
Paul's Epistle to the Romans

LESSON **VI** : SOLA FIDE — SOLA GRATIA — CHAP 3 VERSES 21-31

INTRODUCTION

“Romans 1:18-3:20, while important in its own right, is nevertheless preliminary to the main point that Paul wants to establish in this part of his letter: the availability of God’s righteousness to all who respond in faith. This ‘good news,’ announced in 1:17, is now elaborated. The essential points are packed into 3:21-26, a passage that Luther called ‘the chief point, and the very central place of the Epistle, and of the whole Bible.’ The remainder of the section develops one major element of this extraordinarily dense passage: faith as the only basis for justification. In 3:27-31, Paul highlights the exclusivity of faith (3:28) as he makes a number of points clearly directed to a Jewish viewpoint: faith excludes all boasting (3:27), provides for the inclusion of the Gentiles (3:29-30), and complements rather than nullifies the law (3:31). In chap. 4, each of these points is reiterated with respect to Abraham, as other elements are also drawn into the picture: the place of circumcision, the cruciality of grace, the promise, and the nature of faith. From this emphasis, we can surmise that Paul was well aware of the point at which his gospel was most often (and not only in Galatia) attacked and wanted to demonstrate as clearly as possible that faith was both the necessary and necessarily exclusive response of human beings to God’s work of redemption.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 218]

In a passage that is loaded with key theological terms, the phrase ‘righteousness of God’ (*dikaioσynē theou*) stands out. It occurs four times (vv. 21,22,25,26 [‘his righteousness’ in the last two]), while the related verb ‘justify’ (*dikaioō*) is found twice (vv. 24,26) and the adjective ‘just’ (*dikaioσ*) once (v. 26). After a section in which the need for this righteousness has been demonstrated in detail (1:18-3:20), Paul is now prepared to explain how the righteousness of God empowers the gospel to mediate salvation to sinful human beings (cf. 1:16-17). The passage falls into four parts:

- (1) God’s righteousness as revealed (cf. 1:17) and how it relates to the OT (v. 21)
- (2) the way in which all human beings, equal in their sin, have equal access also to God’s righteousness through faith (vv. 22-23)
- (3) the source of God’s righteousness in the gracious provision of Christ as an atoning sacrifice (vv. 24-25a)
- (4) at this point we are presuming that ‘righteousness of God,’ which refers in vv. 21-22 to the justifying act of God, refers in vv. 25-26 to the ‘integrity’ of God, his always acting in complete accordance with his own character. Moo states many modern theologians reject this interpretation, but he continues by stating “this shift in meaning is required by the data of the text, and, indeed, gives to the text its extraordinary power and significance.”

“There can be no gospel unless there is such a thing as a righteousness of God for the ungodly. But just as little can there be any gospel unless the integrity of God’s character be maintained. The problem of the sinful world, the problem of religion, the problem of God in dealing with a sinful race, is how to unite these two things. The Christian answer to the problem is given by Paul in the words: ‘Jesus Christ, whom God set forth a propitiation (or, in propitiatory power) in his blood.’” [J. Denney, *The Death of Christ*, q.v. Moo, *Romans*, pg 219] In other words, how is a holy and righteous God able to reconcile a fallen world while not violating his own being? As Denney says, the answer is Jesus Christ.

“THE CHIEF POINT OF THE WHOLE BIBLE” — ***“Luther called this paragraph ‘the chief point ... of the whole Bible’ because it focuses on what Luther thought was the heart of the Bible: justification by faith. Luther believed that this ‘article’ was vital: ‘if that article stands, the church stands; if it falls, the church falls.’ Later Lutherans coined the slogan ‘the article by which the church stands or falls’ to highlight the central role that they accorded this doctrine. In Luther’s day, of course, ‘justification by faith’ was a polemic thrust against a Roman Catholic teaching that insisted on the place of human cooperation in the grace of justification. Hence to the sola fide of the Reformers was added sola gratia — ‘by grace alone.’ With these phrases, the Reformers expressed their conviction that justification is, from first to last, a matter of God’s own doing, to which human beings must respond but to which they can add nothing.”*** [Moo, *Romans*, pg 242]

“This whole passage, which Olshausen happily calls the “Acropolis of the Christian faith,” is of special importance. It teaches that we are justified in a manner which is entirely of grace, without any merit of our own; through, or by means of faith, and on the ground of the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is evident from this statement, that Paul intended to exclude from all participation in the meritorious ground of our acceptance with God, not only those works performed in obedience to the law, and with a legal spirit, but those which flow from faith and a renewed heart. The part assigned to faith in the work of our reconciliation to God is that of an instrument; it apprehends or appropriates the meritorious ground of our acceptance, the work or righteousness of Christ. It is not itself that ground, nor the means of attaining an inherent righteousness acceptable to God.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 94]

TODAY’S LESSON IN A NUTSHELL

“HAVING proved that justification, on the ground of legal obedience or personal merit, is for all men impossible, Paul proceeds to unfold the method of salvation presented in the gospel. With regard to this method, he here teaches,

1. Its nature.

2. The ground on which the offer of justification is made.
3. Its object.
4. Its results.

I. As to its nature, he teaches,

1. That the righteousness which it proposes is not attainable by works, but by faith, vers. 21, 22.
2. That it is adapted to all men, Jews as well as Gentiles, since there is no difference as to their moral state, vers. 22, 23.
3. It is entirely gratuitous, ver. 24.

II. As to its ground, it is the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, or Jesus Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice, vers. 24, 25.

III. Its object is the display of the divine perfections, and the reconciliation of the justice of God with the exhibition of mercy to the sinner, ver. 26.

IV. Its results.

1. It humbles man by excluding all ground of boasting, vers. 27, 28.
2. It presents God in his true character as the God and father of all men, of the Gentile no less than of the Jews. vv. 29,

30.

3. It confirms the law, ver. 31. [Hodge, Romans, pg 87]

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. (Rom 3:21-26 KJV)

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Rom 3:21-26 NIV)

And now apart from law hath the righteousness of God been manifested, testified to by the law and the prophets, and the righteousness of God [is] through the faith of Jesus Christ to all, and upon all those believing, — for there is no difference, for all did sin, and are come short of the glory of God — being declared righteous freely by His grace through the redemption that [is] in Christ Jesus, whom God did set forth a mercy seat, through the faith in his blood, for the shewing forth of His righteousness, because of the passing over of the bygone sins in the forbearance of God — for the shewing forth of His righteousness in the present time, for His being righteous, and declaring him righteous who [is] of the faith of Jesus. (Rom 3:21-26 Young's Literal Translation)

