

Three More Questions

In his book, *Fully Alive*, Christian comedian Ken Davis recounted an incident from his college days. His class had been asked to deliver a persuasive speech in which they would be graded on creativity, persuasiveness and the ability to drive home their point in a memorable way.

The title of his talk was “The Law of the Pendulum”. He spent 20 minutes carefully teaching the physics principles that govern a swinging pendulum. Because of friction and gravity a swinging pendulum can never return to a point higher than the point from which it is released.

He then demonstrated what he taught by attaching a child’s toy top to a 3 foot string which was attached to the top of a blackboard with a thumbtack. He pulled the top to one side, made a mark on the blackboard and then released it. Each time the toy swung back, he made a new mark until the top came to rest in less than a minute.

He then asked the people in the room how many of them believed the Law of the Pendulum was true. The professor and all his classmates raised their hands.

The professor, thinking the presentation was over, began to walk to the front of the room. But in reality, Davis was just getting started with his presentation. Hanging from the steel beam in the middle of the room was 250 pounds of metal weights attached to four strands of 500 pound test parachute cord. Davis invited the professor to sit with the back of his head against a concrete wall. He then brought the 250 pounds of metal weights to within an inch of the professor’s face.

He once again explained the law of the pendulum and reminded everyone that if what he had said was true when he released the weights they would swing across the room and return short of the professor’s face. He then asked the professor once again if he believed in the law of the pendulum. After a long pause, he weakly nodded and whispered “yes”.

Davis released the pendulum. It arced across the class, came to a brief stop and then began to return, at which point Davis said he had never seen anyone move so fast in his entire life as the professor dove out of the way. Davis then asked the class again, “Does he believe in the law of the pendulum?” The students unanimously answered “no”.

In the book of Romans Paul has been teaching us about the “law of faith.” He calls this law of faith salvation through faith and justification through faith. He has made it clear that no one is able to be right or justified before God by keeping God’s law and that therefore we all need the gospel of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We all need to be justified and redeemed and have God’s wrath satisfied on our behalf by what God has done for us in Christ Jesus and not based on what we can do for God. That is the essence of the “law of faith.”

How many of you believe in the law of faith? Do you really? Just like the law of the pendulum, the real test of whether you really believe in the law of faith is demonstrated by how you live it daily.

Please find Romans 3 in your Bibles and follow along as I read verses 27-31:

Romans 3:27-31

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

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.

29 Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also,

30 since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

31 Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

This is God's Holy word. Let us pray.

Paul's theme here in Romans is justification, or how people can be made right with God. As we saw last time in Romans 3:21-26, God in His righteousness has made a way for us to be made right with Him through faith in Jesus Christ. God justifies or declares righteous the people who believe in Jesus Christ. As we saw last time this righteousness that we all need is:

- 1. From God** (Rom. 3:21a).
- 2. Not from Law but witnessed by the OT** (Rom. 3:21b).
- 3. Only to those who recognize their sinfulness** (Rom. 3:22-23).
- 4. Based on the grace of God** (Rom. 3:24a).
- 5. Provided by the death of Christ** (Rom. 3:24b-25a).

Having explained the doctrine of justification, Paul now explores three implications of this teaching. He introduces these implications in the form of questions:

"Where is boasting then?" (27)

"Is God the God of the Jews only?" (29)

"Do we then make void the law through faith?" (31)

The answers to these questions imply three principles of the law of faith. We can say that justification by faith:

1. Excludes Boasting (3:27-28)

Read verse 27 again, **"Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith."**

Why does Paul raise the issue of boasting? Because boasting is the outward form of the inner condition of pride. And pride has been the root cause or the underlying sin of all the evils and miseries of the world that Paul described in Romans 1:18-3:20.

Paul's question assumes that the natural propensity in all of us is to claim credit for what God alone can do. We don't want to be thought of as helpless and impotent before God. It's difficult for our selfish pride to admit, "I have nothing to offer God; I'm helpless, sinful, and deserving God's deepest wrath. I have nothing to cling to but Christ crucified for me."

“Boasting is the language of our fallen self-centeredness”, wrote John Stott. Boasting vents self-centeredness; it publicizes our pride.

We saw the pride of the Jews in chapter 2. Romans 2:17, **“Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God.”** And Romans 2:23, **“You who make your boast in the law.”** The Pharisees especially prided themselves in keeping the Law: They fasted, they prayed at the required times, they observed the Sabbath, they carefully did ritual hand washing, and they even tithed their table spices (Matt. 23:23)!

Paul himself, before his conversion, took great pride in his Jewish religious credentials and good works. In Galatians 1:14, he says that he was advancing in Judaism more than many of his contemporaries. In Philippians 3:5-6, Paul rattles off the list that he once took great pride in: **“circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”**

But Paul goes on to say, **“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.”** (Philippians 3:7-9).

That’s the same point that Paul is hammering home in our text: If we are justified by faith alone, apart from any human works, then we have no grounds for boasting. Look again at verse 28, **“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”**

Let’s imagine that there are two chairs in the middle of an empty room. One chair is labeled “Do” and the other chair is labeled “Done.” Those two chairs represent the two kinds of religion in the world. Every religion is either a “Do” religion or a “Done” religion.

