



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 3: 27-31

Romans

"All Boasting Excluded"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our text this morning is Romans chapter 3 verses 27 through 31. This concludes chapter 3 and it gives something of a conclusion to the text that we looked at last week in which Paul explains the gospel. And so, in this passage, Paul draws implications from what he taught in verses 21 through 26. And so, because of that, we will be going over some of the same material that we covered last week, which is always helpful. I had a Hebrew professor, and the first day of the first semester of Hebrew, he said there are three rules that you must know in order to learn Hebrew. And if you learn these rules, then you'll learn Hebrew. The first rule is: review. The second rule is: review. And the third rule is: review. And so it's good to review, and that's what we're going to do somewhat this morning. We'll cover some of the same ground. We dealt with some very weighty matters last week and the week before. And so it comes together somewhat in the implications or the conclusions that Paul draws from this great text of chapter 3 verses 21 through 26. Paul writes in verse 27:

Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man 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 indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one.

If you're looking carefully at the text, you may wonder: what's the significance of "by faith" and "through faith." And different ideas have been given. I think

probably the way we should understand that is: Paul's being rhetorical. He's using different prepositions there for the sake of variety, but he means the same thing. It's by faith. It's through faith. Faith is the channel, the means by which we receive salvation. Verse 31:

Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for the time that we have together this morning, an opportunity to open the Bible and consider its meaning. It's a great privilege because this is Your inerrant word. It has been described as our compass. We gain understanding, direction in life. We gain direction for time and eternity through this book. And so, it is essential for our wellbeing. We cannot live without it. And because it is Your word, and because it is essential, we must pay attention to it. We must believe the things that You have revealed to us here. And so we pray that as we consider this text, You might give us understanding of it, You might illuminate the text for us, illuminate our minds that we might understand Your revelation and that we might live in light of it, that it might affect the way we think and the way we live. We commit our time to You and pray that You would prepare our hearts for our time of study. We live in busy times with busy schedules and all kinds of thoughts enter our minds at the wrong times. Some are important, some are not so important. But Father, there's nothing more important than what we're about to do, and that is consider the meaning of this great text of Scripture.

So to that end, Father, we pray that You'd clear our minds of the things that are not important, that You would help us to focus completely on this time of study, and that we would grow as a result of it. Convict us of our sins, convict us of our error, the mistakes we have in our thinking. And through our time together, may we adore You more, may we learn more about You, and worship You more purely and completely. I pray Father for all of us, that You would put within our heart a desire to You know, to know You better, to live lives that are pleasing to You. And in doing that, live lives that are consistent before the world so that they would see and hear Your truth from us.

So bless us to that end. Bless us spiritually and bless us materially, Father. We have physical needs. There are many among us who are sick. We pray for them. We pray that You'd give healing if that please You, if that be part of Your will. And yet, we know that when it's not Your will, it's for a good purpose. May that good purpose be effected in their lives through affliction and through difficulty. We all face that, and we pray that You would bring about Your sanctifying work through the difficulties of life. And through the good things of life, the pleasurable experiences of life, which are many. Bless us beyond all that we ask or think. You bless us in ways that we're not even aware of. Make us grateful. And through the peace that we experience, the prosperity that we have, the great opportunities of friends and the fellowship, and all the multitude of blessings that we could list, through all of that, Father, may we be drawn closer to You and be given a greater appreciation of the good things You've given us, which are just a foretaste of what's to come for all eternity. Help us to focus our minds on that.

Bless us this evening when we come back to this place to remember our Lord and take the Lord's supper. That is to direct our hearts to eternity. It reminds us of what He did for us, and we're reminded of that, that He's coming again, and He's coming maybe soon. May we live for that day. So bless us now Father with thoughts that are proper, with minds that are focused. We look to You for these things, in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] We sometimes hear it said that ideas have consequences. They do, of course. Good ideas lead to good consequences. Bad ideas lead to bad consequences. And that is what our passage is about. The consequences of the ideas that Paul put forth in the previous verses, verses 21 through 26 of Romans chapter 3. Those verses have been called the Acropolis of the Christian faith. They've been described as among the most important of the Bible. In fact, Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who for many years was the senior minister at Westminster Chapel in London stated that, "It is when men and women have gone wrong here that they have gone into heresy and the church has lost its power." And so, the implications or consequences that come down from this Acropolis, these great verses, are very important. Because in them, in verses 21 through 26, Paul explained the gospel.