“Having demonstrated that no flesh can be justified by the deeds of the law in the sight of God, the apostle proceeds to show how the sinner can be justified. With regard to this point, he teaches, in this verse, 1. That the righteousness which is acceptable to God is not a legal righteousness; and, 2. That it had been taught already in the Old Testament.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 87f]

v 21 — but now — Paul signals a transition from what has preceded to a new phase of his exposition of the gospel with ‘*but now*.’ “As in 6:22, 7:6, 1 Cor 15:20, Eph 2:13, and Col 1:22, ‘*but now*’ marks the shift in Paul’s focus from the old era of sin’s domination to the new era of salvation. This contrast between the two eras in salvation history is one of Paul’s most basic theological conceptions, providing the framework for many of his key ideas. *Rom 1:18-3:20 has sketched the spiritual state of those who belong to the old era: justly condemned, helpless in the power of sin, powerless to escape God’s wrath. ‘But now’ God has intervened to inaugurate a new era, and all who respond in faith — not only after the cross, but, as Rom 4 will show, before it also — will be transferred into it from the old era. No wonder Lloyd-Jones can exclaim, ‘there are no more wonderful words in the whole of Scripture than just these two words ‘But now.’* ... Paul here views the transition from the standpoint of history, with the cross as the point of transition between the old era and new. He can also apply this basic salvation-historical concept at the level of the individual, with the conversion as the point of transition.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 221]

righteousness of God — As the ‘wrath of God’ dominated the old era (1:18), so ‘the righteousness of God’ dominates the new. ‘*Righteousness of God means the same here as in Rom 1:17: the justifying activity of God.*’ “The method of justification by works being impossible, God has revealed another, already taught indeed, both in the law and prophets, a method which is not legal (without law), i.e. not on the condition of obedience to the law, but on the condition of faith, which is applicable to all men, and perfectly gratuitous,’ vers. 21-24.... [T]he interpretation which best suits both the force of the words and Paul’s usage is, ‘*The righteousness of which God is the author, which comes from him, which he gives, and which consequently is acceptable in his sight.*’” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 88]

apart from the law — this phrase could go with ‘*righteousness of God*’ as the KJV: “*the righteousness of God without the law is manifested.*” The other way of taking this is to take the phrase with ‘*manifested*’ as NAB: “*the righteousness of God has been*

manifested apart from the law.” The latter makes more sense (according to Moo). Paul’s purpose is to announce the way in which God’s righteousness has been manifest rather than to contrast two kinds of righteousness. “What does Paul mean by this? In Rom 2:1-3:20 Paul has made clear that the law has failed to rescue Jews from the power of sin because compliance with its demands to the extent necessary to secure justification has not been — and cannot be — forthcoming. ‘Apart from the law’ might mean, then, ‘apart from doing the law’: God’s righteousness is now attained without any contribution from ‘works of the law.’ While this may, indeed, be part of what Paul intends, it is questionable whether it goes far enough; for there is, as Paul will show in chap 4, nothing really ‘new’ about this: justification has always been by faith, apart from the law. Furthermore, it is not the manner in which God’s righteousness is *received* that Paul is talking about here, but the manner in which it is *manifested* — the divine side of this ‘process’ by which people are made right with God. This phrase, then, reiterates the salvation-historical shift denoted by ‘but now.’ In the new era inaugurated by Christ’s death God has acted to deliver and vindicate his people ‘apart from’ the law. It is not primarily the law as something for humans to do, but the law as a system, as a stage in God’s unfolding plan, that is in view here. ‘Law’ (nomos), then, refers to the ‘Mosaic covenant,’ that (temporary) administration set up between God and his people to regulate their lives and reveal their sin until the establishment of the promise in Christ. One aspect of this covenant, of course, is those Jewish ‘identity markers,’ such as circumcision, the Sabbath, and food laws; Paul is certainly affirming, then, that the righteousness of God is now being manifested ‘outside the national and religious parameters set by the law.’ But Paul’s point cannot be confined to this. The reason these ‘identity markers’ are no longer required is that the covenant of which they were a part has been made ‘obsolete’ (cf. Heb 8:7-13). It is this basic shift in salvation history that Paul alludes to here, and much of his discussion of the law in the rest of this letter (cf. 3:27-31; 4:15; 5:13,20; 6:14; and especially chap. 7) is an attempt to explain this ‘apart from the law,’ while at the same time justifying his assertion that faith ‘establishes’ the law (cf. 3:31; 8:4). But Paul hastens to balance this discontinuity in salvation history with a reminder of its continuity. While God’s justifying activity in the new age takes part outside the confines of the Old Covenant, the OT as a whole anticipates and predicts this new work of God: God’s righteousness is ‘witnessed to by the law and the prophets’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 222f]

is manifested — i.e. clearly made known, equivalent to the phrase *‘is revealed’* as used in 1:17. “The revelation has been made and still continues. This righteousness, which, so to speak, had long been buried under the types and indistinct utterances of the old dispensation, has now in the gospel been made clear and apparent.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 88]

law and prophets — a customary division of the OT into the Pentateuch and ‘everything else’; i.e., the entirety of the Jewish scriptures. “*That the Old Testament does teach the doctrine of ‘a righteousness without works,’ Paul proves in the next chapter, from the case of Abraham, and from the declarations of David.*” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 89]

v 22a — through faith — this is the “human side” of the transaction: it is through faith in Jesus Christ. “Picking up another key theme from 1:17, Paul highlights faith as the means by which God’s justifying work becomes applicable to individuals.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 225]

NOT “BECAUSE OF FAITH” BUT “THROUGH FAITH” — Our salvation is not *based* upon our faith; rather it is merely the channel by which we *receive* our salvation which is *based* upon the merits and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. “This righteousness, of which God is the author, and which is available before him, and which is now revealed, is more particularly described as a *righteousness which is of faith, i.e. by means of faith, not on account of faith. Faith is not the ground of our justification; it is not the righteousness which makes us righteous before God, nor is it even represented as the inward principle whence that righteousness proceeds.* It is indeed the principle of evangelical obedience, the source of holiness in heart and life; but such obedience or holiness is not our justifying righteousness. Holiness is the consequence and not the cause of our justification, as the apostle proves at length in the subsequent parts of this epistle. This righteousness is *through* faith, as it is received and appropriated by faith. *It is, moreover, not faith in general, not mere confidence in God, not simply a belief in the Scriptures as the word of God, much less a recognition of the truth of the spiritual and invisible, but it is faith of Christ; that is, faith of which Christ is the object. A man may believe what else he may; unless he receives and rests on Christ alone for salvation, receives him as the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us, he has not the faith of which the apostle here speaks as the indispensable condition of salvation.... The act, therefore, which the sinner is required to perform, in order to be made a partaker of the righteousness of God, is to believe on Christ; that is, to receive him as he is revealed in the gospel as the eternal Son of God, clothed in our nature, loving us and giving himself as a propitiation for our sins.... This righteousness is extending unto all, and over all, as covering them or overflowing them.... There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile recognized in this method of salvation.*” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 89]

