

**Intro:**

In Rm 3.27-31, we see three benefits of justification by faith, called “certain advantages”<sup>1</sup> by one commentator.

1. ***Boasting Excluded*** – the first advantage of justification by faith is that all human boasting is excluded. No man has any merit in himself to commend himself over his fellow men in order to gain the approval of God.
2. ***All Nations Included*** – the second advantage of justification by faith is that no tribe of men has any prior claim on God’s favour because the One God justifies All Men the Same Way: by faith alone.
3. ***God's Law Established*** – the third advantage of justification by faith is summed up by these words. By it we mean that justification by faith upholds the law “by insisting that its utmost demands must be and have been fully met.”<sup>2</sup>

This third advantage is the one we want to look at today:

*God's Law Established*

The relationship of saints to the law is an age-old question. In fact, it is the question that stirred up the church in the apostolic age.

- Apostolic leaders – Jews, thoroughly steeped in a culture of law-keeping
- First converts – Jews, likewise steeped in the culture of law-keeping  
As long as the Church remained primarily Jewish, the question of ‘what to do about the law’ wasn’t on the radar screen at all.
- First Gentile converts – pose a question: what are we going to do about law-keeping?

First Gentile convert of all time: Cornelius, Acts 10-11

- God clearly involved in this conversion: Vision to Cornelius, Vision to Peter, Coming of Holy Ghost upon Cornelius and other Gentile converts
- Peter is aware of legal difficulties even as he is preaching to Cornelius (10.28-29)

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<sup>1</sup> Herman A. Hoyt, *The First Christian Theology*, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments*, electronic ed., Ro 3:31 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995).

- Jerusalem Jews challenge Peter about legal difficulties (11.2)
- Peter justifies his actions by citing the revelations God gave and the gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles. Conclusion: (11.18)

The question isn't settled by simply admitting Gentiles into the church, but it is going to take some time to bring the issue to a head.

After Paul's first missionary journey (Ac 13-14), certain Jerusalem Christians arrive in Antioch and dispute with the church, with Paul and Barnabas, over the question of applying the law to the Gentiles (Ac 15.1-2).

That is the conflict. We have already seen Paul touch on this at various points in the book of Romans. We see it in chapter 7, which we read this morning for our Scripture reading.

I am going to develop this further in a moment, but I want to say that we see this conflict being carried on this very day within the Christian church, albeit mostly from a different perspective.

- To the question, 'What about the law?' Paul said 'Faith establishes the law.'
- Today, some Christians seem to answer, 'Faith makes the law void.' [This is exactly what the Judaizing Christians were afraid of.]

Read Rm 3.27-31, text 3.31.

**Proposition:** Justification by faith establishes the authority, the demands, and the consequences of the law, although it sees that the consequences have been once for all paid by Someone Else.

## I. How grace seems to threaten the law

A. A few grammatical notes from our text

1. Should 'law' be capitalized or not?

a. If yes, then Law refers to Mosaic Law

b. If no, then law refers to principal of law from God (which includes the Mosaic Law)

2. The 'article' information

a. Both instances of word 'law' in v. 31 have no article

b. The word 'faith' does have an article – it points to a particular faith, the faith that obtains 'without-law' righteousness from God

- c. So from that standpoint, 'law' may be simply generic principle of law from God (which includes Mosaic Law)

Most translators seem to agree with this point of view:  
only Geneva and NAS go with "Law"

I am mentioning this just for you to hold this fact in your mind, we will come back to it later.

- B. The heart of the question: does the faith 'bring to nothing' the law?

1. Grace (justification by faith) seems to say 'forget all that'
  - a. Someone comes to Christ and is justified (declared righteous) by faith – his whole past record is not charged against him at all
  - b. The justified saint cannot be lost by future sins – all his sins, past, present and future are charged to Christ's account
  - c. The law that demands death for sin *doesn't seem to matter* – it seems to be 'set aside', 'disannulled', 'made void'

The Judaizing Christians of the Apostolic Age were concerned that God's Word would simply be set aside by 'letting Gentiles in without requiring *at least some of the Law.*' [And for the Judaizers, they meant some of the Mosaic Law.]

2. Some modern Christians are actually saying that law doesn't matter ... 'forget all that'
  - a. Any attempt by Christians to decide whether an activity is right or wrong is *by definition* 'legalism'
  - b. Stress is made on 'living in grace' which tends to allow anything someone wants to do (except that which is specifically excluded by the Bible)

There is an element of truth to this teaching that makes it appealing, but it is a teaching that essentially 'disannuls' – makes 'void' – law.

Chuck Swindoll's book, *Grace Awakening* is one of the major proponents of this view, sold over 500,000 copies.

Widely embraced in the evangelical church today.

