

# ONE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENT

Romans 3:27-31

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Right about now, many seniors in high school are receiving notices from colleges as to whether or not they have passed their entrance requirements. Besides money to pay for higher education, there are a host of requirements that, taken together, can decide whether or not a high school graduate is accepted at a college. A few are SAT exams that test the students' English and math reasoning skills; grades; activities such as sports, debate teams, student leadership, and community involvement; recommendations; and awards.

At home, I have a safe. Thankfully, it does not work like the entrance requirements to get into a college. It is simple. You have to enter just one combination of numbers and signs, and you are in. The only requirement is that you recall the correct code!

How many requirements are there for one to be declared acceptable for admission into the Kingdom of God? How many requirements are there for one to be considered forgiven, saved, and assured of spending eternity with God?

There are not many. In fact, there is just one entrance requirement. And that one requirement is even easier for me than having to remember forever my multi-digit combination of signs and numbers to get into my safe.

This morning, we are going to look at what the Scriptures clearly declare to be THE one entrance requirement for spending eternity with God and discover what it is to intimately know and walk with your Creator.

As we typically do, let's take a moment to set the Biblical stage for our study of **Romans 3:27-31**. Last time we finished looking at what I called the "Hallelujah Chorus" of **Romans 3:21-26**. That short paragraph is packed with introductory ideas that set the foundation for the Apostle Paul's full explanation of the Gospel in the chapters to come.

The major point of that paragraph, we learned last time, is that when it comes to the salvation and transformation of people, all the work and credit goes to God, not us. Paul declares in **verse 26** that everything he has written in the paragraph beginning with **3:21** and ending with **3:26** had one purpose in mind: to demonstrate or show “**the righteousness of God.**”

As we opened up the expression “**the righteousness of God,**” we learned that it contains two highlights. The first points to God’s character. God is the only one who truly has it all together. He is perfectly balanced as a being of love and justice. He is completely good, with no evil in Him at all.

The second highlight of this expression “**the righteousness of God**” reveals that it is out of His good, righteous character that our beneficent God acts on behalf of the human race to rescue us from our sin and foolish rebellion against Him that could lead to damnable ends. The rescue effort began and ends with Him. There is nothing we can do to improve upon or add to His righteous plan to save and transform our lives.

We also saw in that same paragraph that there are three key points that reveal the righteousness of God, his very actions, and lengths to which he has gone to rescue us. In the order in which those points were presented, Paul introduced us to the subjects of God’s *justification* of sinners, which comes as a result of Christ’s redeeming us by His blood. And only by that *redemption* can all of God’s wrath against sinners be *propitiated* or satisfied so that God, without any wrath left toward us, can reach out to us in love and embrace us with His loving arms. In turn, we can now receive His loving embrace without fear of His wrath.

If you are visiting with us this morning, and you don’t know what the three terms justification, redemption, and propitiation mean, you can go back online and retrieve either my written messages or listen to the sermons where those terms are fully explained and illustrated.

From this point forward in his letter to the Christians in Rome, the Apostle Paul expounds upon these truths beginning with **verse 27** through the end of

**chapter 8.** He begins our paragraph of study for this morning in **verse 27**, with explaining more in depth that which he first mentioned in **verse 24**, the truth about justification. That is, that God is the one and only one who can ultimately declare you righteous and therefore make you completely acceptable to Him. This would include, obviously, His total and complete forgiveness for all of our past, present, and future sin.

In **verse 24**, Paul simply introduced the subject of justification. But beginning with **3:27-4:25**, Paul zeroes in on this truth of justification and what is required for one to be declared righteous before God. Or to put it another way, Paul more fully explains the entrance requirement for you to enter into an eternal intimate loving relationship with God.

We are going to read this whole section this morning, but we won't cover it all today. It is a rather lengthy passage, but I will read it slowly, and you will see in a moment why we are reading the entire passage. Please follow along in your Bibles as I read these verses.

