Be Saved	God's Word Is Very Near	Do Not Fear, Only Believe	A Beautiful Announcement of Salvation	Confession and Belief Lead to Salvation
Joel 2:28-32	Romans 9:14-16, 25-33	Romans 11:1-4, 17-27	Deuteronomy 30:11-20	Mark 5:35-43	Isaiah 52	Romans 10:1-17

HEARING AND BELIEVING

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: ROMANS 10:1-21

PRINT PASSAGE: ROMANS 10:1-17

RESOURCES: *New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition, Boyd's Commentary for the Sunday School*

KEY VERSE: If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9, KJV)

Intro

You have heard the saying that “seeing is believing.” Well for the believer, hearing is believing too. Hearing by faith is not something we do with the ears, but with the heart. It is a spiritual discipline, undergirded by a relationship with God, that enables an awareness of His divine direction for our lives. As an essential feature of the believer’s walk with God, faith serves as certainty in uncertain times. It is the constant assurance, amid the influences of doubt, that God’s presence, power, and promise is accessible to all who believe. Such confidence, however, can only be confirmed through a relationship with Him. A key point, not easily recognized by those who are more religious than relational.

Unfortunately, religion can get in the way of our relationship with God when tradition is the only thing that connects us to Him. For many believers, there is no difference between God’s voice and God’s word in that, for them, compliance to Scripture is the same as being in relationship with God. This was the exact concern Paul had for his people, according to the letter he wrote to the Christians in Rome. They believed in God, but their understanding of Him was filtered through the Law of Moses. Like too many evangelicals today, the Jewish people in Paul’s day believed righteousness must be earned by strict obedience. According to Paul, their deep devotion to the Law precluded them from receiving God’s grace, guaranteeing rejection in the Day of Judgment. So he wrote them a letter to correct their misguided thinking and to encourage them to stop striving for something they couldn’t attain.

Think About It

How do those who can’t speak confess their sins? Are they still eligible to be saved?

1. Israel’s Stumbling Block (Romans 10:1-4)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

BRETHREN, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

2 For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

3 For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

BROTHERS and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

2 For I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not based on knowledge.

3 Not knowing the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God’s righteousness.

4 For Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Know It

Paul expresses deep and abiding affection for his fellow Israelites in verse 1. After all, he also belonged to that special race of people to whom God revealed Himself through history. The reality of his love for them is demonstrated when he says that it is his heart’s desire and prayer to God is that they be saved, implying that those who held fast to their Jewish traditions were not where they thought they were in relation to their acceptance from God.

For Paul, salvation involved God’s deliverance from the ultimate consequence of sin in exchange for His loving acceptance and eternal life. Such an experience can only happen according to God’s grace, through faith, and apart from the Law. As a former Pharisee who once upon a time fought to preserve the integrity of the law, Paul now regards it as the primary obstacle preventing access to God’s righteousness.

Paul makes it very clear in verse 4 that devotion to the law is actually what prevents God’s approval and acceptance. This is because Christ is the end of the Law, which is to say that the Law has fulfilled its purpose by leading believers to Christ. Upon His death and resurrection, Christ nullified the relevancy of the Law and replaced it with grace, making God’s righteousness available to Jews, Gentiles, and all who believe.

NOTES:

2. Not Law, but Grace (Romans 10:5–10)

King James Version

5 For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.

6 But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:)

7 Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)

8 But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

New Revised Standard Version

5 Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them."

6 But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down)

7 "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim),

9 because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For one believes with the heart, leading to righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, leading to salvation.

To reinforce his argument, Paul contrasts two kinds of righteousness in verses 5–6. First is the kind that Moses had written about, which is righteousness of the Law. Citing Leviticus 18:5, he references a statement from Moses speaking on behalf of the Lord to His people saying: "You shall therefore keep my statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them." Paul paraphrases it like this: "the man who does those things shall live by them." This statement from Moses was a terse summary of the way to salvation. In its immediate application, the Law represented the covenant responsibilities God had imposed on the Jews as His special people. Complete compliance to the Law was the condition for not only acquiring God's approval, but also for what makes one eligible to live in the light of His promise and blessings.

The problem, however, was that no one is able to live up to the requirements of the Law. Although it pointed believers in the right direction, the Law offered them no power to achieve its directives. The Law was never meant to be used as

a way to merit God's favor. Nevertheless, that didn't prevent Jewish leaders and legalists' perversion of the divine intention of the Law, giving the false impression that only through personal merit that one can truly be saved.