for all those who believe — the question arises, why add this phrase if Paul just essentially made the exact same statement? — “*The righteousness of God which is received by faith in Jesus Christ, for all who believe ...*”. Several explanations have been given. One modern explanation interprets “through faith in Jesus Christ” as possessive, “through the faith of Jesus Christ.” This, according to Moo, is acceptable and possible preferable linguistically; but Moo argues against it and prefers the traditional interpretation. Another explanation is to compare this statement with the statement in 1:17, “*from faith to faith.*” But as one author put it, this is “*to appeal from the uncertain to the obscure.*” The most obvious explanation is probably correct: “*Paul’s purpose is probably to highlight the universal availability of God’s righteousness. This theme is not only one of the most conspicuous motifs of the epistle, but is explicitly mentioned in vv. 22b-23. God’s righteousness is available only through faith in Christ — but it is available to anyone who has faith in Christ.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 226]

v 22b,23 — for there is no distinction — “‘There is no distinction’ summarizes a key element of Paul’s presentation in 1:18-3:20, and is likely, therefore, to have special application to Jew and Gentile. In v. 23, Paul elaborates this point. *His ‘no distinction,’ as we would expect, has to do with the absence of any basic difference among people with respect to their standing before God. Jews may have the law and circumcision; Americans may lay claim to a great religious heritage; ‘good’ people may point to their works of charity; but all this makes no essential difference to one’s standing before the righteous and holy God.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 226]

all have sinned — ἥμαρτον (hēmarton) is noted by the commentators to be in the aorist tense, signifying a point in time rather than continued action. Some take this to refer to mankind’s sin in Adam, “*All have sinned in the person of Adam.*” Hodge: “Bengel explains it by assuming that *the original act in paradise, and the sinful disposition, and also the acts of transgression flowing from it, are all denoted....* The idea that all men now stand in the posture of sinners before God might be expressed either by saying, All have sinned (and are sinners), or all sinned.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 90] “[*It is more likely a ‘summary’ aorist, gathering up the sins of people throughout the past into a single ‘moment.’*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 226] “Sinned (hēmarton). Constativ second aorist active indicative of hamartanō as in Romans 5:12. This tense gathers up the whole race into one statement (a timeless aorist).” [Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol 4 pg 347]

coming short of the glory of God — this second verb states the consequences of the first: because all have sinned, all are falling short of the glory of God. The tense indicates Paul thinks all people are regularly falling short of the glory of God. “‘Are deficient in regard to;’ are lacking, etc. Here it means, that they had failed to obtain, or were destitute of.” [Barne’s *Notes on the Bible: Romans*]

glory of God — “‘Glory’ in the Bible characteristically refers to the magnificent presence of the Lord, and the eternal state was often pictured as a time when God’s people would experience and have a part in that ‘glory’ (e.g., Isa 35:2; Rom 8:18; Phil 3:21; 2 Thes 2:14). And just as this sharing in God’s ‘glory’ involves conformity to the ‘image of Christ’ (Rom 8:29-30; Phil 3:21), so the absence of glory involves a declension from the ‘image of God’ in which human beings were first made.... *Paul, then, is indicating that all people fail to exhibit that ‘being-like-God’ for which they were created; and the present tense of the verb, in combinations with Rom 8, shows that even Christians ‘fall short’ of that goal until they transformed in the last day of God.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 226f] Hendriksen lists four views as to the glory of God: (1) **all men fail to render to God the glory due him.** Though the thought expressed here is true, it is improbable that this is what Paul meant due to the manner in which Paul made the statement. (2) **it refers to the future heavenly glory.** This also is surely true and is used in such a manner in several NT passages. But here Paul uses the present tense, that because of sin all men are *presently* falling short of the glory of God. (3) **just as in redemption sinners are transformed into the image of God (2 Cor 3:18), so in the fall man lost that reflection of God’s glory.** Hendriksen likes this theory and gives many reasons for its acceptance; but he continues to list one other theory which coincides with the latter. (4) **it means ‘glory imparted by God’ which man once enjoyed prior to the fall.** Glory therefore would refer to ‘approval, approbation, praise.’ [Hendriksen, *Romans*, pg 128f] To this last theory, Hodge agrees: “*By [glory of God] is most naturally understood the approbation of God, the δόξα [doxa, glory] which comes from God; comp. John 12:43, ‘They loved the praise of men rather than the praise (δόξαν, doxan) of God.’ ... All men are sinners and under the disapprobation of God. In this respect there is no difference between them; and therefore all need a righteousness not their own, in order to their justification before God.*” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 90f]

v 24 — There are difficulties in the linking of this verse with the preceding, and because of that there are some who believe Paul is again now quoting from an ancient tradition. Regardless of Paul’s dependence on material readily available, the important thing is determining the emphasis Paul is making.

being justified — this continues the main theme of the paragraph began in vv. 21-22a, while also being dependent upon the ‘all’ in v. 23. “*Paul uses the verb ‘justify’ (δικαιοῶ) for the first time in Romans to depict his distinctive understanding of Christian salvation. As Paul uses it in these contexts, the verb ‘justify’ means not ‘to make righteous’ (in an ethical sense) nor simply ‘to treat as righteous’ (though one is really not righteous), but ‘to declare righteous.’ No ‘legal fiction,’ but a legal reality of the utmost significance, ‘to be justified’ means to be acquitted by God from all ‘charges’ that could be brought against a person because of his or her sins. This judicial verdict, for which one had to wait until the last judgment according to Jewish theology, is according to Paul rendered the moment a person believes.* The act of justification is therefore properly ‘eschatological,’ as the ultimate verdict regarding a person’s standing with God is brought back into our present reality.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 227f]

justification — a forensic term; the judicial act of God by which he pardons all the sins of those who believe in Christ, and accounts, accepts, and treats them as righteous in the eye of the law, i.e., as conformed to all its demands. In addition to the pardon of sin, justification declares that all the claims of the law are satisfied in respect of the justified. It is the act of a judge and not of a sovereign. The law is not relaxed or set aside, but is declared to be fulfilled in the strictest sense; and so the person justified is declared to be entitled to all the advantages and rewards arising from perfect obedience to the law.