He developed it around three important words, you'll remember: righteousness, which is to be understood as the gift of righteousness, that which God imputes to the believer. He doesn't make us righteous; He declares us to be righteous in justification. The second is redemption, and the third word is propitiation. All three are works of God, not of man.

James Boyce illustrated the three in terms of a triangle. In fact, he called this the salvation triangle. A few years ago when he was here and he was preaching on this subject, I don't remember if it was the text of Romans chapter 3 or not, but on these three words and on these three doctrines, he pointed to the molding over the baptistery here, which as you can see, is triangular in shape. And he used that as his diagram. He pointed to the top, the peak of it, and said, "That represents God the Father," and then the lower left corner represents Christ. And then the right lower corner represents ourselves. It represents us. That's where we are positioned in this triangle. Redemption has us as its object. It describes what Christ did in relation to His people. He redeemed us, or He bought us by His blood. That saving act is manward. It is lateral. So it is represented in a line pointing from left to right. It's what Christ has done for us. Propitiation has to do with God the Father. He is the object of propitiation. It is vertical. It describes what Christ did for us in relation to the Father. He satisfied the Father's justice by His death for us. And in doing that, He turned aside God's wrath. So, the left line pointing up is representative of propitiation. It connects Christ to the father. The third line is the line on the right pointing downward. It connects God with us. It points from the top to the bottom because it's what God does in justification. That's what it represents. Because in justification, the Father acts upon us. It's what He does to us in declaring sinners to be righteous.

All of this is God's work. Man does none of it. Christ redeems His people. He propitiates His Father who sent Him to redeem us and propitiate Him. As a result of that, the Father justifies us, justifies the sinner. Now, what do we do in all of that? Nothing. We merely receive the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ as a gift because salvation is of the Lord. We believe. We trust in Him, and that leads Paul to the inevitable conclusion that all boasting is excluded. Actually, that is one of the three conclusions that Paul draws from the gospel in these last verses of the chapter. It is the first of all. First is that all boasting is excluded and he states that in verses 27

and 28. The second consequence and the second conclusion is that there is only one way of salvation for everyone. Verse 29 and 30. And the third conclusion, third implication is that the gospel upholds or establishes the law, verse 31. This first implication that all boasting is excluded is a way of saying that all glory goes to God, which is the great goal of all things. That is the point that Paul will make at the end of the first half of the Book of Romans in chapter 11 and verse 36 with that great doxology. "But from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

That is the purpose of creation. Man's chief end and man's highest good is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That's why we were created. We were created for that purpose. But this is the very thing that man despises. He wants the glory for himself. That's what sin has produces. That is the consequence of the fall.

A modern theologian, Donald Bloesch, made a statement that I think is true. He wrote in his book, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, "While the core of sin is unbelief, its chief manifestations are pride and sensuality." Well, certainly pride is. We see that in the early chapters of the Bible. It moved Cain to slay his brother Abel. Then Cain's descendant, Lamech, expressed both sensuality and pride when he takes two wives and boasts about killing a boy. Gloried in that. Then later in Genesis 11, the human race gathers on the plane of Shinar. It's been told to fill the earth, and man decides not to do that. Rather, he will gather there in that one place, build a city and build a tower. Let us make for ourselves a name, they say. How typical that is. People want to make a name for themselves, to be able to boast about their achievements.

Nothing has changed over time. It's the same today as it was back then. People brag about everything, everything they can brag about. Brag about their heritage, about their ancestors, about their children, their school, their fraternity, their sorority, their house, their car, their dog. Whatever they have that sets them apart from someone else, and they can take some credit for. Human pride is found in every walk of life, in every aspect of life from sports to religion.

Chiefly in religion. What is typical of human religion is personal merit and achievement. It is man reaching up to God. It is man ascending to heaven. It's all about merit and entitlement, about man earning God's good favor. Christianity is the opposite of that. It is not about man ascending to God; it is about God descending to

man. It promises life to the undeserving, not the deserving. It promises forgiveness for sinners, not for the good. All other religions or philosophies are systems that teach some form of self-salvation, from good works, or philanthropy, or ritual. Through some method of meritorious deeds.

