

How God Destroys Human Self-Righteousness

(3:27)

The Law of Faith (3:27)

3:27 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.

- If a person can be declared right before God (justified) based on their own ethics, morality, spirituality, good deeds, intelligence, etc., then they have the ability to boast about their own righteousness. The **Bible, however, tells us that no person can be declared right before God based on anything in them** and, therefore, cannot boast at all in their right standing before God:
 - In 2:23, the apostle spoke to those Jews who boasted “*in Law*,” that is, in their possessing it and keeping it. Paul condemns them for “*breaking the Law*” and therefore dishonoring God and causing the non-Jews to blaspheme Him.
 - Paul will later write to the Corinthians that God chose a way to salvation that no “*wise...mighty...noble...strong*” person in the world would have chosen, “***so that no man may boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, Who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written [in Jeremiah 9:23], ‘Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord’***” (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).
 - He will also say in the same letter, “*the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God...so then let no one boast in men*” (1 Corinthians 3:19,21).
 - In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes, “*by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of*

God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9).

- “***Boasting...is excluded***” because we have **done nothing to save ourselves, and none of our self-righteousness will get us declared right before God now or on the day of judgment.**
- What, then, is “*a law of faith*,” as opposed to “*law...of works*”? **Paul is not speaking of two types of Law, but of a right understanding of the Law and a false understanding of the Law of God.** Jesus tackled the same thing in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:17-48), contrasting “*you have heard that the ancients were told*” or “*you have heard that it was said*” (the wrong way of understanding the Law) with “*but I say to you*” (the right understanding of the Law).
- The wrong understanding of the Law taught that we are righteous before God (“justified”) by keeping its commandments. Paul is clear that we can never keep the Law well enough to be justified before God.
- The right understanding of the Law sees a reliance on God’s grace by faith, resulting in an obedience that comes out of that faith.
 - Paul has already spoken of “*the obedience of faith*” (1:5), and will end the letter with the same phrase (16:26).¹ This is an obedience that comes out of, or is the fruit of, faith in God’s promises to graciously save His people (who cannot save themselves).
 - Galatians 3 (one of those chapters I tell you believers should read at least once a week) tells us that “*the Law...was added* [to God’s

¹ Paul will speak of the “*work of faith*” in 1 Thessalonians 1:3. This is a Law-obeying work that comes out of faith in God’s grace as given in Jesus Christ. Similarly, James tells us that true faith will inevitably produce “*works*” (2:14-26).

promise to Abraham] *because of transgressions*” (3:19). The Law was given to teach us that we are sinners who cannot be righteous before God (see also Romans 7:7). READ Galatians 3:22-24. What is the purpose of the Law?

The Only Gospel (3:28)

^{3:28}For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

- Remember why we need to be “justified”:
 - We were created to be in relationship with our Creator; when we are not, we are cut off from the only Source of our purpose, peace, love, belonging, and joy. Our sin cuts us off from Him in this world and eternity:
 - “Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You cannot look on wickedness with favor” (Habakkuk 1:13).
 - “You are not a God Who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with You. The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity” (Psalm 5:4,5).
 - One single violation of God’s Law makes us guilty of lawlessness, and “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). We have violated the Law of a God Who is so holy, beautiful, and glorious that He deserves perfect obedience. This violation is one against an eternal Being Who is infinitely worthy of complete devotion.
 - “Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen’” (Deuteronomy 27:26; quoted in Galatians 3:10).

- “...whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all” (James 2:10).
- We need a righteousness by which we may be in earthly and eternal relationship with One Who is perfectly righteous: “The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He” (Deuteronomy 32:2). Yet, God’s wisdom tells us that “he who justifies the wicked [is] an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 17:15). How can God justify us?
- When we believe in Jesus Christ, His life as a human being of perfect righteousness is credited to our account.² We read that God “is just [He doesn’t break His own Law] and justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).

Salvation and the God of Salvation (3:29)

^{3:29}Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ^{3:30}since indeed God Who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

God of Jews and Non-Jews

- Remember: Paul has asserted that “there is no partiality with God” (2:11). God does not have a people-group that He favors over any other.³

² 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5.

³ The special place of the Jews, if you remember, is not in who they are, but in the fact that “they were entrusted with the oracles of God” (3:2). God revealed Himself and His plan to “bless the nations” through His Son (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8) to the Jewish people in His inspired Word.

