

Human Pride and Salvation by Faith Alone

Romans 3:27-31

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Before we get into Romans, I want to talk to our whole church about baptism. Why? We have our biggest baptism service of the year coming up July 22. It is our Lake Michigan baptism. We already have around 50 people signed up with a month to go.

Why should you be baptized? Three simple reasons. *For Jesus. For Us. For you.* It's three different ways of saying: Obedience, public profession, and personal discipleship.

Why for Jesus? Jesus commanded that all his disciples are to be baptized.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20, ESV)

Jesus made it very clear. Believe in me, then be baptized. We do it for Jesus.

Why for us? Baptism is a public affirmation of your private profession. Seeing others following Jesus is one of the most encouraging sights in the Christian life. I hope you will plan on being there and experiencing the joy of seeing people baptized in the triune name.

Why for you? How many days in your Christian walk really stand out in your memory? I guarantee this will be one of them. It's a day when you can know you are completely in the will of God, obeying God the Son by identifying with him in the way he said to do so.

A quick word to those of you who were baptized as babies. For some, it is a difficult decision to be baptized as an adult. Can I say respectfully that I think there are many reasons it doesn't need to be?

First, we don't ask you to repudiate that baptism or your parents following their church's teaching to do so. Many fine and wonderful Christians down through history and today baptize infants. I think we will get to heaven and find out that baby baptism wasn't God's plan, but your parents likely did so in personal faith and obedience, and we respect that.

Secondly, our teaching position is believers' baptism. Unknown to you, your parents were following their church's teaching position. By being baptized you are purposefully following your church's teaching position. Same heart, different expression.

Thirdly, there is no sin in being baptized as an adult after being baptized as a child. If you know of a verse condemning it, let me know. Further, if we get to heaven and find out believers' baptism is right, you enter heaven without that first act of obedience.

Fourth, does anybody seriously think that while the infant-baptized adult is being baptized by immersion, God is in heaven shaking his head in disgust? Even if we get to heaven and find out infant baptism was right, isn't God honored by these steps of faith as an adult?

Finally, I think we all should wish we could get baptized multiple times. You don't need to and we don't do that. But I compare it to my wedding day. I'd relive that day over and over

if I could. And I would be baptized over and over to experience the joy of publicly identifying with Jesus. As we see others baptized, there should be in our hearts a longing, *I wish that could be me again*. What a cool opportunity to identify with Jesus as an adult. Many of us would wish we had the same opportunity again.

If any of this draws your heart to want to be baptized, contact the church office. We have physical sign-ups at each welcome desk. We will be in touch and get you ready.

With that said, we need to get right into our fresh text from Romans today. I am going to simply read, explain, and apply. We are coming on the heels of what some call the most important paragraph ever written, verses 21-26. We examined six key words there. *Righteousness. Sin. Justification. Redemption. Propitiation. Forbearance*. I won't go over them again, except to say, Paul is explaining how God makes sinners have right, legal, eternal standing with him. Now Paul draws the net.

"Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law." (Romans 3:27-31)

At first glance, this is a bridging text between the Matterhorn heights of gospel glory in verses 21-26 and the smack-you-in-the-face observations in chapter 4 regarding Abraham's justification by faith, not law. He is moving from one to the other.

But there's something incredibly important right here. Paul gets at it in his typical diatribe, question and answer approach. There are six questions in five verses. Each is intended to make us think about a gospel implication. The big one that shapes all the rest is the first one.

Then what becomes of our boasting? Paul's main point here is that salvation by faith apart from human effort and merit denies us the one thing our sinful nature craves—pride or self-glory.

Faith Silences Human Boasting

Look what I've done!

"Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith." (Romans 3:27)

If the organizing principle of my approach to God is obedience to the moral law of God, then I have something about me to glory in. This assumes that I was somehow able to be righteous, which none of us can do. But if the organizing principle of my approach to God has nothing to do with me and everything to do with what God did for me through Jesus, now I have nothing about me to glory in and everything about God to give all the credit.

That little difference could be for you the difference between heaven or hell forever. This distinction is something Luther and the Reformers emphasized. Remember our *Sola* series? *Sola* means "alone." The Reformation Solas included, by grace alone, Scripture alone, God's glory alone. But perhaps the most famous one is, *Sola Fide*, by faith alone. Why was that so controversial and why did the ancient church view Luther as a heretic for saying it?