So, in that sense, Christianity is not a religion at all. It is the antithesis to religion. Commenting on that, John Stott has written that Christianity is a gospel, the gospel, good news, that God's grace has turned away His wrath, that God's Son has died our death and born our judgment, that God has mercy on the undeserving, and that there is nothing left for us to do or even contribute.

Now, that message is lethal to pride, and that's what Paul says when he begins our passage: "Where then is boasting?" Where is it? And he answers his question. It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by law of faith. That is the only conclusion that a person can draw from the gospel of the grace of God. No place for boasting. If salvation is all of God, then where is the boasting? If God has done it all, what can we take credit for ourselves? Boasting is eliminated. It's eliminated by what Paul calls a law of faith, which means the principle or the rule of faith.

There may be other interpretations of that, meaning the law of faith. Some, such as Charles Cranfield in his commentary, have suggested that this is the Old Testament law which summons people to faith. That may be his meaning here as well. But what's clear is he's speaking of faith. What he's saying here is that this statement that he is making, there's no boasting that faith excludes all boasting, is true of all men, all people, Jew and Gentile alike. Man's morality, his religious ceremonies and efforts, they come to nothing. They produce pride in a person's accomplishments, the sense that one has outdone others in piety, that he or she has managed to measure up to God's approval while others haven't. Religion is the source of the biggest and the worst expressions of pride.

What greater boast can a person make than the one in which he or she says, "I'm religious." I'm religious, and so I'm worthy. By my rigor, by my zeal, by my efforts and my devotion, I have won the favor of the God of the universe. That's arrogance, and that's what law keeping produces when a person thinks that by keeping the law, he or she can win God's approval and gain heaven. Produces self-righteousness, self-confidence, self-satisfaction, but it is all illegitimate because Paul

says there is a law that undercuts all of that, the law or the principle of faith. It gives no place to pride.

And in verse 28, he gives the reason for his statement. "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." In other words, we receive. We don't achieve. If we could achieve heaven, God's approval, by law keeping, then Christ died needlessly. That's what Paul says in Galatians 2:21. If salvation is by the law, if a person can earn his or her salvation, then Christ died needlessly. If that's the case, as the Dutch theologian G.C. Berkouwer wrote, "God would be guilty of throwing himself away."

The fact that God sent His Son to die, the fact that the cross occurred is the proof in and of itself that man cannot save himself. If we could save ourselves, God never would've sent His Son to die. The fact that the cross occurred is the proof that man is absolutely unable to save himself. God must, and does, do it all. He saves. We simply receive His salvation. We simply receive righteousness in Christ. Justification is by faith alone. That's one of the great watchwords of the Reformation, and that is how Martin Luther translated this verse when he translated the Bible into German. He translated this by faith alone.

Now, the Greek text does not have the word "alone" in it. Luther was severely criticized by the Roman Catholic church for adding the word. They accused him of perverting Scripture. But as Stott points out, and others have pointed out, Luther wasn't the first to do that. Some of the church fathers had done it. Origen had done that. He had translated this verse in that way. And what he did, what Luther did, what others have done was to follow the true instinct that they had of the meaning of the text. It means that. Really, Luther added nothing to the sense of the text by translating it: "A man is justified by faith alone." It's what it means. If it is by faith, then it is not by works. And if it is not by works, then it's by faith alone. In fact, we might even argue that Luther was following apostolic precedent when he translated this in that way because in verse 24, Paul wrote that we are justified as a gift by His grace. That is a deliberate redundancy on the part of the apostle. Because if it is a gift, then it's by grace. And if it's by grace, then it's a gift.

Paul could've left out one of those two words and he would have said the same thing. It would've meant the same thing. But Paul put it that way in order to reinforce the truth. Salvation is by grace alone. He wanted to impress that upon his

readers. And Luther was doing very much the same thing. Justification by faith is the same as justification by faith alone, but Luther made the addition in order to stress the point that salvation is through faith plus nothing. Because he lived in an age in which that had been forgotten, an age in which the opposite was being taught, when the opposite was widespread.

Rome taught that salvation was obtained through its sacramental system. It didn't deny the necessity of the cross. It didn't deny the necessity of faith. But it said that neither of those were sufficient. Neither is enough. Faith had to be accompanied by religious rights and deeds. Baptism, penance, confession, the Mass, good works. So by adding the word alone, Luther was only clarifying and emphasizing the true meaning of the text. Justification is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. There's nothing meritorious in faith. Saying that salvation is through faith alone is not a way of substituting one kind of merit, that of faith, for another kind of merit, that of good works.