freely — “‘Grace’ is one of Paul’s most significant theological terms. He uses it typically not to describe a quality of God but the way in which God has acted in Christ: unconstrained by anything beyond his own will. *God’s justifying verdict is totally unmerited. People have done, and can do, nothing to earn it.* This belief is a ‘theological axiom’ for Paul and is the basis for his

conviction that justification can never be attained through works, or the law (cf. Rom 4:3-5, 13-16; 11:6), but only through faith. Once this is recognized, the connection between v. 22a and v. 24 is clarified: that **justification is a matter of grace on God's side means that it must be a matter of faith on the human side. But the gracious nature of justification also answers to the dilemma of people who are under the power of sin (v. 23). As Pascal says, 'Grace is indeed needed to turn a man into a saint; and he who doubts it does not know what a saint or a man is.'**" [Moo, *Romans*, pg 228] "Since justification is gratuitous, the subjects of it are in themselves unworthy; they do not merit God's favor. Justification is as to us a matter of gift; on the part of God it is an act of grace; we are justified by his grace. The act, so far as we are concerned, is altogether gratuitous. We have not the slightest degree of merit to offer as the ground of our acceptance.... Though it is so entirely gratuitous as regards the sinner, yet it is in a way perfectly consistent with the justice of God. It is through 'the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,' that is, of which he is the author." [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 91] "Freely — This word stands opposed to what is purchased, or which is obtained by labor, or which is a matter of claim. It is a free, undeserved gift, not merited by our obedience to the Law, and not that to which we have any claim. The apostle uses the word here in reference to those who are justified. **To them it is a mere undeserved gift, It does not mean that it has been obtained, however, without any price or merit from anyone, for the Lord Jesus has purchased it with his own blood, and to him it becomes a matter of justice that those who were given to him should be justified,** 1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 Peter 2:9. (Greek). Acts 20:28; Isaiah 53:11. We have no offering to bring, and no claim. To us, therefore, it is entirely a matter of gift." [Barne's *Notes on the Bible: Romans*]

atonement — (expressed in Hebrew by *kaphar*, to cover over sin, hence to forgive; Gr. *reconciliation*, as usually rendered), the satisfaction offered to divine justice for the sins of mankind by the death of Jesus Christ, by virtue of which all penitent believers in Christ are reconciled to God, and freed from the penalties of sin.

MEANS BY WHICH JUSTIFICATION IS CONSIDERED — "What gives this paragraph its unparalleled significance is the number of perspectives from which God's justification of sinners is considered."

REDEMPTION — (ἀπολύτρωσις, *apolutrōsis*) "A releasing by ransom (*apo*, *lutrōsis* from *lutroō* and that from *lutron*, ransom). God did not set men right out of hand with nothing done about men's sins. We have the words of Jesus that he came to give his life a ransom (*lutron*) for many (Mark 10:45 = Matthew 20:28). *Lutron* is common in the papyri as the purchase-money in freeing slaves." [Robertson, *Word Pictures*, vol 4 pg 347] "If 'freely by his grace' indicates the mode of justification, as entirely free and unmerited, 'through the redemption' illumines the costly means by which this acquitting verdict is rendered possible. **'Redemption' means, basically, 'liberation through payment of a price.' Thus, in the second and third centuries B.C., 'redemption' often refers to the 'ransoming' of prisoners of war, slaves, and condemned criminals. If 'redemption' has this connotation here, then Paul would be presenting Christ's death as a 'ransom,' a 'payment' that takes the place of that penalty for sins 'owed' by all people to God.**" [Moo, *Romans*, pg 229] "The word redemption ... when applied to the work of Christ, as affecting our deliverance from the punishment of sin, is always taken in its proper sense, deliverance effected by the payment of a ransom. This is evident, (1) Because in no case where it is thus used, is anything said of the precepts, doctrines, or power of Christ, as the means by which the deliverance is effected; but uniformly his sufferings are mentioned as the ground of deliverance. Ephesians 1:7, 'In whom we have redemption through his blood;' Hebrews 9:15, 'By means of death, for the redemption of transgressions,' Colossians 1:14. (2) In this passage the nature of this redemption is explained by the following verse: it is not by truth, nor the exhibition of excellence, but through Christ 'as a propitiatory sacrifice, through faith in his blood.' (3) Equivalent expressions fix the meaning of the term beyond doubt. 1 Timothy 2:6, 'Who gave himself as a ransom for all;' Matthew 20:28, 'The Son of man came to give his life as a ransom for many;' 1 Peter 1:18, 'Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ,' etc. Accordingly Christ is presented as a Redeemer, not in the character of a teacher or witness, but of a priest, a sacrifice, a propitiation, etc. **That from which we are redeemed is the wrath of God; the price of our redemption is the blood of Christ.**" [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 91]

redemption — the purchase back of something that had been lost, by the payment of a ransom

in Christ Jesus — as in Eph 1:7 and Col 1:14, Paul adds the redemption is 'in Christ Jesus.' "Or, that has been effected by Christ Jesus; that of which he is the author and procurer; compare John 3:16." [Barne's *Notes on the Bible: Romans*]

THE WORK OF THE FATHER AND SON IN REDEMPTION — "While the persons of God the Father and God the Son must be kept distinct as we consider the process of redemption, it is a serious error to sever the two with respect to the will for redemption, as if the loving Christ had to take the initiative in placating the angry Father. God's love and wrath meet in the atonement, and neither can be denied or compromised if the full meaning of that event is to be properly appreciated. 'Our own justification before God rests on the solid reality that the fulfilling of God's justice in Christ was at the same time the fulfilling of this love for us.'" [Moo, *Romans*, pg 231] Note in v. 25 it is God who takes the initiative to set forth his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. "The prime doer in Christ's cross was God. Christ was God reconciling. He was God doing the very best for man, and not man doing his very best for God." [P. T. Forsyth, *The Cruciality of the Cross*; q.v. Moo, *Romans*, pg 231]

v 25 — The focus shifts from the human reception of God's gracious gift to what God has done to provide us that gift.

God set forth Jesus — The verb could be translated “*propose, plan*” (cf. REB, “designed”). There is good reason to keep this interpretation. Paul is the only person to use this verb in the NT and only uses it twice, both times having the meaning “*plan, determine*” (Rom 1:13; Eph 1:9). In addition, there is a closely related NT word which has the meaning “*purpose*” (Rom 8:28; 9:11). But most often it is translated as we see it in our common versions because it better fits what Paul’s intent is here. It is also used in the LXX to mean “*set before,*” especially in the context of the temple shewbread. So we accept it in that light to mean “*whom God displayed publically*” (NASB)