**<sup>27</sup>Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of *faith*. <sup>28</sup>For we maintain that a man is justified by *faith* apart from works of the Law. <sup>29</sup>Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup>since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by *faith* and the uncircumcised through *faith* is one. <sup>31</sup>Do we then nullify the Law through *faith*? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.**

<sup>1</sup>What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? <sup>2</sup>For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup>For what does the Scripture say? “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” <sup>4</sup>Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. <sup>5</sup>But to the one who does not work, but *believes* in Him who justifies the ungodly, his *faith* is credited as righteousness, <sup>6</sup>just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup>“BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. <sup>8</sup>BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.” <sup>9</sup>Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, “*FAITH* WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” <sup>10</sup>How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; <sup>11</sup>and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the *faith* which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be

the father of all who *believe* without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, <sup>12</sup>and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the *faith* of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. <sup>13</sup>For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of *faith*. <sup>14</sup>For if those who are of the Law are heirs, *faith* is made void and the promise is nullified; <sup>15</sup>for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. <sup>16</sup>For this reason it is by *faith*, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the *faith* of Abraham, who is the father of us all, <sup>17</sup>(as it is written, “A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU”) in the presence of Him whom he *believed*, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. <sup>18</sup>In hope against hope he *believed*, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been

spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.”<sup>19</sup> Without becoming weak in *faith* he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; <sup>20</sup>yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in *faith*, giving glory to God, <sup>21</sup>and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. <sup>22</sup>Therefore “IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” <sup>23</sup>Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, <sup>24</sup>but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who *believe* in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup>He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

As we were reading through this lengthy passage, did you notice the one key word associated with this topic of justification that keeps coming up in every paragraph? It is the word “**faith (believe).**” In fact, if we look back to the previous paragraph, we find the role that “**faith**” plays in God’s righteous plans to rescue sinners introduced in **verses 22, 26** where we read, “<sup>22</sup>**Even the righteousness of God through *faith* in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.**” And then, “<sup>26</sup>**For the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has *faith* in Jesus.**”

Paul’s purpose in hitting so hard with this word faith is to demonstrate that it is the sole means by which one is justified before God. Faith, or putting one’s

complete confidence in the finished work of Christ, is the only entrance requirement to being declared righteous and thus saved by God. Faith stands in total contrast to any human merit based on human works or efforts to appease God's wrath and to receive God's full forgiveness and total acceptance and forever approval.

In our hanging out together, I often hear some of you say, "Well, I just hope that my good will and efforts will count for something." And I repeatedly tell you that if you mean that you hope your good efforts count for something that might be added to your credit so that you might be saved, I will tell you again, they don't count toward your salvation and acceptance before God. Your good deeds may make someone else accept you or have a part to play in your eternal rewards, but they have no effect on God's justification or acceptance of you. God's acceptance of you rests totally on your putting your confidence in the finished work of Christ on your behalf.

Now, let's get back to the text, and specifically to the important role that faith plays. As you will see, the word "**faith**" gives a road map to follow as we travel down through this section.

#### The Faith Road Map **3:27-4:25**

**3:27-31** Faith contrasted with "**works of the Law**"

**4:1-8** Faith contrasted with "**works**"

**4:9-12** Faith contrasted with "**circumcision**"

**4:13-16** Faith contrasted with "**the Law**"

**4:17-22** Faith contrasted with "**sight**"

By looking at this simple overview, do you get Paul's drift? It is faith in Christ's work on the cross alone that saves and forever reunites the sinner with the living God!

Now, let's look a little more closely at our passage for this morning. In **verse 27-31**, Paul spells out for us three implications of everything he told us thus far about justification in **verses 21-26**.

He makes known the first implication in **verses 27-28**. He writes, “<sup>27</sup>**Where then is boasting? It is excluded.**” That means our boasting or trying to take any credit for earning God’s acceptance has been once and for all banished--completely shut out. There is no room whatsoever for us to point to our good efforts as being something helpful for getting God’s acceptance. “**How so?**” Paul asks. Or, by what kind of law?

First, we need to clarify how Paul is using the term “**law**” in these two verses. In first century Greek, the word for “**law**” was used often in a general, nonreligious sense. It meant a principle, a tradition, a command, a rule of some kind, an accepted norm, an order, or a custom. Paul uses the word for law in this way back in **Romans 2:14**. So, in **verse 27**, when Paul uses this term for law, he is using it in a general sense. In other words, Paul is asking, “By what rule or principle is boasting about our good efforts excluded?” And Paul’s answer will be, “By the principle or rule of faith.”

