

Faith

Romans 3:27—31

The Apostle Paul has been building a case against mankind. There is nothing good in man that would cause him to come to God, or would impress God enough to forgive man of his personal sins. God has already taken care of everything man needs for eternal life. Now, man just needs to accept what God is offering by faith.

Man cannot boast

Why does Paul pose the question about men boasting concerning their salvation? The past three chapters of Romans have been answering the question about why we have nothing to boast about. The heart of man (the natural man) is godless, evil and lacking any desire to reach out to God. God has taken care of every aspect of our salvation. Our studies, in the past few lessons, have emphasized that God set everything into motion to carry out His plan of salvation made before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). He reconciled the world to Himself so that all we needed to do was to accept the offer of redemption. He became flesh and offered Himself on the cross to redeem mankind from the “marketplace” of sin. He propitiated the Father, appeasing His wrath against sinful man. He justifies sinners who come to Him in faith, imputing righteousness in place of our sin. There is absolutely no room for us to boast in our salvation. If it was necessary to perform works to impress God, then every sinner would be able to boast in his or her works. However, from God’s perspective, all my efforts are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

The law of works vs. the law of faith

There are two main laws in play. The law of works describes Israel under their Prophetic program. They needed to prove their faith through works (James 2:24). The law of faith describes the Church, the Body of Christ under the Mystery. Although all men in every age are saved by faith, Israel needed to add works to prove their faith was genuine. We, in contrast, are told to add nothing to our faith (Romans 4:4—5). Those who compare James 2:17 (faith without works is dead) with Romans 4:4 (to him that worketh not...) should see a contradiction. These verses need to be understood in the realm of different time periods. James is written to Israel under Law, while Paul writes Romans to the Church under Grace. Those who do not rightly divide Scripture may be tempted to toss out the book of James, as Martin Luther desired to do. The solution is to see that the book of James is written to Israel under prophecy. Instead of tossing the book, Luther just needed to view it dispensationally.

Romans 3:27—31 contains material that needs to be viewed through dispensational eyes. Paul is comparing Israel under the Law and the Church under Grace. Israel was well aware of the law of works. They were required to perform what the Bible calls works of the Law (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; 3:10). Israel was required to come to God with the right heart and attitude. They would come to God by faith, and a true faith would drive them to perform the works of the Law. Unfortunately, many in Israel performed the works but had no faith. Their works were considered worthless because they were defining what would please God without having a true faith (Romans 9:32).

By faith, through faith (verse 30)

Paul now makes another reference spanning two dispensations, speaking of those who are justified BY faith and those who are justified THROUGH faith. Many have puzzled over what is

being said here because they fail to see the distinctions between Israel's and the Church's programs.

First, it helps to look at the Greek words behind the phrases "by faith" and "through faith." The word *by* is translated from the Greek word *ek* (G1537) meaning from or out of. It could be said that Israel was justified *out of* their faith.

The Greek word for *through* is *dia* (G1223). It could be translated "by reason of," "on account of" or "by way of." It is on account of faith that we have been justified. It is a word that brings a person from one place to another; i.e. Jesus walked through the corn fields, they passed through Galilee, enter the Kingdom of God through much tribulation, etc.

According to verse 30, there is one God who is justifying two groups differently. First, He shall justify the circumcision BY faith. This is a reference to Israel when God was dealing with them as a nation under Prophecy. Second, He will justify the uncircumcision THROUGH faith. This is referring to the Gentiles in this Dispensation of Grace.

The circumcision is justified "out of" faith. Out of their faith would come works to prove their faith. If any Israelite had faith in what God said, they would believe Him. Those who had faith would show that they had a true faith by doing works of the Law. James 2:14—26 makes this connection very clear. They were to show their faith by their works (verse 18). It's more than just saying they believe God, it's putting that faith to work in obedience to God. If a man under Law said he had faith but did no works to back it up, then his faith is a dead faith (verse 26). A man would be justified by his faith only when he did works to prove it was a genuine faith.

Things have change in this Dispensation of Grace. We are no longer called to prove our faith by works. Actually, we prove our faith by not doing any works unto salvation. Adding works for our salvation cheapens Jesus Christ's work of redemption on the cross. We are now justified "by way of" faith. Faith is like a conduit that brings us from unsaved to saved, from lost to found, from unrighteous to righteous.

Perhaps it would be helpful to take a look at Ephesians 2:8

For by grace are ye saved through faith;

Notice that we are saved BY (out of God's) grace and THROUGH (by way of my) faith. It was because of God's grace that it was possible for me to believe and be saved. Our salvation today always comes by way of (through) faith.

In contrast to the Church being saved by Grace through faith, it can be said that Israel, under Law, was saved BY (out of their) faith THROUGH (by way of doing) works. It should be obvious that works were involved in Israel's salvation since Paul emphasizes that works are no longer needed (Romans 3:27—28).

While this helps to explain the difference that Paul is pointing out between Israel and the Body in Romans 3, we should not assume that "by faith" always refers to Israel and "through faith" is for the Body. For instance, Romans 1:17 says that the just shall live by faith. This is a general truth that can be applied to Israel or the Church, the Body of Christ. We all need to live "out of" faith.

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