

BEING JUSTIFIED BY FAITH EXCLUDES BOASTING

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Romans 3:27-4:12 (Genesis 15:1-6)

Romans 4:7-8

Salina and I recently had a conversation about the similarities I share with an old friend of ours. We both have tempers that lead to unrighteousness. However, there is a key difference between us – thanks be to God. I realize that my temper deserves God's just wrath, and I need God's mercy and grace. However, I cannot boast in that recognition. I cannot take pride in this insight that brings me to repentance for my sins and to trust in God's righteousness revealed in the Gospel; because, it is all a gift from God by His Spirit Who has circumcised my heart. This is merely one example of pride or boasting that can arise among Christians, especially when it comes to matters of living according to one's conscience (which require regular calibration with God's Word). We have discussed this at length in our study of 1 Corinthians: boasting in our teachers, our social class, whether or not we eat certain foods, and all this can be extended to boasting in other non-essential distinctives such as schooling preferences for our children, movies we do and do not watch, drinking or not drinking alcohol. This is because we are geared toward self-justification. We tend to take pride, or boast in, things that become idolized and exalted above Jesus; because, we find our identity in the external outward displays of religion, rule following, rituals, or laws rather than in Jesus.

If Jews expelled from Rome during the time of Emperor Claudius returned to a predominantly Gentile Church, one could imagine that some boasted in their advantage of being entrusted with the oracles of God. They may have attempted to claim a superior status over the Gentiles in the Church at Rome to restore customs and practices they were more familiar with as Jews. Paul has made it clear, however, that that advantage of having the oracles of God is no advantage when it

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PASTOR MARC D. WILSON, ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH, LAS CRUCES, NM comes to God's just judgment against unrighteousness. As we have learned, ALL are condemned for unrighteousness because of sin, yet God has revealed His righteousness in the Gospel apart from the Law. Faith in this revealed righteousness of God puts ALL people who believe in a right relationship with God as a gift. This is God's grace toward ALL; because, we ALL are unable to fulfill the Law according to God's holy righteousness.

Therefore, boasting is excluded; because, one is justified by faith, not works of the law. Abraham had no right to boast; because, Abraham was justified by faith, not works. Therefore, any advantage a Jew may claim is nothing to boast about; because, ALL are justified by faith, not works. This is our primary argument for today. Let's tease this out.

Boasting is Excluded Because:

1. **One is justified by faith, not works of the law** [legal works] (3:27-28)
 - a. Abraham's Example (4:1-3)
 - i. Jews of this time focused on Abraham's faithful works as the basis of his right relationship with God, but Paul rejects this understanding. Moo paraphrases Paul's argument this way, "What shall we say about Abraham? For if we say he was justified by works, he has reason to boast, and my claim in 3:27-28 that all boasting is excluded is called into questions." Paul then affirms his claim that "all" boasting **is** excluded by considering God's perspective – "but not before God."
 - ii. "imputed", "counted", "credited" or "reckoned" refers to a change in status; from ungodly to righteous before God. Only by this radical change of status before God can one's character become increasingly righteous over time through "the obedience of faith".
 - iii. Faith is not a Work for an Obligatory Wage (4:4-5)

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1. Faith is the channel by which God's righteousness is credited to the underserved ungodly person.
 2. "God initiates and provides; people trust and receive." (NIV Faithlife Study Bible)
 3. We cannot earn a right status before God through our works. We are justified only by trusting in God who justifies the ungodly. We contribute nothing toward a righteous status before God. The wage we deserve is death for our sin.
- b. David's Agreement (**4:6-8**)
- i. Paul summarizes Psalm 32:1-2 to demonstrate that David, not just Abraham, understood the blessing of God's gracious provision for righteousness. David gave thanks to God for justifying him; not by works but through the forgiveness of sins for which David repented. Repentance of sins and faith in God's gracious provision for making us righteous go hand-in-hand.
 - ii. Rather than God "counting" sins against us, He "counts" us righteous by faith through the once-for-all atoning sacrifice of Jesus who bore God's just judgment for sin as our substitute.
2. **One is justified by faith, not circumcision** [religious works].
- a. Abraham's Example (**4:9-12**)
- i. Abraham is the Father of ALL (Circumcised / Uncircumcised; Jew / Gentile) who Share His Faith
 - ii. Why? Abraham was justified by faith in God's promises before he was circumcised. Circumcision served as a sign of Abraham's righteousness by faith in God's promises. Abraham was justified by grace through faith before God even gave the Law to Moses. So, God's gift of righteousness is not only for those under the Law. Therefore, Abraham is the spiritual

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father of ALL who are justified by grace through faith in God's promises.

- iii. That both the circumcised and uncircumcised are united as children of Abraham through faith reveals the reality that Jew and Gentile are united under the One True God through faith. The One Creator God of ALL justifies BOTH the Circumcised AND the Uncircumcised by the Same Faith (**3:29-30**)
- iv. This, along with Paul's reference to David's Psalm, demonstrates how ALL People at all times in both the OT and NT have been justified, or declared righteous, before God. It has always been by faith in God's promises, and all God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus.

3. By faith, we uphold the Law (3:31)

- a. Because we, who believe in the Gospel, serve in the new way of the Holy Spirit Who has circumcised our hearts (***Romans 7:6, 14***). By the indwelling and empowering Holy Spirit in our lives, we are transformed more and more into the image and likeness of Jesus in our love for God and others. Our righteous status leads to increased righteous character in our lives.

Whereas our society thrives on self-promotion, even at other's expense, the Christian humbly finds his/her identity in Jesus and not their achievements. For example – Achievements in business and success with personal finances are not things to boast in and apply to the proclamation of the Gospel and the growth of King Jesus' Kingdom. God's ways are not our ways. God's ways look foolish and weak to the world's ways of doing things. We, as servants of King Jesus, do not boast in our wisdom, wealth or strength but in knowing God's righteousness revealed in Jesus. There is no room for boasting in our religious works thinking that God owes us in some way or thinking we deserve praise from others. All that we have to serve our Lord properly

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PASTOR MARC D. WILSON, ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH, LAS CRUCES, NM comes from Him to build each other up and to honor His Name. Unlike proud and unrepentant un-Believers under the tyranny of sin, Christians recognize our desperate need for the Gospel as we live out the "obedience of faith" that involves daily repentance for our unfaithfulness and trusting in God's faithfulness toward us. This will have a profound impact on how we view and relate to others; believers and non-believers alike. Don Carson once stated something like we should never put down others unless it is on our prayer list. How can boasting in anything that we do impede our proclamation of the Gospel or dishonor our King Jesus Who humbled Himself to the point of dying for us on the Cross so that we may be declared righteous before our Father in heaven? How may we, in our boasting, attempt to rob God of His glory?

ALL boasting is excluded; because, our justification is by faith, not by works of the law or by any standard we may set for ourselves. More amazingly is that our faith that receives this means of making us right with God is also a gift. Our justification before God through Jesus' sacrifice of atonement and the faith that believes in this righteousness of God revealed are both by God's grace. Actually, Jesus' sacrifice gives the Gospel its power to save, and that power is applied to us by the Holy Spirit Who circumcises our hearts so that we may repent of our unrighteousness, trust in God's righteousness revealed, and live "the obedience of faith." This Gospel also unifies us by the Holy Spirit in Christ and His Kingdom, and the mutual encouragement of our faith in this Gospel compels us to eagerly proclaim it to everyone by the same power of the Holy Spirit in King Jesus' Name.

AMEN