

## **“THE END OF BRAGGING.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**August 20, 2023, 10:30 AM**

### **Scripture Texts: Romans 3:27-31**

#### **Introduction.**

I received a bit of criticism for last week’s sermon. She told me I didn’t give a clear definition of the big word I used, propitiation. I talked about it, talked around it, but didn’t actually say what it means. Wives are great critics and we are wise when we listen to them.

So here is a definition of what propitiation means when we read God put Jesus forward as a propitiation by His blood. Propitiation is the act of God by which He redirects His just wrath for our sin away from us and onto Jesus who bore the full cup of God’s wrath, died our death in our place, and bore the shame of all our guilt.

God has turned aside His wrath, appeased it, satisfied it by the atoning work of Christ on the cross. It is there God makes Jesus to be a propitiatory sacrifice to satisfy God’s divine justice.

This is a huge deal. When you see a bleeding and dying Savior that should get our attention there is something really serious is going on. If that’s the remedy, the problem must be way beyond our ability to fix it. If that’s the medicine then clearly the disease is life threatening.

Jesus so perfectly fulfills the demands of the law and justice, that God is satisfied, and He can remain just even while He freely justifies us by grace through faith. Everything that stood between us and His grace and mercy is now removed.

So what? What are the implications of this?

Let’s look at our text in the light of the three questions Paul asks and the answers he gives, what about boasting (27-28), what about the Jews (29-30), what about the law (31)?

#### **Romans 3:27-28, what about boasting?**

Have you ever had someone do something for you, and they did it all, every last bit of it, you contributed nothing whatsoever? It was completely a gift. If we all put our minds to it we should be able to think of sometime when someone, parents, spouse, good friend, total stranger did something for us that was pure gift.

Imagine if a big serve team came over to your house to do a ton of work, cleaning up, fixing up, repairing, improving. If you were at all able you would be out there working with them. Your sense of pride would compel you. But suppose you could do nothing, you contributed nothing.

Suppose someone came by your house a week later and made a big deal about how great everything looked, would you say, “Yeah I really worked hard to do all that.”

What would you be doing? You are stealing the credit, you are stealing the glory of what was done for you.

This is our situation with our salvation, our justification. Human beings are constitutionally addicted to the principle of self-help, DIY do it yourself, pull yourself up by your own bootstraps thinking. And the fact that no one has ever been able to save themselves by their own works or efforts hasn't slowed anyone down from trying.

Every time we do anything to try to win God's favor, to earn God's blessings, we show how far we are from understanding who God is, what His holiness is like and how far our sin has removed us from Him.

God has done all the work of our salvation without any help from us. None. Solely on the basis of what Jesus has done, God declares us righteous and justified.

**Romans 3:24** [We are] justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

This is humbling for all of us who desperately want to contribute something. It is humbling because down deep we are all proud.

This is why Paul says, what becomes of our boasting? Where is our glorying?

Why does Paul address this so directly? Why does the Holy Spirit tell Paul to beat this drum some more? He has already said this in chapter 2 and chapter 3, and just last week, he said apart from the law, apart from works, by faith, it is a gift.

Alright, already Paul, we get it. And he says no you don't. You still don't get it.

### ***Boasting and its root sin, pride.***

The world is full of boasters and braggers, and so is the church. Paul wrote two letters to the church in Corinth and the main thing he dealt with was pride. And it is in Rome, and in all our hearts.

There is a lot of boasting in the religious/spiritual world. Lots of strutting, lots of bragging, lots of posturing, lots of comparing and contrasting. A lot of making a show of our goodness, a lot of putting on appearances.

What makes you feel good about yourself? What do you want others to think about you? Do you want people to know how good you are?

Pride is the first of the deadly sins. It is the first thing on the list of things God hates. Pride is the greatest common problem in all humanity. I don't like it when I see it in others, which of course makes me wonder how proud I am. The sin we see in others is the sin we do most.

What is pride and boasting? Boasting is the external expression of the pride in our hearts.

Pride is boasting in self and not the Lord.

It is taking credit ourselves for what God alone can do.

It is relying on self and not God.

It is feeling sufficiency in our own strength and not in God's.

It is the unwillingness to admit weaknesses and needs.

If there was some other way, then God would not have put Jesus forward as the propitiation. If there was some other way, or something to be added, it would rob Jesus of His glory.

All the power, glory, honor, praise, worship belongs to God and God alone.

***Faith destroys pride/boasting.***

Paul destroys our pride by first showing we had nothing to do with achieving our salvation.

And then, he destroys our pride by showing the only way we can make this salvation ours is by faith.

Faith removes boasting, faith removes glorying in self.

Paul asked the Corinthian church a very searching question that goes to the core of all of us.

**I Corinthians 4:7** What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

What do you have that you have not received? What in your life is your own doing, you have earned it, made it, done it all of your own? Is there any single thing in your life that is not from God, that is not by His grace and will?

What do you want to credit to natural ability, to being born with it?

What do you want to credit to your background, your family, your parents, your schooling, to being born with privilege in America?

What do you want to credit to your own free will, your hard work?