Because it is one thing to say, *Salvation is by faith. Ok. Salvation requires me to trust in Jesus. No problem.* But any pluralistic religion, even Hinduism, allows for "faith" in Jesus. The cults teach faith in Jesus. What sends people into hysterics is when Paul and other biblical writers make it clear that true salvation comes by faith *alone*. Faith *alone* excludes all human effort to earn salvation. Faith *alone* leaves us with nothing in us or by us to glory in.

If you are insisting that you contribute something, there is one thing we contribute. In the words of Jonathan Edwards, *"You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary."* So, congratulations. Your contribution was the moral mess that made Jesus' death necessary. It's like saying my contribution to the cure for cancer was having cancer.

Why did God engineer salvation by faith in such a way that there is nothing in us we can celebrate? If there is a foundational truth to the whole of Romans and the Bible and all that God does, it is **Sola Deo Gloria**. God's Glory alone. *"For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another."* (Isaiah 48:11, ESV) This verse summarizes the whole Bible and the reason behind why God created us in the first place. For his glory, specifically, for the glory of his Son. Colossians 1:18 says, *"that in everything he might be preeminent."*

I find most Christians are comfortable with the glory of God as being why God does what he does UNTIL they realize the implications in salvation which make human pride squirm. Paul is preparing us for Romans 9-11 where God's glory and initiation in salvation will be described with words like election and predestination. The only way we swallow Romans 9-11 is the easier swallow in chapter 3 that salvation has nothing to do with us. It's all God. Even the personal faith that saves us is not a basis for human bragging. Why is the faith that I express NOT itself something I can point to and say, at least I had the insight to trust in Jesus? At least I get credit for that!

Answer: the faith that saves is a gift from God. *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."* (Ephesians 2:8-9, ESV) You see it there. That soul inclination to trust in Jesus is also a gift from God. Take God out of the process and none of us would ever trust in Christ. Why? We are dead in our sins.

I told you last week about the tour of the English and Scottish Reformation which Jennifer and I enjoyed. It was led by Pastor Erwin Lutzer from Moody Church. He gave lectures on the tour bus and he told the story of when he was a professor of preaching at Trinity University. He tried to think of a way to emphasize to his students that preaching has power because God makes it effective. So, what he did is he had all his students prepare a sermon and he took them to a local cemetery and told them to preach to the graves. They actually had to do it. Why? That's what we are doing when we proclaim the gospel. We are preaching to spiritually dead people. All the preaching, teaching, parental exhortations, books read, and sermons heard are like preaching to graves at the cemetery.

What must happen for dead people to respond to anything? They must be made alive first. This is called regeneration or being born again. God grants us life and gives us faith that responds to the gospel with personal dependence on Jesus. We are no more able to do this on our own than dead people in the cemetery can mow their own graves. Only God can do this. The faith that saves us is a gift so that none of us can boast.

To be clearer, let me lean on an author to clarify how me trusting in Jesus isn't itself a doing.

"Scripture never says that we are justified because of the inherent goodness of our faith, as if our faith has merit before God. It never allows us to think that our faith in itself earns favor with God. Rather, Scripture says that we are justified "by means of" our faith, understanding faith to be the instrument through which justification is given to us, but not at all an activity that earns us merit or favor with God. Rather, we are justified solely because of the merits of Christ's work.... It is apparently because faith is the one attitude of the heart that is the exact opposite of depending on ourselves."¹ (Wayne Grudem).

The result is that no one will be in heaven saying, *How'd I get here? I did something...*

Look who I am!

"Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." (Romans 3:29-30)

The key phrase here is, *"since God is one."* He is clearly addressing the Jews at Rome since the oneness of God was and is to this day the central truth of Judaism. Every practicing Jew quotes each day the Shema from Deuteronomy 6:4, *"Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one."*

Paul applies the singularity of God to salvation and says, because God is one there is only one way to God. What's that? Justification through faith. See it, *"who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised by faith."* (Romans 3:30) "Circumcision" is code for Jews. "Uncircumcised" is code for Gentiles. In other words, one God. One way to God that is the same for everyone.