The “Do” religions are based on the belief that in order to please God you have to do something: Pray, join a church, give money, be good, keep a list of dos and don’ts, go to Mass, offer a sacrifice, make a pilgrimage, wear certain clothing, go to the temple twice a year, follow the Ten Commandments, and so on. Although these religions may seem to be very different on the outside, they all teach that salvation is “earned” by the things you do.

Every religion in the world is a “Do” religion, except one. True Christianity is a “Done” religion. Why is Christianity a “Done” religion? Because Jesus Christ has done everything necessary for our salvation when he died on the cross and was raised from the dead. Nothing more needs to be added; nothing more could be added.

Now let me ask you one simple question: Where are you sitting right now? On the “Do” chair or on the “Done” chair? Everyone in the world is sitting in one of those two chairs. Either you are trying to save yourself by your good works or you are trusting in Jesus Christ alone. It’s either “Do” or “Done.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”**

Justification by grace through faith excludes boasting. Second, justification by faith,

2. Eliminates Distinctions (3:29-30)

In verse 29 Paul asks, **“Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles?”** Paul is asking “Who can qualify for this salvation?” His answer is, **“Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.”**

Paul takes the Jew back to the central creed of the Jewish faith: that God is one. Deuteronomy 6:4, **“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!”** Paul argues that since there is only one God, then there can only be one way of salvation.

This way of salvation is the same for everyone. Paul points out that it is the same for Gentile and for Jews. We could apply that further to say that salvation is available to everyone; whether we grew up in the church or didn't; whether we have lots of religious knowledge or have none; whether we grew up in America or Africa; whether we are politically liberal or conservative; whether we have sinned blatantly, repeatedly and publicly, or sinned in more “socially acceptable” ways.

Let's apply this point: If you come from a religious background, don't trust in church membership, baptism, or communion for salvation. You must trust in Christ alone. If you don't come from a religious background, you don't need to join the church, be baptized, partake of communion, or go through other religious rituals to get right with God. In fact, doing these things to earn right standing with God would only fill you with pride, which keeps you from God! Put your trust in Jesus Christ alone. God justifies all who believe (3:22).

Another application of this principle is this: quit comparing yourself with others. Many of us fall into the trap of comparing our lives to others. When I do that, one of two things is going to occur. I am either going to end up boasting in my spiritual maturity because I think I am better than others or I'll be discouraged in my walk with Jesus because I don't feel like my life measures up to others.

The law of faith eliminates either of those mindsets. God's love for me is not dependent on how mature I am. Certainly it is God's desire that all of His children grow in their relationship with Him and continue to become more and more like Jesus because God knows that is what is best for us. But my standing with God does not depend on what I do.

So when I begin to measure my life against those of other believers I am really living more according to the law of works than with the law of faith. We must constantly remember that our salvation and our value to God are not a result of anything I do, but only a result of what God has already done for me.

That's the second great implication: There are no distinctions in the matter of salvation. Since salvation is by faith alone, anyone can be saved.

That brings us to the third principle of the law of faith. Justification through faith,

3. Establishes the Law (3:31)

Read verse 31, **“Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.”**

Paul anticipates that some will question that if salvation is by faith and not by keeping the law, does that not make the law null and void?

“Certainly not!” is Paul’s emphatic reply. Nothing in Paul’s teaching is meant to say that the law has no value. It has enormous value ... but not as a means of salvation. How does justification through faith establish the law?

a. The law shows us our sin. Romans 3:20 said, **“by the law is the knowledge of sin.”** As Paul has demonstrated so well in Romans 1:18 to 3:20, the law shows us not only what God wants; it also shows us how far short we fall of God’s righteousness.

b. The law shows us our need for Christ. Galatians 3:24 says, **“Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”** The law is a schoolmaster who leads us to Christ by showing us we can never please God on our own. As Paul said in Romans 3:21, **“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.”** All of the Old Testament was written to point us to Christ.

c. The law was fulfilled by Christ. Only one Person has ever kept God’s law perfectly. In his sinless life and in his sacrificial death Jesus fulfilled the righteous demands of the law on our behalf. Romans 3:25 said that God set forth Jesus Christ as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness. When we trust Christ, His obedience is credited to our account. He did the obeying and we get the credit! We did the disobeying and He took the blame! That’s the wonder of the gospel.

d. The law is fulfilled in us by the power of the Spirit. Paul will make this point in Romans 8. When we trust Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us, and it is by His indwelling power that we are supernaturally changed and enabled to live for God day by day.

Let me tell you the rest of the story about Ken Davis’ presentation of the law of the pendulum.

Davis reports that one of the most fascinating and unexpected outcomes of his lesson was that after the professor had bailed out of the chair, one of the other students volunteered to sit in that same chair. Although he flinched a little when the pendulum swung toward his head, he stayed put. And once the entire class saw the validity of the law demonstrated, they all wanted to do it. As Davis writes: “The desire to live out demonstrated faith is not only adventurous; it’s contagious.”

The same is true, with the law of faith. No doubt, it is adventurous to live according to that law. It goes against every single part of my fallen human nature that tells me that I have to do something to be right with God. But when I live by faith in what God has already done for me, it is not only wonderful for me, it is also contagious for others.