PROPI TIATORY SACRIFICE — (ἱλαστήριον, *hilastērion*) The use of the term “*hilastērion*” in this verse has been the subject of debates. “When the use of *hilastērion* in the Bible is considered, a strong case can be made for taking the word as a reference to the OT ‘mercy seat,’ the cover over the ark where Yahweh appeared (Lev 16:2), and on which sacrificial blood was poured. For this is what the word refers to in its one other NT occurrence (Heb 9:5), as well as in 21 of its 27 LXX occurrences. Particular significant are the several occurrences of the word in the description in Lev 16 of the ‘Day of Atonement’ ritual. According to this text, the high priest is to enter the ‘Holy of Holies’ once a year and sprinkle on the mercy seat (=LXX *hilastērion*) the blood of a sacrificial victim, thereby ‘making atonement.’ In the OT and Jewish tradition, this ‘mercy seat’ came to be applied generally to the place of atonement. By referring to Christ as this ‘mercy seat,’ then, Paul would be inviting us to view Christ as the New Covenant equivalent, or anti-type, to this Old Covenant ‘place of atonement,’ and, derivatively, to the ritual of atonement itself. What in the OT was hidden from public view behind the veil has now been ‘publically displayed’ as the OT ritual is fulfilled and brought to an end in Christ’s ‘once-for-all’ sacrifice.... **Christ, Paul implies, now has the place that the ‘mercy seat’ had in the Old Covenant: the center and focal point of God’s provision of atonement for his people. Since this atonement takes place by means of Christ’s death as a sacrifice, and the word *hilastērion* includes reference to propitiation, translations such as ‘means of propitiation’ (Morris, Godet) and propitiatory sacrifice’ (Hodge, Murray, Ridderbos) are not inaccurate. But they may be too restrictive. ‘Mercy seat’ would be all right if the broader theological connotations of the phrase were obvious; but, considering the breadth of the concept to which the term refers, the NIV and NRSV ‘sacrifice of atonement’ is as good as we can do.**” [Moo, Romans, pg 231f, 236] Origen, Luther, Calvin and others agree. In answer to those who object to Christ being the “place” of atonement, Moo states the following: “[B]ut perhaps the strain [of thinking of Christ as the *place* of atonement] is no greater than in thinking of Christ as the new temple (John 2:19-21), as the rock that followed in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:4), or as both High Priest and sacrifice at the same time (cf. Hebrews). Moreover, there is evidence that the word, or the mercy seat it designates, becomes a semi-technical way of designating the atonement itself. In this case, objections to the interpretation based on the literal function of the mercy seat fall to the ground.” [Moo, Romans, pg 233]

propitiation — (1) the act of appeasing the wrath and conciliating the favor of an offended person; (2) that which propitiates; atonement or atoning sacrifice; specifically, the influence or effects of the death of Christ in appeasing the divine justice, and conciliating the divine favor.

through faith — this seems best to be understood as modifying ‘propitiation’ (*hilastērion*) to indicate the means by which individuals appropriate the benefits of the sacrifice. “Through faith. Or by means of faith. The offering will be of no avail without faith. The offering has been made; but it will not be applied, except where there is faith. He has made an offering which may be efficacious in putting away sin; but it produces no reconciliation, no pardon, except where it is accepted by faith.” [Barne’s Notes on the Bible: Romans]

in his blood — this is understood in many of our translations — as an object of ‘faith’ — “*faith in his blood*” (KJV, NIV, Young’s). The sense might be then, “*through faith in his sacrificial death*” (the blood being an equivalent statement for his death). Moo takes exception to this: “But Paul never elsewhere makes Christ’s blood an object of faith, so [it is better to take this to modify *hilastērion*: ‘a propitiation in blood’]. ‘In his blood’ singles out Christ’s blood as the means by which God’s wrath is propitiated. As in several other texts where Christ’s blood is the means through which salvation is secured (Rom 5:9; Eph 1:7; 2:13; Col 1:20), the purpose is to designate Christ’s death as a sacrifice.” [Moo, Romans, pg 237] The NASB picks up on this, translating the phrase as follows: “*whom God displayed publically as a propitiation in His blood through faith.*” **“Faith in a sacrifice is, by the very force of the terms, reliance on a sacrifice.** It would be to contradict the sentiment of the whole ancient and Jewish world, to make the design of a sacrifice the production of a state of mind acceptable to the Being worshiped, which moral state was to be the ground of acceptance. **There is no more pointed way of denying that we are justified on account of the state of our own hearts, or the character of our own acts, than by saying that we are justified by a propitiatory sacrifice. This latter declaration places of necessity the ground of acceptance out of ourselves; it is something done for us, not something experienced, or produced in us, or performed by us.** There is no rule of interpretation more obvious and more important than that which requires us to understand the language of a writer in the sense in which he knew he would be understood by the persons to whom he wrote. To explain, therefore, the language of the apostle in reference to the sacrifice of Christ, and the mode of our acceptance with God, otherwise, than in accordance with the universally prevalent opinions on the nature of sacrifices, is to substitute our philosophy of religion for the inspired teachings of the sacred writers.” [Hodge, Romans, pg 95]

to demonstrate his righteousness — this indicates why the Lord ‘set forth Christ as a sacrifice of atonement’: “*for a demonstration of his righteousness because of the passing over of sins committed beforehand in the forbearance of God.*” “[The preferred interpretation] takes ‘righteousness’ (*dikaioynē*) to designate what we might call an aspect of God’s character, whether this be his ‘justice,’ his impartiality and fairness, or his acting in accordance with his own character and for his own glory. **The**

whole clause would, then, be interpreted along the lines of the following paraphrase: ‘in order to demonstrate [or show] that God is just, acting in accordance with his own character, [which was necessary] because he had passed over sins committed before, in the time of his forbearance.’ ... On [this] view, the clause ties God’s work in Christ to his fulfilling of his covenant promises. God now fulfills those salvific promises by putting forth Christ as the means by which sins are forgiven.” [Moo, Romans, pg 237f] “It should be remembered that the object of the death of Christ, being very comprehensive, is variously presented in the word of God. In other words, the death of Christ answers a great number of infinitely important ends in the government of God. It displays ‘his manifold wisdom,’ Ephesians 3:10, 11; it was designed ‘to purify unto himself a people zealous of good works,’ Titus 2:14; to break down the distinction between the Jews and Gentiles, Ephesians 2:15; to effect the reconciliation of both Jews and Gentiles unto God, Ephesians 2:16; ‘to deliver us from this present evil world,’ Galatians 1:4; to secure the forgiveness of sins, Ephesians 1:7; to vindicate his ways to men, in so long passing by or remitting their sins, Romans 3:25; to reconcile the exercise of mercy with the requirements of justice, ver. 26, etc. These ends are not inconsistent, but perfectly harmonious. The end here specially mentioned is, *to declare his righteousness....* It was necessary that the justice of God should be publicly exhibited, because he forgave sin. Besides, the apostle himself explains what he means by [righteousness] when he adds that God set forth Christ as a propitiation, in order *that he might be just*, and yet justify the ungodly. The satisfaction of justice therefore was the immediate and specific end of the death of Christ. This was indeed a means to a higher end. Justice was satisfied, in order that men might be sanctified and saved; and men are sanctified and saved, in order that might be known, in the ages to come, the exceeding riches of the grace of God.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 95f] “*For the remission of sins* – Margin, ‘Passing over.’ The word used here occurs no where else in the New Testament, nor in the Septuagint. It means ‘passing by,’ as not noticing, and hence, forgiving. A similar idea occurs in 2 Samuel 24:10, and Micah 7:18. ‘Who is a God like unto thee, that passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance?’ In Romans it means for the ‘pardoning,’ or in order to pardon past transgression.” [Barne’s *Notes on the Bible: Romans*]