But first, he offers another option. In answer to the question, “**Where then is boasting?**” Paul offers the option that the traditional Jew is hoping for. He suggests, “**Of works?**” But then he quickly answers, “**No!**”

Why does he say, “**No**”? Because if our justification or our acceptance before God was by works or by human effort, we could boast. However, back in **verse 24**, Paul made it clear that being justified or declared righteous and acceptable by God comes to us as a “**gift.**”

Since when can we boast about what we have done, when somebody else hands us a gift? There is no room to boast when one is given a gift.

Think about this: Let’s say I come to your friend’s home to celebrate your birthday. You, your spouse, and your kids are living with your friend because you can’t afford to rent your own place, let alone purchase a home. You and your spouse have both been working hard to make ends meet, but you are always struggling to hang on to enough money at the end of the month for anything but the basics. At this point in your life, you certainly do not have enough to pay rent or a mortgage.

I walk in to this birthday occasion and hand you a little box that contains your special gift. You open it up and in it you find the keys to a \$2,000,000.00 home. A gift that, most likely, you could not purchase if you worked all your life for it. In addition, in the box is a note that explains that this house is fully paid for, and that there has been a trust fund set aside to take care of all expenses for upkeep, taxes, and repairs as long as you decide to live in it. With the income you are already making, you could move in right away! You are ecstatic!

But then, let's say that your pride kicks in at receiving such an expensive gift. You start feeling embarrassed that you haven't been able to provide for your family, even though you have been busting your corns to do so. You even go so far as to ask, "How much did it cost you?" When I refuse to tell you, because I know you won't be able to calculate it (probably more than just monetary costs), you turn to me and insist on writing me a check for \$5. You tell me, "I'm going to pay you back for this. Each month I'm going to give you \$5." It may be a prideful good intention on your part, but the pathway to hell is paved with good intentions. Good intentions can't repay the cost. Furthermore, the giver of the gift would be insulted.

But most importantly, if you could pay for it, as soon as you did, the gift would cease to be a gift! It's only when you choose to simply receive it, it is a gift. And that's faith. Faith, in simple terms, is simply saying "Yes" to God's gift of justification through Christ. Faith is agreeing with God that His plan of salvation is the only one that saves, and that you need it, and that you can do nothing but receive it.

So in **verse 27**, Paul's reply to, "**Of works?**" is "**No, but by the law (or principle or rule) of faith.**" It is absolutely incongruous, absurd, and inconsistent for a person to live by the principle or rule of faith and then boast about working for a gift. Hence, all boasting is excluded.

But then, in **verse 28**, Paul zeros in on the Jews, who would like to cling to what they believe is their right for boasting. Paul has been addressing a wrong Jewish reasoning for their perceived right to boast, ever since **Romans 2:17-24**. Their false "self-understanding" involves three expressions: their

“**calling oneself a Jew,**” “**relying on the law,**” and “**boasting before God.**” All three expressions are central to the dialogue that takes place now, in the **3:27-4:2.**

Paul’s primary thought about boasting in **verse 28** concerns the Jews’ confidence in their presumed privileged status with God based on their possession of the Law. Paul already rejected such boasting once, in that major section of Romans covering **2:17-3:20.** There, he argued that Jews may not boast in the Law because they do not keep it.

In **verse 28,** the word for “**Law**” does not refer to a mere rule, principle, or tradition, as Paul used the term in the previous verse. Here the word specifically refers to the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. We read, “**For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.**” In other words, one’s ability to possess or perform according to the Law has no part to play in justification. Only faith, or putting one’s complete confidence in God’s ability to justify, counts. Thus, Paul just removed from the table the Jewish idea that their mere possession of the Law and attempts to obey it can lead to their justification. In the next chapter, Paul will continue to demonstrate this through Abraham’s life, David’s life, and through the testimony of Old Testament prophets.

Hence, the first implication concerning justification that we take away from **verse 27-28** is that there is no place for anyone to boast in their being justified, especially the Jews. There is nothing any human being can do to make himself righteous or to get himself saved. The rescuing work is solely God’s doing. We were dead and helpless in our trespasses and sins. Hence, no one can boast in themselves as having earned a right to be saved. God’s rescuing work on behalf of the human race excludes our boasting.

In **verses 29-30,** Paul makes known another implication of God’s manner of justification. We read, “**Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through [the same] faith is one.**” [NASB]

Would you please note my addition in **verse 30** of the words “the same” faith. Greek scholars have convinced me that proper Greek grammar would have us more correctly translate this verse to read, “**God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through the same faith is one.**” Not only is it more grammatically correct, but it follows the symmetry of Paul’s argument. Let me demonstrate what I mean by symmetry and the logic that supports it.