What is more foolish than boasting about something you had nothing to do with?

What justification do you have for boasting when what you have come from someone else?

We will either boast about what we have done for Jesus, or what Jesus has done for us.

**Galatians 6:14** But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

What about boasting? Faith destroys boasting and pride.

### **Romans 3:29-30, but what about the Jews?**

One more time Paul has to hammer this concept home, especially for the Jews who are so convinced they are better because of the law of works, better because they were God's chosen.

Paul leads off with a question any of our kids in should be able to answer. Is God the God of everyone or of just some people? Is God the God only of the Jews? Of course not. God is the God of everyone everywhere.

The issue here is, is God the Savior of the Jews only or of the Gentiles also. Does God want to make all peoples beneficiaries of His grace and mercy? And if so then how does He do that?

**God is one.** There is only one true God. By definition that is the meaning of God. God is the ultimate source of all there is. There cannot be two beings who are the ultimate source of all being. One would be the ultimate source of the other. There can only be one true God.

Since there are not many gods, there are not many ways of salvation. Since there is only one God, there is only way to be reconciled to that one God, only one means of justification. If God justifies both the same way, then He is equally God of both.

There is one God and one way of becoming His people. God is consistent, He doesn't play favorites, treating some better than others.

We are all in the same boat, in the same class, we are all playing on the same level playing field.

If Jesus was just a man, then you could have an argument over who was better, Ghandhi, Budda, Mohammed, Jesus.

But Jesus is both man and God. He is the only one able to keep the law and bear the wrath of God and overcome sin, death, Satan and hell.

We must all confess, acknowledge our sin and our need, we must all repent and believe, we must all put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, for there is no other way to be reconciled to the Father.

Paul takes one example of a work of the law, circumcision.

Think of circumcision as being anything that we might use to commend ourselves to God.

Think of uncircumcision as being anything that we think would keep us from God, a barrier.

Paul sweeps both aside, the Jews are no better off, the Gentiles are no worse off.

So your advantages you might be leaning on or trusting in are of no advantage.  
Your disadvantages you might think are hindrances or barriers are of no disadvantage.

God is the God of all who put their faith in Jesus for their justification and redemption.

Faith destroys boasting, and faith destroys distinctions, privilege, entitlement, prejudice.

### **Romans 3:31, so what about the law?**

All this talk of law and faith, works and faith, and righteousness apart from the law, could lead one to think the law is all bad and faith is the only good. All of Paul's beating the drum of justification by faith alone can leave the impression the law is now null and void.

Does justification by faith alone mean we can completely ignore the law of God and pay no respect to it or obey it? The Jews especially bristled at what sounded like Paul's complete rejection of the law. But this is a misunderstanding.

Jesus encountered the same misunderstanding and said, "I have not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it" (Matthew 5:17). And "your righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees."

Is it not plain to see how important the law is if God sent His Son to perfectly keep, obey and fulfill all the demands of the law on our behalf, as our representative, and so take away the curse on us for not keeping it?

Paul has limited his argument so far to justification. But that is not all there is. There is also sanctification which is the work of the Holy Spirit in us to conform us to the image and likeness of Christ and to enable us by His power to love and obey the law. The law is useless for our justification, but the law is useful for our sanctification.

The Holy Spirit sanctifies us according to the law, and along the path of righteousness. We are to aim at keeping the law even if we can only do so imperfectly.

By Jesus I am justified. By the Holy Spirit I am sanctified. By the Spirit I learn the work I am to do as a justified sinner, to become a sanctified saint. To walk by the Spirit, live by the Spirit, pray by the Spirit, be filled with the Spirit.

By faith we love the law, and love comes from the Holy Spirit who enables us to love God and love our neighbor, to fulfill the law, which is love.

### **Implications and application.**

A believer is a *humble* person lives by faith in the grace of God. Humbled by their sin, humbled by their gift of forgiveness and salvation. When you see everything as gift, it humbles you. You can't be proud and claim Christ alone. If you are proud you aren't living by faith. Humility is the chemo that kills the cancer of pride. Parents, if your children are proud, they aren't seeing you live your faith in humility.

First Church, let us be a humble people. Let us lay aside all boasting, all bragging, all self-promoting. We have received through no merit of our own, the free gift of salvation by God's grace through faith. May God make us a humble people.

If you must boast, boast only in Jesus, who He is and what He has done for you. If you must boast, boast in Christ crucified for all your sins. If you must boast, boast in your weaknesses, in your sin, in your unrighteousness, in your unworthiness, boast in how bad you are, and how good Jesus is.

If someone accuses you of some sin, any sin, surprise them by not being defensive, but agree with them and say you don't know the half of it, I am way worse than that.

We were made to boast in God.

We were made to give Him credit for all good.

We were made to rely on His power.

We were made to magnify His glory and His all sufficiency in our weakness. JP

**Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

**Prayer:** "I will glory not because I am righteous, but because I am redeemed; I will glory not because I am free from sins, but because my sins are forgiven me. I will not glory because I have done good nor because someone has done good to me, but because Christ is my advocate with the Father and because the blood of Christ has been shed for me."—St. Ambrose