- C. The short answer: “God forbid!” [KJV]; “May it never be!” [NAS]
1. Very strong negation
  2. “Let there be no possibility of such a thought even crossing your mind one time!”

## II. How justification by faith establishes the law

- A. Understanding the nature of law
1. Recall our grammatical discussion
    - a. ‘Law’ has no article, so not a specific code
    - b. Law as a concept, the concept that underlies every law or code
  2. Concept rooted in supremacy and authority of God
    - a. God is almighty, all powerful, Creator, and sets the standard as the Holy One (not just by might, but by right)
    - b. Whatever God wills at any given point of time is Law for whoever God wills it
  3. God has revealed specific (and different) Laws at various times in history
    - a. Edenic Code: one Law – don’t eat of the tree of Knowledge
    - b. Noahic Code: government, capital punishment added
    - c. Abrahamic Code: governed the way Abraham lived his life, passed on to his sons after him (tribal code)
    - d. Mosaic Law: formally codified at Sinai
      - 1) Rabbis counted 613 commandments in the Law
      - 2) Specific application to National Israel
      - 3) Specific laws sometimes changed (Lev 17 – law for wilderness; Dt 12 – law for settled nation in the land)
  - e. New Testament and Law
    - 1) Mosaic Code is fulfilled in Christ (Rm 8.2-4)
      - a) No longer applies
      - b) Meant for our instruction, not for our obedience

- 2) 9 of 10 commandments repeated in NT
- 3) Great Commandment and Second Commandment repeated (and emphasized) in NT
4. Certain observations about Law in general
  - a. Specific laws are in force only for certain people at certain times
  - b. Under all laws is Law: the will of the Holy God
  - c. Law demands obedience; when disobedience occurs, Law demands death
    - 1) Mosaic Law: the example of the man stoned to death for gathering sticks on the Sabbath (Num 15.32-36)
    - 2) The first law demands death for sin: "dying you shall die" (Gen 2.16-17)

Two different codes, one underlying principle (conform to the will of God), one ultimate penalty (death).

B. What justification by faith teaches about the law

1. It agrees with the demand for perfect obedience: Christ came to fulfill (fill up) the law

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**Matthew 5:17** Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup> For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

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2. It agrees with the demand for death for disobedience: Christ tasted death for every man

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**Hebrews 2:9** But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.

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“If a lawbreaker pays the penalty, he will be lost eternally. The gospel tells how Christ died to pay the penalty of the broken law. He did not treat it as a thing to be ignored. He paid the debt in full. Now anyone who has broken the law can avail himself of the fact that Christ paid the penalty on his behalf. Thus the gospel of salvation by faith upholds the law by insisting that its utmost demands must be and have been fully met.”<sup>3</sup>

- C. The only person who truly establishes the law is the repentant sinner
1. He makes no boast in his works
  2. He takes no credit for his pedigree
  3. He acknowledges his guilt and his debt

He bows before God Almighty and His Law, and says, “Woe is me, a sinner, undone!”

And he finds in Christ a glorious and gracious Saviour who received his guilt, paid his debt, and set him free from the demands of the Law.

### III. How faith in Christ engages the law

- A. The concerns repeated:
1. Remember how we began with recalling the fears that motivated Judaizers: “If we don’t require at least *some* Mosaic Law, those Gentiles will run wild.”
  2. Remember also modern Christians who say: no need to worry about law, we have total freedom in grace (unless specifically prohibited)
- B. The concern answered by the first Church Council (Ac 15.13-29)
1. The Mosaic Law is set aside (it was for a different time and place)
  2. The new believers are still given certain demands:
    - a. No idolatry
    - b. No blood / things strangled
    - c. No fornication

<sup>3</sup> William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments*, electronic ed., Ro 3:31 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995).

From this we see that Law still has force – not the Mosaic law, but God, honouring His name, and serving Him in holiness as His nature and Will demands.

C. By faith the believer

1. Accepts the verdict of Law and submits to its authority
2. But is no longer under the demands of its penalty *because the penalty has been paid*
3. Liberty means freedom to fulfill the Law without fear of failure
  - a. Failure will come, but the penalty has been paid
  - b. Failure will diminish the more the lifelong pursuit of submission is practiced
4. The law is established in submissive, believing hearts (Jas 2.8)

**Conclusion:**

Do you see what Justification has done?

It establishes the Law – we aren't trying to weasel out of its demands.

But it frees from the penalty of the Law – we are enabled to live constantly pressing onward in submission to all its ramifications.

What does it mean to love one's neighbour?

It means much more than being nice to people who like you and wave at you when you are out in your yard.

It means finding a guy who hates you lying in the road and bathing his wounds and taking him to an inn and paying for his care.

And so fulfill the law of Christ.