That's an important point to emphasize, I think, because many evangelicals today are confused on this very point. If asked: why are you saved? Most would probably answer: because of my faith, as though faith saves. And where that is the thought, where that is the belief, it follows naturally from their view of the death of Christ, from their view of the atonement. If asked: for whom did Christ die? Most would say Christ died for all the sins of all people. He didn't actually, if pressed on that point, didn't actually achieve that salvation. He didn't actually satisfy the justice of God and didn't actually redeem anyone from sin and death. He only made salvation possible. It is a person's faith that makes Christ's sacrifice effective.

Now, we covered this last week. Covered it in some depth, but it's the idea Christ died to make all men savable, but not to actually save anyone. The human response of faith is what determines whether Christ's sacrifice will be effective or not. So salvation does not depend upon God's decree of election and Christ's work of redemption. Salvation depends on man's decision to believe. Everything in effect hangs in the balance. What Christ did hangs in the balance for everyone until that person believes, and then that makes the death, the sacrifice of Christ, effective.

Well, J.I. Packer exposes the problem with that when he writes, "What we say comes to this, that Christ saves us with our help." He saves us with our help because our help is faith. And without our faith, there's no salvation. Now, in a sense, of



course, that's true. We must believe. But people are saying is: it's faith that makes Christ's work effective. And so, Packer is saying if that's the case, then we're saying that Christ saves us, but with our help. And what that means, when one thinks it out, is this: that we save ourselves with Christ's help. That's something to boast about. If the saving power of the cross depends on man's response, then the believer, to some degree, maybe a small degree, but to some degree, saves himself, and we might add, saves the work of Christ from failure. Paul said that those who are saved have nothing to boast about. And further, the idea that Christ died to make all men savable is nowhere taught in Scripture. The apostles are very clear: His death was effective. What Christ came to do, He accomplished. God cannot be frustrated in His plans. He cannot have a goal and not meet that goal. He's God. He's God Almighty.

That's the way the death of Christ, the atonement that He made, is presented in Scripture. He died to save all for whom He died. Let me give you one example. I can give you many. You might, just for reference, look at Revelation 5:9. It presents the sacrifice of Christ as achieving exactly what it set out to achieve. But Matthew chapter 1 and verse 21, that's the statement where the angel announces the birth of Jesus to Joseph, tells him to name the child Jesus, which means the Lord saves, and then He explains why. He says, "He will save His people from their sins." He came to do what? To save His people from their sins. Did He accomplish that? Yes, He did. He could not but accomplish that. He's God Almighty. There's nothing contingent. There's nothing uncertain about Christ's death. He redeemed all He died to save. He paid for all their sins. In doing that, He fully satisfied God's justice. And in so doing, He turned away God's wrath from them.

So, the cross did not merely make possible the salvation of God for whom Christ died. It actually saved them, and it ensured that they would be brought to faith, which means that He obtained our faith for us. At the cross, Christ died for us and ensured everything that was necessary for us to be saved. He purchased our faith in His death. Faith is a gift, bought by Christ and given by the Holy Spirit when He applies the merits of the cross to the elect in regeneration.

Packer again writes on that subject. In writing about the cross, writing about Christ's death he writes, "Its saving power does not depend on faith being added to it. Its saving power is such that faith flows from it. The cross secured the full salvation of all for whom Christ died."

That's the teaching of the Bible. The Bible is very clear. It teaches that faith is a gift. Let me give you one example. I can give you many, but one example. Philippians 1:29. For to you it has been granted for Christ' sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake. It has been granted. What has been granted? Believing in Him. Granted means given. It's been given to you. Faith has been given. And there are numerous other passages that teach that. Acts chapter 5 verse 31, Acts 11 verse 18. Repentance is given. Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8. Otherwise, faith would be a ground for boasting. If it is self-produced, if faith arises from ourselves independent of God, then it is our doing, is it not? We do it independently of God. If it's our doing, if it's our work, then is it not something, small though it may be, is it not something that we can take credit for, something in which we can glory? We stand in heaven, can we not glory in what we did? Praise the Lamb for what He did, but then we can say, "We did believe." We did add that. Without that, Christ's death would've come to nothing. Maybe you wouldn't do that. Maybe you'd be a little more humble in heaven than begin to boast about your little edition of faith. But you would have grounds for doing so.