The other kind of righteousness Paul references is a righteousness of faith, which he cites from Deuteronomy 30:12–14. Different than the righteousness that's "earned" through human effort, the righteousness of faith is available to everyone because of the all sufficient work of Christ.

In its original meaning, righteousness referred to the accessibility and comprehension of the Law, given to Moses by God for the people to live by. According to Moses, there was no need for heroic actions to know what the Law required, since it was conveniently provided for them through Moses.

Using Moses' statement about access to God's law, Paul reinterprets its phrasing to better demonstrate his point. He offers a rhetorical question for his readers: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" Which is to say, don't ask yourself what great work must you first perform to secure justification before God. One does not need to go up to the heavens (as if it were possible) as did Christ, who came down from heaven, or descend to the depths of earth, from which Christ was raised after His death. In other words, there is no human action that can match what Christ has already done to secure our salvation.

The same sentiment Moses expressed in his proclamation to the people of God in Deuteronomy, Paul now applies to his readers in Rome. Just as the people had unrestricted access to the word of Law, Paul explains the word of faith that replaces the word of Law is also available for believers. It is as close to them as their mouths and hearts. The word of faith is not a word in the literal sense, but rather, a "message"—essentially a condensed summary of the Gospel. It is the message that a person must accept in order to be saved. Different than the word of Law, the word of faith doesn't require an intermediary (like Moses) to validate justification, but rather, a confession with the mouth and a belief with the heart that God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Specifically, in the case of Israel, the word of faith was a message that hit at the heart of their religious beliefs. The phrase "Jesus is Lord" is thought to be the oldest Christian confessional statement, and was a clear expression of the deity of Christ. For a Jew to confess that "Jesus is Lord" would be to ascribe deity to Him, which was the source of the Jewish outrage that led to His crucifixion.

When Paul writes that it is with the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation, he is not speaking of two separate processes. Righteousness and salvation are being used interchangeably in this context. To believe with the heart is to be committed, at the deepest level, to the truth of Christ as revealed and experienced personally. To confess with the mouth is to admit externally the reality of an inner conviction and change.

3. Hearing is Believing (Romans 10:11–17)

King James Version

New Revised Standard Version

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.
12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.
13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.
14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?
15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!
16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?
17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

11 The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame."
12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.
13 For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."
14 But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?
15 And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"
16 But not all have obeyed the good news, for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"
17 So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

Though there are clear differences in terms of heritage and religious affiliation between Jews and Gentiles as it relates to sin, there is no difference between the two groups. God is the same Lord over all who believe in Him, and everyone who calls on Him for help will be saved. So Paul asks a series of rhetorical questions in verse 14 that reveal the reasons why. He presents a chain of contingencies that must precede the act of calling on God's name that have been ignored by some of the Jewish people. How can they call on God, asks Paul, if they don't believe? How can they believe if they haven't heard of the kind of grace He has to offer? How can they hear of this grace without a preacher? And how can a preacher teach about this grace unless they are first sent by God?

The message of God's grace produces faith, and as faith develops, it in turn naturally becomes the living expression of the message.

Application & Review

NOTES:

Remember It

Those of us who are saved are familiar with the perquisite formula needed to secure eternal life: confess with the mouth "the Lord Jesus" and believe with the heart that God has raised Him from the dead. When one confesses, that person acknowledges the truth regarding a particular matter.

Our confession of Christ is our internal acknowledgment of two essential truths necessary for establishing a relationship with God. First, is the admission of our existential predicament, that we are broken in a way that cannot be fixed by human effort. Second is the admission that the only One who can fix us is Christ, and only through our acceptance of His grace are we assured to be made whole.



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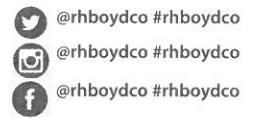
For a musical complement to the lesson, consider "Nobody Greater" by Vashawn Mitchell. Reflect on God's greatness in your life as you listen to the words or sing along.

Recount the moment you accepted Christ as your Savior. How did you feel and what did it mean to "say the words?" How did your relationship with Christ evolve over the years following your profession of faith?

How do you invite others to accept the Lord into their hearts? Are you comfortable sharing God's plan of salvation with a nonbeliever?

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Devotional Readings for May 27–June 2, 2024

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
God's Witnesses	Praise the Lord!	God's Children in Christ through Faith	The Lord's Blessing Makes Rich	Your Treasure Is with Your Heart	Seek First God's Kingdom	Christ, the Most Precious Gift
Isaiah 43:8–13	Psalms 113	Galatians 3:19–29	Proverbs 10:19–25	Matthew 6:19–24	Matthew 6:25–34	Colossians 1:24–2:3