

JUSTIFIED

ROMANS 3:31-4:3

INTRODUCTION

Boasting is received in the world as acceptable. We almost expect it in many circles – business, sports, etc. We almost laud those who are confident and self-assured so much so that it bleeds into every area of our lives, including our relationship with the Lord. Boasting, however, is dangerous in anyone, but none more so than in Christians. Whether Jew or Gentile all stood guilty in our sin before God. We were not just guilty, however. We were guilty and without a way in ourselves to be otherwise. For such people the wrath of God is certain (Romans 1:18). Having established this fact Paul, now, with the darkness of humanity clearly pictured Paul makes a shift in his language about the beauty of gospel.

THROUGH FAITH (Romans 3:21-24)

Paul starts this section off with the contrast of “*But now*” (Romans 3:21). There was a moment when all, even the Jews were without the saving hope of the gospel. They were lost and trapped in their own sin and its eternal implications. But now, in Christ, the righteousness that God demands has broken through and is now accessible; not through works, but *through faith* (Romans 3:22). Having faith means that our eyes must turn away from our achievement, effort, work and activities as the *basis* for our being one with the Lord. Instead we must focus on the need to place our faith in Christ. Jews have no greater advantage than the Gentiles in this way even with their history of faith. “*For there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift...*” (Romans 3:22b-24). While we must live holy lives that reflect the glory of God we must never be led to the false belief that our actions *establish* our relationship with the Lord. Faith, alone does this. Our actions simply prove our faith (see James 2:14ff). As in the Latin orthodox phrase *sola fide* (faith alone) we have our sins washed away and our eternal destiny shifted from damnation to glorification only when we shift our faith away from self and, singularly, toward Christ.

IN JESUS (Romans 3:25-26)

The anger and wrath of God is a serious reality for those who do not believe in Christ. One might also call this a serious matter to God! The major question Paul is answering in these verses is this: How can God be *righteous* and at the same time reconcile *sinners* to Himself? In other words if man is actually in the sinful condition we have read about (Romans 1-3:18) and God is righteous, how can a sinner ever be one with the holy Lord? The answer: *Christ Jesus*. While the language Paul uses here is rich and beyond the scope of our space let us sum it up in this way. Christ has come to demonstrate what the sacrifices only symbolized in an incomplete manner. Because they were incomplete, in that they did not remove sin, God’s acceptance of them was an expression of divine restraint. Thus Paul says “*in his restraint God passed over the sins previously committed*” (Romans 3:25b). Now, God has “*presented him to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time*” (Romans 3:25a). In this way, with Christ being the Perfect sacrifice as the God-man, God remains righteous when reconciling sinful men, because their faith in Christ has removed their guilt.

FOR ALL PEOPLE (Romans 3:27-31)

The power of the work of Christ is that it completed the mission of God to have a people who would be from every nation on the globe (See Genesis 12:1). In this way no one, not even Jews, could boast about their relationship with the Lord. Boasting was only to be done in the faith the Lord provided (Romans 3:27-28). This language of Paul would certainly cut to the heart of Jews who saw Gentiles as dogs and second class people. Yet Paul pushes even deeper the implications of the gospel. He says that God is the God of all people and there is a path for the circumcised "*by faith*" and for the uncircumcised "*through faith*" (Romans 3:30) in Christ alone. This is a driving text for the priority of missions. God is the God of everyone and therefore, *everyone* must hear the gospel!

INCLUDING ABRAHAM (Romans 4:1-3)

This is a shocking truth for Jews to hear. Abraham, the father of the faith, is now counted as one with Gentile believers in that he is said to be justified, not by circumcision, but by faith! Not even the giant Abraham could boast. When he responded to the call of God in Genesis 12:1ff he did so by faith. Circumcision would not happen until later, but Paul says that Abraham became the patriarch of it all, *by faith*! Now, with this established, it is clear that nothing that has ever been of value has been such because of action. It has all been because of faith.

CONCLUSION

How powerful a word this is for a busy people who measure our value in achievements? This may be the way of the world, but it is not the way of the Lord. The only achievement that matters to the Lord is that which was accomplished on Golgotha. May we rest, by faith, in that.