That is reason enough for rejecting the notion that faith is self-produced. Reason enough for believing that it is God's gift. Paul said that the gospel excludes all boasting. The only thing he allowed himself to boast in was the person and work of Christ. He allowed himself to boast in the cross. Galatians 6:14. He writes, with what I think is irony, and it's beautiful irony, but may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'm going to boast, he says. I'm going to boast a lot. I'm going to boast in the cross, which means I'm not going to boast at all. I'm going to give all the credit to Christ.

And why? Because at the cross, Christ bought him and bought all of those for whom He died. And in so doing, ensured their faith. The point is: faith is of no merit. Faith has no merit. It is not a work that gains salvation for us. It is merely the instrument of our salvation, the channel by which we receive salvation, by which we receive the righteousness of Christ, the gift of righteousness. It's not the basis of our salvation. Faith is not the basis of that. The shed blood of Jesus Christ is the basis of salvation. Nowhere does the Bible state that we are justified because of our faith or on account of our faith. Faith has been defined, or better, faith has been illustrated as the eye that looks to Him, the hand that receives His gift, and the mouth that drinks

the living water. This is merely a channel. It's merely a means. It is nothing to boast about. Justification by faith alone excludes all boasting except the boasting that we do in the cross of Christ. It also excludes all elitism. Because justification by faith is the way of salvation for everyone without exception. There's no other way of salvation.

Now, that is the second conclusion that Paul draws from his explanation of the gospel, verse 29. "Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also." Well, the Jews certainly understood that. There's only one God over this earth. Many gods are believed in. There are images of gods in pagan temples, but they knew that's all false. There's only one God over all the nations. There's only one God over all the creation, over all the universe. Everything that is, is because of this one God. It comes from Him. He is the king of the universe, as they say. Monotheism is the chief article of Judaism. Expressed in that great text of Deuteronomy 6:4, the Shema. "Here, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." The Jew understood that, and Paul seems to be addressing the Jew here. And from that fact of monotheism, the fact that there is one God, Paul draws the conclusion in verse 30 that there is therefore one way of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. God will justify both in the same way, through faith, he says.

And the Old Testament indicated that. God promised Abraham that in Him, all the families of the earth would be blessed. Genesis 12:3. The Jew knew that text, but Jews largely failed to recognize this and saw by the time Paul was writing this great epistle to the Romans, saw the privileges that God gave them as exclusively theirs to the exclusion of the Gentiles. The Gentiles, on the other hand, accepted all kinds of gods and all kinds of philosophies. It was very much like our pluralistic society today. Everything's true. Everything's right. Accepted everything. Everything except the one way of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But they accepted everything. The Jew accepted none of that, and yet all of this is resolved in Christ and the gospel of grace. There are not many gods. There is one God and there is one way of salvation, but the one God is not the God of one people. He is not a national deity, but the God of all people and all nations. So, the one way of salvation is for all people.

Peter made that very clear in his statement before the Sanhedrin in Acts chapter 4 and verse 12. There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name

under heaven, or we could say no other name given among the nations of the earth that has been given among men by which we must be saved. Only one name, only one way. The Bible does not tolerate other ways. But it is not elitist. It is not an elitist way of salvation. The one way is open to the whole world to Jews and Gentiles alike, to all kinds of people, to all without distinction. Whoever believes, whoever he or she may be, whoever believes will be saved. That is the promise of the gospel.

Having said that, someone will object: well, how can that be? For all that you've said, after speaking about the doctrines of election and limited atonement, those are exclusive? And by the way, they're very harmful to evangelism. Well, they are not harmful to evangelism. In fact, just the opposite is true. They make evangelism possible. They are the reason that evangelism will be successful. Election doesn't exclude people from salvation. Sin has done that. Unbelief does that. Election includes people in salvation. Apart from God's sovereign choice of some, and I might say the some are many. In fact, the some are a vast multitude. Some reformed theologians and preachers, Charles Hodge, for example, Charles Haddon Spurgeon believed that there'll be more elect than non-elect. What we know about the number of the elect: it is a vast number. God told Abraham that. He told the patriarchs that. It's like the number of the stars of the heavens, sand of the seashore, the dust of the earth. Can you count the dust of the earth? It's an innumerable multitude. A vast number.