because of the passing over of sins committed beforehand — According to Moo, the word translated ‘*passing over*’ does not mean ‘*forgiveness*’ but, when applied to legal charges or sins, ‘*postponement of punishment, neglect of prosecution.*’ “But what are these ‘former sins’ to which Paul is referring? The phrase at the beginning of v. 26 points toward an answer. ‘In the forbearance of God’ should be connected with ‘passing over,’ and in light of Paul’s only other use of ‘forbearance’ (Rom 2:4), it will refer to the period of time before the cross (cf. also Acts 14:16; 17:30). The sins ‘committed beforehand’ will not, then, be sins committed before conversion, or baptism, but before the new age of salvation. This does not mean that God failed to punish or ‘overlooked’ sins committed before Christ; nor does it mean that God did not really ‘forgive’ sins under the Old Covenant. Paul’s meaning is rather that God ‘postponed’ the full penalty due sins in the Old Covenant, allowing sinners to stand before him without their having provided an adequate ‘satisfaction’ of the demands of his holy justice (cf. Heb 10:4).” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 239f] It should be noted that several commentators do understand this to mean “remission, forgiveness.” “To say that God did not punish sins under the old dispensation, is only a different way of saying that he pardoned them.” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 96] “*Through the forbearance of God* – Through his patience, his long-suffering. That is, he did not come forth in judgment when the sin was committed; he spared us, though deserving of punishment; and now he comes forth completely to pardon those sins concerning which he has so long and so graciously exercised forbearance. This expression obviously refers not to the remission of sins, but to the fact that they were committed while he evinced such long-suffering; compare Acts 17:30. I do not know better how to show the practical value and bearing of this important passage of Scripture, than by transcribing a part of the affecting experience of the poet Cowper. It is well known that before his conversion he was oppressed by a long and dreadful melancholy; that this was finally heightened to despair; and that he was then subjected to the kind treatment of Dr. Cotton in Alban’s, as a melancholy case of derangement. His leading thought was that he was doomed to inevitable destruction, and that there was no hope. From this he was roused only by the kindness of his brother, and by the promises of the gospel. The account of his conversion I shall now give in his own words. ‘The happy period, which was to shake off my fetters, and afford me a clear discovery of the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus, was now arrived. I flung myself into a chair near the window, and seeing a Bible there, ventured once more to apply to it for comfort and instruction. The first verse I saw was Romans 3:25; “Whom God hath set forth, etc.” Immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beam of the Sun of righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement he had made for my pardon and justification. In a moment I believed, and received the peace of the gospel. Unless, the Almighty arm had been under me, I think I should have been overwhelmed with gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears, and my voice choked with transport. I could only look up to heaven in silent fear, overwhelmed with love and wonder. How glad should I now have been to have spent every moment in prayer and thanksgiving. I lost no opportunity of repairing to a throne of grace; but flew to it with an earnestness irresistible, and never to be satisfied.”’ [Barne’s *Notes on the Bible: Romans*]

v 26 — for a demonstration of his righteousness at the present time — this apparent redundancy would probably be best understood as a parallel statement to ‘*for a demonstration*’ in v. 25. “It resumes the topic of the demonstration of God’s righteousness after the intervening qualifiers and adds the important point that this demonstration has significance not only for the past but also for the present age. A reference back to ‘but now’ at the beginning of the paragraph is obvious, as Paul focuses again on the time after Christ’s coming as the climactic, eschatological age of salvation history.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 241] “There were two purposes to be answered; the vindication of the character of God in passing by former sins, and in passing them by now.... The death of Christ vindicated the justice of God in forgiving sin in all ages of the world, as those sins were by the righteous God as Olshausen says, ‘punished in Christ’” [Hodge, *Romans*, pg 97f]

so that he would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus — probably connected with the preceding clause, the sense is, “for a demonstration of his righteousness at the present time, in order that he might show that he is just and the justifier of the person who has faith in Jesus.” “On this view, the two purpose clauses in vv. 25 and 26 — both beginning ‘for a demonstration’ — are parallel modifiers of ‘set forth,’ the former focusing on how the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ enabled God to maintain his righteous character in postponing punishment of sins in the past, the latter showing how this same sacrifice preserved God’s righteous character as he justifies those who, in this age of salvation, place their faith in Jesus. This being so, it is likely that ‘the justifier’ is not coordinate with ‘just’ — ‘just and justifying,’ nor instrumental to it — ‘just by means of justifying,’ but concessive — ‘just even in justifying.’ **Paul’s point is that God can maintain his righteous character (‘his righteousness’ in vv. 25 and 26) even while he acts to justify sinful people (‘God’s righteousness’ in vv. 21 and 22) because Christ, in his propitiatory sacrifice, provides full satisfaction of the demands of God’s impartial, invariable justice.**” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 241f] “And the justifier of him — Greek, ‘Even justifying him that believeth, etc.’ This is the uniqueness and the wonder of the gospel. Even while pardoning, and treating the ill-deserving as if they were innocent, he can retain his pure and holy character. His treating the guilty with favor does not show that he loves guilt and pollution, for he has expressed his abhorrence of it in the atonement. His admitting them to friendship and heaven does not show that he approves their past conduct and character, for he showed how much he hated even their sins by giving his Son to a shameful death for them. When an executive pardons offenders, there is an abandonment of the principles of justice and law. The sentence is set aside; the threatenings of the law are departed from; and it is done without compensation. It is declared that in certain cases the law may be violated, and its penalty ‘not’ be inflicted. But not so with God. He shows no less regard to his law in pardoning than in punishing. This is the grand, glorious, special feature of the gospel plan of salvation.” [Barne’s *Notes on the Bible: Romans*] As the Psalmist said, “*Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.*” (Ps 85:10 KJV)

HOW COULD ONE MAN PAY FOR THE SINS OF INNUMERABLE PEOPLE? — “In view of the fact that Christ is God, and therefore a Person of infinite value and dignity, we have no hesitation in saying that **the crucifixion of Christ was not only the world’s worst crime, but that it was a worse crime than that which would have been committed if the entire human race had been crucified.** Isaiah tells us that in comparison with man God is so great that even “*the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are accounted as the small dust of the balance,*” 40:15. Christ’s Deity and Creatorship is set forth by John when he says, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... All things were made through Him; and without Him was not anything made that hath been made... He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world knew Him not,*” 1:1,3,10.... **For sinful man to crucify his God was an infinitely heinous crime. Whatever may be said about the Atonement, it certainly cannot be said that the debt paid by Christ was of lesser value than that which would have been paid if all of those for whom He died had been left to suffer their own penalty.**

“In order to illustrate a little more clearly the infinite value of Christ’s atonement we should like to use a very simple illustration. Doubtless all of us, for instance, have killed thousands of insects such as ants, beetles, grasshoppers. Perhaps we have even killed millions of them if we have plowed a field or set a large brush fire. Or perhaps we have killed a considerable number of birds or animals, either for food or because they had become pests. Yet we suffer no accusing conscience. But if we kill just one man we do have an accusing conscience which condemns us bitterly; for in that case we have committed *murder*. Even if we could imagine a whole world full of insects or animals and if we could kill them all at one stroke, we would have no accusing conscience. The reason for this difference is that man was created in the image of God, and is therefore of infinitely greater value than the insects or animals. Now in a manner similar to this, **Christ, who was God incarnate, was not only of greater value than a man but was of greater value than the sum total of all men; and therefore the value of His suffering and death was amply sufficient to redeem as many of the human race as God sees fit to call to Himself... Because He was a Person of infinite value and dignity His suffering was what God considered a just equivalent for that which was due to all of those who were to be redeemed.**”