Here Paul is challenging ethnic pride or the assumption that so many Jews had, which was that because they were physical descendants of Abraham, the chosen people of God, their ethnicity was a basis for saving favor from God. *We are Jews! God likes us more!*

No. With God there is no discrimination or partiality. The most non-racist person in the universe is the one who made all the races and loves them—God. This was the lesson Jonah had to learn in Nineveh. This was the lesson Peter had to learn with his vision of the sheet coming down. Are we better than the prophet and the apostle? Do we subtly assume God's favor because of some category we find ourselves in?

How about the *ethnic category*? There's a part of that which I think is good and even celebrated in heaven. God loves the ethne and the diversity of heaven will reflect ethnic diversity. But we can take that much too far and assume, like the Jews, that our bloodline gives us status before God. Look at me, I'm _____. Ethnic boasting.

How about national pride or the assumption that our nation, no matter which it is, grants us favor before God? There's a kind of national pride that is healthy and there is a kind that is unhealthy. When I am grateful for my country, grateful for the sacrifices of others for our country, pray for my country and my leaders, it's all good and right. But when my national

¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 730.

pride creeps into a spiritual category where I think God's love for my country is more than other countries, something has gone drastically wrong.

To this we could add church bragging, *our church is better and your church is not. We are from such and such a church and I will now share details about what's happening that I hope makes you feel less than me because you don't attend here.*

Add to this all such spiritual boasting: *I'm a Baptist. I'm a Presbyterian. I'm a mid-tribulationist. I'm a whateveralist.* Anything about me that I point to as a way to elevate me spiritually above others denies the essential gospel that I contribute nothing except my sin. God contributes everything. Remember, it was the Pharisee who promoted himself in prayer and the tax collector who said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Jesus said, "I tell you, this [sinner] went down to his house justified, rather than the [Pharisee]." (Luke 18:14)

Let me illustrate it this way. What's it like to fly United (not Southwest) out of O'Hare? In case you haven't, it goes something like this. You get to the gate and immediately there is a clear sense of class distinction. You notice nicely dressed people going in and out of the United Preferred Passenger Lounge. They are the Preferred passengers. What does that make me? The time comes to board. *First-class passengers, you are now free to board.* There, lining up, is the Armani crowd. Lots of cashmere and button down. First-class. *Next, business-class please line up for boarding.* There they go. Again, a high percentage of Italian leather briefcases and *Wall Street Journals*.

Finally, the announcer says, *All other passengers you may board now.* So, then I go under the "other" category. I wait as the first-class and business-class get to their comfortable and spacious seats. Stretch their legs. Sip their Champagne. All us "other" passengers are forced to walk through first-class and business-class to get to the back of the plane where we sit. Is it just me or do you sense from the first-class passengers a certain disdain that my body has to physically walk past them in such close proximity? It's like they detect a disease or something. Once everyone's seated in their proper class of seating, off the plane goes.

In your self-opinion, if salvation is a United flight, where are you on the plane? Few would admit it, but do churches chronically have self-perceived first-class members? Not in terms of wealth, but self-perception of spirituality. Are you one? Business-class? *I didn't contribute as much as the first-class for this flight, but I'm no slouch either.* These people say, *I'm no Billy Graham, but you know.*

That's all wrong, but here's the more common heresy in Christian churches. Its third-class church attenders. *No, we didn't contribute as much as first-class or business-class, but in terms of how this flight gets me to heaven, I did contribute something. These tickets weren't free.* Really? What did you contribute to get the plane to fly to heaven?

Dear friends, on the flight to heaven, we aren't the pilot, we aren't the first-class or business-class passengers, and we aren't in rows 21 and above. On the flight to heaven, at best we're the baggage. How does baggage get there? Somebody else paid their way.

God has so engineered salvation by faith alone so that nobody gets off the flight in heaven and says, *Ta-da! Look at me! Look what I did! Let me tell you what I did to get here.*

As the old story about Muhammed Ali goes while on a flight, the flight attendant asked him to buckle up. Ali said, "*Superman don't need a seatbelt.*" The flight attendant said, "*Superman don't need a plane.*"²

Human pride takes us to hell where all human effort is rewarded with divine judgment. Salvation by faith alone eliminates all human boasting and self-righteousness. Salvation by faith alone ensures we all will say forever, *look at Christ and what He did for me. There is Jesus. Let me tell you what he did for me.*

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² Muhammed Ali and unnamed flight attendant as quoted by Thomas Hauser, *Muhammed Ali: His Life and Times*, p. 479.