But, apart from God's sovereign choice, none would be saved. We would not choose God unless He first chose us. We love God because He first loved us, John tells us. God takes the initiative. And Christ assured that believers would believe. He assured that His people would come, would choose Him and be saved, and He did that by ransoming them by His blood. Election, remember, is not simply to salvation. Some people have that in their mind, and I suppose if you believe in the doctrine of election, then you shared it with other people, you've talked about it, you've certainly gotten into a discussion. And someone will say: well then, what's the point of evangelism? Because if you're elect, you're saved. That's it. That's one of the most common objections to election. It destroys evangelism. But election is not simply to salvation. Election is to salvation through faith. The elect are chosen to believe. And so, they will believe, and we don't know who the elect are. The only way a person

can know who the elect are, or if they are elect, is through faith, because the elect are chosen to life through faith, and they will believe.

So, if you're pondering this, if you're wondering: well, maybe I'm not one of the elect, well then believe. Trust in Christ and you'll know that you are elect.

As for the gospel, it can be given to all in a bonafide offer, a legitimate offer, because the cross is suited to every man. It made a satisfaction to God's justice that is sufficient for all. We speak about limited atonement, and people seize up on the adjective "limited" and say, you're limiting the cross. You're limiting God's power to save. Not at all. It has to do with the scope of God's intention to redeem, the design of the atonement, not the power of the atonement. It is infinite in its value. Christ died for one person. It's the same death whether He died for one or for an infinite number of people. It's a death of infinite value, of infinite power. So that's not the issue. It is able, more than able to include all who come to Christ, all who believe in Him. And it is adapted to the need of all. It is for sinners, and it has the promise that if the sinner will believe, he or she will be saved. Those who do, those who believe, they find out, they discover when they believe that Christ redeemed them. That's why they believe, because He redeemed them, because He purchased them for Himself.

So, if you happen to be wondering about yourself in regard to the extent of the atonement or in regard to the decree of election, believe. Trust in Him. That is a free, genuine offer of salvation that can be legitimately made to everyone. Jesus saves. That's the gospel. And He saves all who believe in Him regardless of who they may be, regardless of race, nationality, education, sex, social standing, age, young and old alike are saved through faith. Regardless of your moral background, the most self-righteous person or the most degraded person. Christ saves all who believe. He saved Joseph of Arimathea, a righteous man in the eyes of the world, a Pharisee; He saved the thief on the cross, a criminal. They're saved through faith in Him. They're saved through faith in Him because of what He did on the cross.

John 6:37. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out." That's the gospel. It excludes all boasting, but excludes no one who believes. It opens the way to all kinds of people. Whosoever comes will be saved. Apart from the law, apart from human works, apart from personal merit, apart from the law, and through faith alone.

Now, that is a statement that the Jew would have rejected vigorously. God had given Israel the law. It was one of the greatest blessings that He had given to His people. The Jew put his hope in the law, which promised that those who keep its statutes will live. You find that in the Pentateuch. You find it in Leviticus 18:5, Deuteronomy 4 verse 1, verse 40. If you keep the law, if you keep the statutes of the law, you will live. So the Jew concluded that if Paul were teaching that salvation is apart from the law, then his teaching is contrary to the law. He has therefore set the law aside as being worthless, and therefore Paul's gospel is false, must be false. Contrary to the law that promises life to those who keep its statutes. Yet, the law that promises life to those who keep its statutes is not a promise that can be fulfilled. That's the point of the law. At every turn, at every effort, a person finds that he or she cannot do it, cannot keep the law. So Paul's response to the objection in verse 31 is to say that the gospel's not contrary to the law at all. In fact, it actually establishes the law. This is Paul's third conclusion or inference from the gospel. Do we then nullify the law through faith? He asks. May it never be. On the contrary. We establish the law. How does the gospel do that?

Well, to answer that question, we must first decide what the meaning of the word "law" is. It can mean different things. It can mean the Decalogues. So it might have the restricted meaning of the Ten Commandments. Or, it can refer to the Old Testament in general. If Paul is referring to the Old Testament, then the gospel would uphold it because the Old Testament itself taught the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Go back to chapter 1 and verse 17. He quotes Habakkuk 2:4. "The just shall live by faith."