[Lorraine Boettner, *Studies in Theology*]

Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law. (Rom 3:27-31)

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law. (Rom 3:27-31 NIV)

Where then [is] the boasting? it was excluded; by what law? of works? no, but by a law of faith: therefore do we reckon a man to be declared righteous by faith, apart from works of law. The God of Jews only [is He], and not also of nations? yes, also of nations; since one [is] God who shall declare righteous the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through the faith. Law then do we make useless through the faith? let it not be! yea, we do establish law. (Rom 3:27-31 Young’s Literal Translation)

PAUL EXPOUNDS ON FAITH — “In 3:27-4:25, Paul expounds the great theological thesis of 3:21-26. Or, to be more accurate, he expounds one key element in that thesis. For we hear no more in 3:27-4:25 about the atonement, or the demonstration

of God’s righteousness, or the provision for sins under the Old Covenant. Rather, Paul concentrates on the vital theme states in v. 22: ‘the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.’ Faith is the topic in every paragraph of this section of the letter, as Paul uses a series of antitheses to draw out the nature and implications of faith as the sole means of justification. Faith is contrasted with ‘works of the law’ (3:28), ‘works’ (4:1-8), circumcision (4:9-12), the law (4:13-16), and ‘sight’ (4:17-22). With these contracts Paul enunciates what has become a hallmark of the Reformation teaching: sole fide — that ‘faith alone’ is the means by which a person can be brought into relationship with the God of the Bible. Sole fide, Paul argues in this section, is necessary in order to maintain sola gratia: ‘by grace alone.’ But is it also necessary in order to ensure that Gentiles have equal access with Jews to the one God. The inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God has been God’s plan all along, as his dealings with Abraham demonstrate. The revelation of God’s righteousness ‘apart from the law’ (v. 21) has now opened up this possibility in a way that was not the case before. This concern with the inclusion of the Gentiles is thus also an important theme in this section; but, contrary to many contemporary scholars, who are reacting to what they perceive to be an excessive concern with the individual and his or her relationship to God in traditional theology, it is not the main theme. The inclusion of the Gentiles within the people of God continues to crop up — 3:29-30; 4:9-12, 16-17 — but only as one motif within the larger argument.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 243f]

CONTINUITY WITHIN DISCONTINUITY — “The antitheses in this section reveal its polemic thrust. Paul is once again ‘arguing’ with a Jewish or Jewish-Christian viewpoint, contesting the importance of the law (3:27-28; 4:13-15), works (4:2-8), and circumcision (4:9-12). Indicative of this thrust is the return of the ‘dialogical’ style of 2:1-5, 17-19; 3:1-8. On the other hand, in the balance that so characterizes Paul’s presentation of his gospel in Romans, he is at pains to maintain continuity with the OT and with Judaism. Justification by faith is nothing more than what the OT itself teaches (chap. 4, *passim*); faith ‘establishes’ the law (3:31); and even circumcision, while no longer the necessary sign of those who belong to God, is upheld as valid for Jews (4:11-12). These positive remarks about OT and Jewish institutions stand in marked contrast to the somewhat parallel passage in Galatians (chap. 3), where Paul’s polemical concern force him to take a more one-sided slant. In Romans, however, Paul is intent on showing how his gospel breaks the boundaries of the Old Covenant while at the same time standing in continuity with it; continuity within discontinuity is his theme. Such balance was necessary if the Romans were to understand and appreciate Paul’s gospel as a message that meets the needs of all people.

3:27 – 4:25 CLOSELY RELATED SECTIONS — Even though the pre-occupying thought of chapter 4 is Abraham, these final few verses of chapter 3 are closely related to chapter four. Paul makes an initial statement of “faith alone,” then expands upon that thought in chapter four. “Naturally, the much longer chap. 4 introduces a number of points not found in 3:27-31, but the similarity in general theme and development is striking. We may, then, view 3:27-31 as the initial statement of the theme, with chap. 4 as its elucidation and elaboration.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 245] Note some key words:

<i>boasting</i>	3:27	4:2
<i>works</i>	3:27, 28	4:2, 4, 5, 6
<i>law</i>	3:27, 28, 30	4:13, 14, 15 (twice), 16
<i>justify, justification</i>	3:28, 30	4:2, 3, 5 (twice), 6, 9, 11, 13, 22
<i>reckon</i>	3:28	4:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24
<i>faith</i>	3:27, 28, 30 (twice), 31	4:3, 5 (twice), 9, 11 (twice), 12, 13, 14, 16 (twice), 17, 18 (twice), 20, 24

Consider some re-occurring themes:

<i>Boasting is excluded (3:27a)</i>	<i>Abraham has no right to boast (4:1-2)</i>
<i>... because one is justified by faith, not works of the law (3:27b-28)</i>	<i>... because Abraham was justified by faith, not works (4:3-8)</i>
<i>Circumcised and uncircumcised are united under the one God through faith (3:29-30)</i>	<i>Circumcised and uncircumcised are united as children of Abraham through faith (4:9-17)</i>

v27 — Paul considers several implications of and for justification by faith. He begins by showing faith removes any possibility of boasting on the part of the Jews (vv. 27, 28). The next two verses give further reason why justification must be by faith: because God is the God of both the Jews and Gentiles, there must be no admixture of ‘works’ which might exclude the Gentiles (vv. 29, 30). Paul concludes by countering a possible Jewish objection: no, this ‘justification by faith’ does not set aside the purpose of the law; rather, it ‘establishes’ the law, i.e., enables it to be truly fulfilled.

where then is boasting? it is excluded — this question / answer draws its inference from 3:21-26. “‘Boasting,’ of course, is a sin common to all people — it reflects the pride that is at the root of so much human sinfulness. But Paul is probably thinking here particularly of Jews and their boasting. This is suggested by his elaboration in terms of the ‘law’ in vv. 27b-28, by his dialogical

style — the ‘Jew’ has been his dialogue partner earlier (cf. 2:17), and by the focus on Jew and Gentile in vv. 29-30. What is the nature of this boasting? and why is it wrong? ... Paul’s reason for excluding boasting has to do with a contrast between faith and works (vv. 27b-28) — two kinds of human response to God. And this is confirmed by the parallel teaching about Abraham in chap. 4. The hypothetical basis for Abraham’s boasting is not simply covenant ‘identity markers’ but ‘works’ in a general sense. Moreover, Paul’s use of Abraham as a key example shows also that it is not just with the coming of Christ that boasting becomes wrong; Abraham, many centuries before Christ, had no cause to boast either.” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 246f]

