

Romans: A Solid Foundation for Christian Living

Message 16: The End of All Boasting

Text: Romans 3:27-31

We humans are a prideful sort. We show off our stuff to set us apart from others. We display our prowess so that others can see how just how able we are. And we boast in our accomplishments, so that, just in case they didn't see it, people will know how incredibly able we really are.

Science gives us a great example of this. Award winning scientists debate the great issues of our day – human impact on climate change or the nature of life, cloning and whether a cloned person would be worthy of rights or mere property or whether artificial intelligence is worthy of the same rights we enjoy. Yesterday's science fiction is today's debate. But when you look at it, it's all about us: how we can control the weather, or we can create life.

The funny thing about it is that, just when mankind thinks he's so smart, God allows something that shows us how really unable we are. Unintended consequences show how far from the truth we are, as the best theories come crashing down and the process begins all over again. Why? Because we're a very prideful people.

And pride is the focus of our study this morning. See, pride stands at the heart of humanity's problem. We are so arrogant that we believe we can control our world, and especially our particular corner of it. We can stand up on our own two feet. We don't need God. We may like Him and talk about Him from time to time, but we don't rely on Him. We can do it ourselves.

But the gospel says something different. Paul in his Roman letter repeatedly made the point that human pride is futile, because human wisdom and human strength are flawed. He says in Romans 1:21-22, "*For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools...*" In verse 23, "*they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*" Pride leads to our departure from God, which leads to sin and separation from Him (Rom. 2:12).

But Paul doesn't simply give us the bad news about pride. He also gives us the remedy: the gospel. In chapters 2 and 3 he explains how the problem of sin runs so deep that even full compliance with the law – as if that would be possible – is unable to save us from it. There is, however, a remedy: faith in Jesus Christ. Rather than to trust in themselves, Paul's readers were to trust in Jesus Christ.

But that poses a question. And how Paul answers the question shows us how the gospel of Christ means the end of all boasting if we take it seriously. Listen to what the Bible says (read).

Now Paul has shown us the problem of humanity – sin – and the remedy, Jesus Christ. All are justified not by their own effort or wisdom or strength, but through faith in Jesus Christ. Now, knowing his audience well, he anticipates a question: "Then what's the value of my boasting?" It's like they were saying, "I want to believe in myself. I take pride in what I can do. But if salvation is all in the work of God, than I cannot boast anymore."

Paul's response: "That's right. Boasting is excluded!" Literally the word here means that it is excluded once for all. It is completely shut out. Why? Because the world does not operate under a law of works, but a law of faith.

Then comes the follow-up: "But, while that's fine for Gentiles, certainly it is different for the Jews. Right? We have the law, so there must be a different way for us to be saved – a way that allows control and a reason to boast."

Paul's reply: "No! There is only one God (the great confession of the Jewish faith), therefore, there is only one way of salvation for everyone – faith."

Finally, another follow-up: "Well then, if the law and all that goes with it are useless, than you are saying we nullify the law. The law is worthless." They were accusing Paul of abandoning his own heritage and negating all the scripture they had at the time."

Paul's response: "Not at all! (strong denial). By faith we uphold the law. It is faith that makes the law stand. We fulfill it's intent and purpose by faith. Faith is why the law was given in the first place."

Now, that's a brief rundown of our text. The gospel of grace is not another means for building up trust in ourselves. It is the end of all boasting. In the gospel we learn that the way to salvation is not to trust in all we know or what we can do; rather, it is to trust in what God knows, who God is, and what God did for us through Jesus Christ.

So what does this mean for us in a practical sense.

1. The more you trust in yourself, the farther away from God you are.

Pride is basically the natural inclination to place yourself where God belongs, in control of your life. That was the great error the Jews made. Paul wrote in Rom. 3:20, "*through the law we become conscious of sin.*"

The law was never intended to be a pathway to salvation. It was to show them how sin so dominated their lives that no one could meet God's standard of righteousness. But in their pride, the Jews saw in the law a means by which they could work themselves to God.

It's no different today. For so many, faith is about what they can do for God. I'll ask people the FAITH evangelism question, "In your personal opinion, what do you believe it takes for a person to have eternal life in heaven." And they say, "I guess you have to try your best. Do what's right. Go to church."

But Paul says in vs. 28, "*We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.*" One is saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone! Anything else moves you away from God.

2. The only way for you to live the life God created you to live is by faith.

The argument against Paul was that, if salvation is only by faith, then the law would be rendered useless. Given all that God did in order for the Jews to have the law, that seems unlikely. Paul's answer was that through faith we uphold the law. Jesus himself said in Matt. 5:17 that He did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it. So how does faith uphold and fulfill the law?

- Faith upholds the law by satisfying its penalty. In Romans 6:23 Paul says that the wages of sin is death. When Jesus died on the cross he satisfied this penalty to those who would trust Him. When God grants you forgiveness, he does not do so by ignoring His own law. He provides a substitute who would take the penalty you deserve.
- Faith upholds the law by accomplishing its design. The law makes us aware of sin. The whole idea is that we would be drawn to God in humility. In Gal. 3:34 Paul says, "*The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.*"
- Faith upholds the law by enabling its observance. Rom. 8:3, "*For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*"

Faith in Christ satisfies your debt of sin, enabling you to enjoy a personal love relationship with the Lord. It also enables you to follow the Lord obediently, by means of His spirit.

Conclusion:

That's what the gospel is about. It's not about what you can do for God. It is not about your great wisdom and ability. It is all about God and what He does for you.

And so, what about you? Are you among those who boast, trusting in your accomplishments or your activity or your knowledge to get you to God?