Paul referred to the law and the prophets as doing that in verse 21. So if that is his meaning here, then verse 31 of chapter 3 serves as a transition for chapter 4 where Paul cites the proof of the gospel of salvation by faith from Abraham and David, who were both justified by faith. But the most common meaning of the word "law" in the Book of Romans is that of the Ten Commandments. It has that meaning in verse 20 of chapter 3 and verses 27 and 28 with the works of the law. Chapter 7, Paul develops his argument there around the Ten Commandments. Specifically, the tenth commandment about coveting. In that sense of the word, Paul's response that faith upholds the law means that it gives or it demonstrates the real purpose of the law. The law was never given to save people. Made that promise of life. It was not given

to save people or to give life. The law was given to expose our inability to have life in and of ourselves. It was given to expose and condemn sin, and to show the sinner his or her need of salvation. That's the purpose of the law. That's what Paul stated in verse 20 of this chapter. "Through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

In Galatians chapter 3 verses 21 and 22, Paul gives a very graphic description of the function of the law. He describes it as a kind of jailer. It shuts up everyone under sin in order to lead them to faith in Jesus Christ. So, rightly understood, the law is not a way of salvation. Just the opposite. It shows people that they cannot save themselves. It shuts them up to the reality of their guilt and their sin. The law defeats the self-righteous man. As Paul will later say in chapter 7, it killed him. He thought he was a righteous man. But then he came to that tenth commandment, don't covet, and he coveted, and he said he killed him. Killed the self-righteous man that he was because it exposed his unrighteousness. It exposed his guilt. The law was given for that purpose. It was given to the nation of Israel to prepare the nation for the coming of the Messiah and the coming of the salvation that can only be received by grace through faith.

So, the doctrine of justification by faith actually establishes the law in its proper function as the instrument that God gave to reveal sin and prepare the sinner for faith. Faith and law work together. Properly understood, both are lethal to pride. The law defeats the autonomous man. It defeats the self-sufficient, the self-righteous man by showing him his inability, by showing him that he cannot achieve what he thinks he can achieve.

Emil Brunner explained this in his book, *The Mediator*. Professor Brunner was a Swiss theologian who was not an orthodox theologian. He held ideas that we should reject. But he did have some insight, some good insight. And in his book, he wrote about the antithesis between grace and law. And he wrote that non-Christian systems think in terms of the self movement of man towards God, from mysticism to moralism, philosophy and religion. This is what people try to do by their own strength of thought or deeds. They try to ascend to God, or their idea of God. And they try with self-confidence, great confidence, thinking that they can do it. And they have that self-confidence because they don't take sin seriously. Because they don't take sin seriously, they fail to see the abyss that lies between them and the Holy God.

It's not until man is brought to the edge of that abyss and sees or feels the impassable gulf that separates him from God that he despairs of ever crossing in his own strength. That's when a person sees his or her need of the gospel and the mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ. That despair is what Brunner calls the antechamber of faith, or the entryway to faith. It is what the law produces. It shows us our sin and our guilt and our impossible situation. It can't bridge the gulf. It cannot bring us to God. It wasn't designed to do that. It was simply designed to show us our need, our failure. Only God can bring us to himself, and the gospel is the announcement that He does that in His Son. It proclaims the initiative of His grace. Not man's movement to God. It proclaims the opposite. It proclaims God's movement to man. There's no such thing as man's movement to God. If we're to be saved, then God must save us. We are that hopeless and helpless. That's the gospel. It promises that He's done that, He's taken the initiative. He has done that in His Son through whom He seeks and saves the lost. It's all of God. It must be, which excludes all boasting on our part, all boasting except the kind of boasting that the apostle did. His boasting in the cross of Christ.

Do you boast in that? Is your complete confidence in Jesus Christ and in His death for you? Do you know that He died for you? He died for sinners. He died that they might believe and be saved. He obtained that saving faith for His people. So if you are here without Christ, if you have never believed in Him, if you desire His forgiveness and His life, then believe. And then thank Him for having died for you and redeemed you for Himself. May God help you to do that and help all of us who have trusted in Him to value and appreciate what He did at the cost He did it. We have life now and forever because of the Lord Jesus Christ and His death for us. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace, and we are reminded of that by the implications, the conclusions, the consequences that Paul draws from his exposition of the gospel. It excludes all boasting. We have nothing to boast in. Why? Because You've done it all, and You did it all because we could not –