BOASTING TODAY — “There is nothing at all wrong with doing the law, according to Paul. The problem, rather, is when doing the law is regarded as an achievement on the basis of which a relationship with God could be established or maintained. This is wrong because justification can come only by faith: not only now that Christ has been revealed (vv. 21-24) — although this makes it even clearer — but in the past also (chap. 4). *This is not to say, either, that all Jews were prone to such a ‘legalistic’ attitude. Certainly, the centrality of the law in the Jewish religion rendered Jews very susceptible to such a tendency; but all people, being fallen, exhibit the same tendency: Greeks, boasting in their wisdom (cf. 1 Cor 1:19-31); Americans, boasting in their ‘American way of life’; and all too many Christians, boasting in their ‘good deeds’ instead of the grace of God.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 247]

THE LAW OF WORKS VS. THE LAW OF FAITH — There is an emphasis here which is not obvious in the NIV: “*Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith.*” Young’s Literal Translation brings out this point very well: “*Where then [is] the boasting? it was excluded; by what law? of works? no, but by a law of faith*” This “*law*” obviously cannot be a reference to the Mosaic economy or the Torah. Paul is contrasting two different “*laws*.” “On this view, the word *nomos* (law), in both its actual occurrences in the verse, has a metaphorical sense: ‘*principle*,’ or ‘*rule*.’” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 249] This is not to say any allusion to the Torah is eliminated; Paul too often contrasts the law of the Torah and faith in Romans. Therefore while Paul is using “*law*” generally — ‘*what rule or system of demands exclude boasting?*’ — it would naturally bring to mind the Torah. This is contrasted with the “*law*” of faith, i.e., the “*ordinance*” or “*demand*” of God for faith as the basis for justification.

v28 — Paul here explains the “*law of faith*.” “It is a ‘*rule*’ or ‘*principle*’ pertaining to faith that ‘a person is justified by faith apart from works of the law.’ Paul here promulgates no new rule; the first person plural ‘we reckon’ probably indicates that he assumes that his readers would join him in this assessment. Paul’s concern to meet Jewish views is evident in his addition ‘apart from works of the law.’ *As in 3:20, what is meant is not certain kinds of works, or works viewed in a certain light, but anything a person does in obedience to the law and, by extrapolation, anything a person does. This being the case, Luther’s famous addition of sola (‘alone’) to fide (‘faith’) — in which he was preceded by others, including Thomas Aquinas — brings out the true sense intended by Paul. A serious erosion of the full significance of Paul’s gospel occurs if we soften this antithesis; no works, whatever their nature or their motivation, can play any part in making a sinner right with God.*” [Moo, *Romans*, pg 250f]

v29,30 — The principle Paul means to point out in this verse is that if justification was dependent upon the law, then only those ‘*in the law*’ can be justified, and God becomes a God of the Jews only. Paul rejects this concept with a question: “*Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also the God of the Gentiles?*” The question itself implies a positive answer: “*Yes, he is also the God of the Gentiles.*” Paul then draws his proof of his teaching from the core beliefs of the Jews: there is only one God who reigns over all. This was confessed by the Jew every day: “*the Lord our God is one Lord*” (Deut 6:4). If this is so, then God must be the God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. If God is God of both Jew and Gentile, then the law cannot be the means of justification.

v 31 — **nullify** — this has the sense of “*make of no account, render purposeless.*”

HOW DOES FAITH “NULLIFY” THE LAW? — Paul’s emphasis upon faith alone and his strong statements against the law as a means to be justified might have led some to believe there was no longer any purpose in the law of Moses. “The polemical situation forced Paul to harp on the inadequacy of works and the limited, and passing, importance of the Mosaic law; and this gave to his preaching an ‘anti-law’ flavor. But, as on other occasions when Paul faces such an objection (cf. Rom 7:7), he responds with a forthright denial: ‘By no means!’ He then follows this up with a counter-assertion: ‘Rather, we establish the law.’ That Paul affirms here a continuing role for the law, despite its playing no part in justification, is clear.

let it not be! — this is our strong oath we first saw in Rom 3:4 and then again in 3:6. Notes from 3:4: *μη̄ γένοιτο* (*mē genoito*) is a negative oath, the strongest negative possible in the Greek language. It is variously translated as: ‘*God forbid!*’ (KJV), ‘*Of course not!*’ (Phillips), and most literally, ‘*May it never be!*’ (NASB). Paul uses the formula frequently in the book of Romans (3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11).

FAITH UPHOLDS THE LAW — Paul is probably using “*law*” in reference to the Mosaic law, either in general principle or specifically the Torah. How then does faith establish the law? (a) Are Christians obligated to obey the moral demands of the law? (b) Or is Paul thinking of what he will later say in 13:8-10 where the law is fulfilled by love? (c) Or does the Christian’s faith in Christ provide the full satisfaction of the demands of the law (Rom 8:4)? Paul’s comments here are too brief to allow us to be too dogmatic in our conclusion. “But the stress on faith as establishing the law suggests that it is law as fulfilled in and through our faith in Christ that Paul thinks of here. In 8:4, Paul will argue that those who are in Christ and who ‘walk according to the Spirit’

have the law fulfilled 'in them,' in the sense that their relationship to Christ by faith fully meets the demands of God's law. While we cannot be certain, it is likely that Paul means essentially the same thing here: that Christian faith, far from shunting aside the demands of the law, provides (and for the first time!) the complete fulfillment of God's demand in his law." [Moo, *Romans*, pg 255] "The plan of justification by faith leads to an observance of the Law. The sinner sees the evil of transgression. He sees the respect which God has shown to the Law. He gives his heart to God, and yields himself to obey his Law. All the sentiments that arise from the conviction of sin; that flow from gratitude for mercies; that spring from love to God; all his views of the sacredness of the Law, prompt him to yield obedience to it. The fact that Christ endured such sufferings to show the evil of violating the Law, is one of the strongest motives prompting to obedience. We do not easily and readily repeat what overwhelms our best friends in calamity; and we are brought to hate what inflicted such woes on the Saviour's soul. The sentiment recorded by Watts is as true as it is beautiful:

*Tw'as for my sins my dearest Lord
Hung on the cursed tree.
And groan'd away his dying life,
For thee, my soul, for thee.
O how I hate those lusts of mine
That crucified my Lord;
Those sins that pierc'd and nail'd his flesh
Fast to the fatal wood.
Yes, my Redeemer, they shall die,
My heart hath so decreed;
Nor will I spare the guilty things
That made my Saviour bleed.*

This is an advantage in moral influence which no cold, abstract law always has over the human mind. And one of the chief glories of the plan of salvation is, that while it justifies the sinner, it brings a new set of influences from heaven, more tender and mighty than can be drawn from any other source, to produce obedience to the Law of God." [Barne's *Notes on the Bible: Romans*]

Grace is indeed needed to turn a man into a saint; and he who doubts it does not know what a saint or a man is.

[Pascal, *Pensées*; q.v. Douglas Moo, *Romans*, pg 228]