

Romans Session 49

How Christ Died for God 3

The Cross Exalts God's Grace

Romans 3:27-28 (NASB77)

²⁷ *Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.*

²⁸ *For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.*

Paul is still talking about the Righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, and His death on the Cross.

Last time we talked about this we said that the cross reveals the righteousness of God the Father. We were looking at the balance between Righteousness and Justice.

Today we want to talk of the Cross as it exalts God's Grace.

The cross proves the utter futility of man's coming to God in his own way and power.

Where then is man's boasting? Paul asks,

In answer to his own question, he declares unequivocally, **it is excluded.**

Because the power of salvation is in the cross of Christ alone, man has no cause for self-congratulation or self-satisfaction, much less for the self-exaltation that is now so widely proclaimed under the guise of the gospel.

Paul reminded the Corinthian believers:

1 Corinthians 1:26 (NASB77)

²⁶ *For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble;*

Paul was, of course, using those descriptions purely on the human level, because in God's sight and by His standard, no person is wise, mighty or noble.

He goes on to say;

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 (NASB77)

²⁷ *but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,*

²⁸ *and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are,*

²⁹ *that no man should boast before God.*

Now Paul says, "**by what kind of law is boasting excluded, is it on the basis of works?**

Again answering his own question, he declares, "**no, but by a law of faith.**

Not even Abraham, the father of God's chosen people, was justified by works;

Romans 4:2-3 (NASB77)

² *For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God.*

³ *For what does the Scripture say? "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

Paul clarified this stance to the Ephesian Church when he wrote:

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB77)

⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;*

⁹ *not as a result of works, that no one should boast.*

The attitude of true faith is exemplified by the tax-gatherer in the Temple.

Luke 18:13 (NASB77)

¹³ *"But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'"*

The greatest lie in the world, and the lie common to all false religions and cults, is that, by certain works of their own doing, men are able to make themselves acceptable to God.

The greatest error in that belief is its sheer impossibility. But the greatest evil of that belief is that it robs God of His glory.

Paul completely cuts the ground out from under works righteousness by declaring, **for we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works**, even the good works done in response to God's own Law.

What then is this saving faith that is completely apart from works?

First, we will consider some things that neither prove or disprove true faith.

Although they will be evident to some degree or another in true believers, they can also be evidenced, sometimes to a high degree, in unbelievers.

1. **The first**, is visible morality. A person can be outwardly moral and yet not be saved. some pagans and cultists put many Christians to shame by their high standards of behavior.

When a certain young man came to Jesus and asked Him,

Matthew 19:16-22 (NASB77)

¹⁶ *And behold, one came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"*

¹⁷ *And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."*

¹⁸ *He •said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS;*

¹⁹ *HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."*

²⁰ *The young man •said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?"*

²¹ *Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you*

shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

²² *But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieved; for he was one who owned much property.*

When this young man said I have kept the commandments you speak of, Jesus did not challenge him concerning his sincerity. According to outward appearance and his own human perception of obedience, the man probably was speaking the truth.

But when Jesus told him to sell all of his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor and then come and follow Him, the man went away grieved, because he owned a lot of property.

He was not willing to obey Christ in this, and that reveals the heart of the man, it shows that his obedience to the Law was not done out of love for God or for the purpose of His glory but was done out of self-love and for the purpose of his own self-interest.

When commanded to give all of his possessions as well as all of himself to Christ, he refused.

And by that refusal, even his seemingly good works were exposed as spiritually worthless works, because they were done out of selfish motivation.

2. **Secondly**, intellectual knowledge of God's truth is not necessarily a proof of saving faith. It is possible to have a great deal of knowledge about God's Word and yet be unsaved.

Like the scribes and Pharisee's of Jesus' day, many scholars throughout the centuries have devoted their lives to careful study of Scripture.

But because they did not believe or obey the truths they studied, those truths became a judgment against them, and they remained as lost as the primitive tribesman who is unaware that there is such a thing as Scripture.

To his self-confident brothers in the flesh Paul said;

Romans 2:17 (NASB77)

¹⁷ *But if you bear the name "Jew," and rely upon the Law, and boast in God,*

Romans 2:23-24 (NASB77)

²³ *You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?*

²⁴ *For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.*

Ezekiel writes;

Ezekiel 36:20-23 (NASB77)

²⁰ *"When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.'*

²¹ *"But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went.*

²² *"Therefore, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.*

²³ *"And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you*

have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord GOD, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.

3. **Third, religious involvement**, is not necessarily a proof of saving faith, in the Old Testament, the Lord repeatedly condemned the Israelites for their meticulous outward observance of the Mosaic ordinances and ceremonies while having no trust in Him.

The Ten virgins in Jesus parable had the same outward dress and carried the same kind of lamps. The fact that all ten women were spoken of as virgins suggests that outwardly they were all morally pure and religiously faithful.

But five of them had no oil in their lamps, and because they lacked the oil of saving faith, they were disqualified from meeting the bridegroom, who represented Christ. (*Matt 25:1-13*)

4. **Fourth**, active ministry in Christ's name is no certain proof of saving faith. Outwardly Judas was as active as the other disciples, witnessed by the fact that he served as their trusted treasurer. And obviously he considered himself a follower of Christ. But Jesus warned:

Matthew 7:21-23 (NASB77)

²¹ "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.

²² "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'

²³ "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

5. **Fifth**, even conviction of sin does not necessarily demonstrate saving faith. Mental institutions throughout the world are filled with people who are so burdened by the knowledge of their sinfulness that they cannot function in society.

Their sense of guilt became so overpowering that it drove them to insanity, but it did not drive them to Christ. Others who are convicted of sin determine to reform themselves. Many people who have been long and deeply enslaved by a particular sin have been able, sometimes through sheer will power, to rid themselves of it.

But successfully forsaking that particular sin in their own power makes them even more susceptible to other sins, especially pride.

They are like the man;

Matthew 12:43-45a (NASB77)

⁴³ "Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find it.

⁴⁴ "Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order.

⁴⁵ "Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.

Self-reformation drives a person further from God's grace and therefore further from salvation.

- 6. Sixth,** assurance of salvation is not an infallible mark of saving faith. The world is filled with people who are sincerely convinced in their own minds that they are right with God and that their place in heaven is secured. If being persuaded that we are Christians makes us Christians indeed, we would need no warnings about being deceived by false hopes.

If it were not possible to believe oneself saved when one is not, Satan would have no way to deceive people about their salvation.

Yet Scripture is full of warnings to unsaved people who think they are saved.

James 1:22 (NASB77)

²² *But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.*

- 7. Seventh,** the experience of a past "decision" for Christ does not necessarily prove saving faith. If no evidence of godly living results from that event, no matter how strong and genuine the profession seemed to be, it is no proof of salvation.

Next time together we will talk of the positive things that give us evidence of a real saving faith, as God does not leave His children in uncertainty about their relationship to Him.