- On Mars Hill (the Areopagus) Paul founded this claim on the common ancestor of all humanity: “...*He made from one man every nations of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God*” (Acts 17:26,27).⁴ By virtue of His role as Creator of humanity, God lays claim to all. He made them to “*seek God.*” That is their primary purpose of existence. Replacing that purpose with any other results in an intellectual, emotional, spiritual, moral, existential, logical, and, as we see today, even biological confusion that leads to societal disintegration.

By Faith

- We cannot be declared right before God in this life or in eternity by our keeping or doing of God’s Law, “*because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight*” (Romans 3:20).
- We savingly receive “*the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ*” (3:22) alone.
- Peter, a Jew, in defending the salvation of non-Jews who believe in Jesus, proclaimed that God “*made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith...we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are*” (Acts 15:9,11).

⁴ Take note that Paul assumes the creation and existence of Adam as given in Genesis is historical fact, an idea under heavy attack these days even from those who claim to be part of the Church. Further, Luke traces Jesus’ genealogy back to Adam (Luke 3:38), Jesus Himself references God’s creation of Adam and Eve (Matthew 19:4), and Paul compares Adam to Christ, Whom he calls “*the last Adam*” (Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:22,45). Reducing Adam to a myth unravels biblical theology.

God Is One

- **The Bible reveals to us that there is only one God.**⁵
 - “*Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!*” (Deuteronomy 6:4; quoted by Jesus in Mark 12:29).
 - “*...for us there is but one God, the Father, from Whom are all things and we exist for Him*” (1 Corinthians 8:6a).
- Since God is one, Paul reasons, He has one plan of salvation for all of humanity, both Jews and non-Jews. He’ll make the same confession in his letter to the Ephesians: “*There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all Who is over all and through all and in all*” (Ephesians 4:4,5).⁶

The Purpose of God’s Law (3:31)

^{3:31} *Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.*

- Since we are not justified (declared right before God) by the Law, does that mean faith in Jesus Christ frees us from God’s moral Law? Paul is accused of teaching this (3:8; 6:1), and refutes it. We are forgiven our sin by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone, but this doesn’t mean we embrace sin to receive more grace!
- As the apostle John says, “*everyone who practices sin practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness*” (1 John 3:4). Jesus speaks of the day of judgment, when

⁵ Deuteronomy 4:35; Isaiah 44:6,8; 45:5,6; John 17:3; 1 Timothy 2:5.
⁶ As always, Paul assumes a thoroughly Trinitarian understanding of the nature of God. Here he speaks of the “*Spirit*” (4:3,4). He speaks of the “*Lord,*” a title reserved for the Son (1:2,3,15,17; 3:11,14; 5:20; 6:23,24). He speaks of the “*Father*” (4:6). These three are personally distinct from each other, yet there is only one God.

“many” will say to Him, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?” In other words, they are seeking to “enter the kingdom of heaven” based on deeds they have done. Jesus responds to them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matthew 7:21-23; a quote from Psalm 6:8). Further, King Jesus is said to “have...hated lawlessness” (Hebrews 1:8; a quote from Psalm 45:7).

- Believers in Jesus Christ alone understand, confess, and live the right use of God’s moral Law. We reject its use as a means to salvation, for we cannot obey it perfectly and therefore cannot use it as a basis for standing rightly before God in this life or in eternity. No, it serves to show us our need of Jesus Christ, and then, by the power of the Spirit given to believers in Jesus, the Law of God guides us in our living the Christ-life.⁷
- Only in Christ, with the penalty of the Law against our lawlessness forgiven, can we sing:
 - “The Law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul” (Psalm 19:7).
 - “I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8).
 - “The Law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces” (Psalm 119:72).
 - “...Your Law is my delight” (Psalm 119:77b; 119:174b).

⁷ This is what Paul will teach later: “...what the Law could not do [make us right before God by our keeping of it], weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:3,4).

- “...I love Your Law” (Psalm 119:113b; 119:163b).
- “Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your Law is truth” (Psalm 119:142).
- Only in Christ, with the penalty of the Law against our lawlessness forgiven, can we confess with the apostle: “...the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good...the Law is spiritual” (Romans 7:12,14).
- Only in Christ, with the penalty of the Law against our lawlessness forgiven, can we with the cup of the Lord’s Supper lay claim to the new covenant promise: “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood...behold, days are coming...when I will make a new covenant...I will put My Law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 22:20//1 Corinthians 11:25).

“But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Galatians 6:14

“Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.”

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” Isaac Watts (1707)