Paul’s first two questions in **verse 29** are basically asking about three different things. Follow this:

- Do we have two Gods or is there just one God?
- Paul’s answer is basically, “No, we don’t have two different Gods. There is only one God for both Jew and Gentile. He is the same God.”

The next untruth he is trying to clear up is,

- Are there two ways to be justified?
- “No, there is only one way, and that is by faith.”
- Well then, are there two types of faith?
- And grammatically, Paul is saying, “No. Just as there is only one God and one way to be justified, there is only one and the same faith.”

Paul’s point, to the chagrin of his Jewish Christian friends in Rome, is that God will justify the circumcised (Jew) by faith and the uncircumcised (non-Jew) through the same faith, because there is only One and the same God, One and the same way, and One and the same faith. For the Jew, this was earth shattering. Until that point, the Jewish Christians believed that you had to become a Jew first and embrace all the Law (ceremonial, civil, and moral) as well as all of their rites if you wanted to be saved. They had felt above other people, pridefully, which led to centuries of their boasting.

But Christ's finished work on the cross proved clearly that although they were privileged to be chosen by God to be a special people, they were not better than others and thus had no right to boast.

God is not partial to the Jew or the Gentile. Because you are a Jew, you are not closer to God nor saved easier. These verses are driving home the point that God's manner of justification is the only way, and it includes everybody, and it is the same for everybody.

Throughout this discussion that began back in **verse 21**, Paul repeatedly has told us that the key to being saved and permanently made right, approved, loved, and accepted by God, never to fear his rejection or punishment is "**faith.**" Altogether, the word "**faith**" and the word "**believe**" (which are from the same root) are used twenty-five times in these verses. And it is not simply faith in faith itself, which is nothing more than the definition of superstition, but faith in the historical work of Jesus Christ's death on the cross for our sins, resurrection from the dead, proving He is God, and His return to heaven to exercise the full prerogatives of God.

Now you might be thinking, "Yes, but Bob, you don't understand. My faith is so weak." Sure it is. So is mine! But, your standing justified before God, fully approved, does not take strong faith. It just takes faith in a God who is stronger than you!

And finally, in **verse 31** we see a third implication concerning justification. Paul raises a question that may be in a Jewish Christian reader's mind at this point, "Do we then nullify (make inoperative or cancel out or destroy or get rid of) the Law through faith?" In other words, "Do we then invalidate the Law by our insistence on faith alone for justification?" Paul's answer is very abrupt, emphatic, and decisive—"**May it never be!**"

Jewish Christians who have grown up loving the Torah may have come to the erroneous conclusion that since the Apostle Paul has argued twice thus far in Romans that salvation comes apart from the Law, then the doctrine of justification by faith has set God's Law aside and made it useless. Hence, "**On the contrary,**" Paul says, "**we establish [or uphold] the Law.**" It is

Christ's execution on the cross that met the requirement of the Law—the punishment of sin. And it enabled us to meet God's standard of righteousness because we are given it by Him. In addition, as we will see next time, the Torah testifies to the truth of justification by faith, as that was Abraham's experience. In addition, the gospel message of justification teaches that because of the Torah, specifically the moral Law, people's hearts are convicted and condemned of their sin, leading them to trust in Christ. And finally, the gospel upholds the Torah, as theologian Andrew Murray, declares, "The moral norms of the Law still function as the authoritative will of God for the follower of Christ." (Murray 1959: 126) The Apostle Paul will reveal this point later in **Romans 8** and **13**. We demonstrate that we are followers of Jesus when we obey the moral Law of the Old Testament.

Let's just pause for a moment to think about the extent of God's love that provided such a rescuing effort for us worthless sinners. It requires nothing but our trust in the finished work of the death of God's Son on the cross. So amazing and so abounding is God's love that never shall we be able to measure it. Throughout all eternity we will be praising God for the mysteries of His infinite love toward us. We may even sing these words in heaven, penned here on earth by William Kuipers, to praise God:

By the sea of crystal, saints in glory stand,  
 Myriads in number, drawn from every land.  
 Robed in white apparel, washed in Jesus' blood,  
 They now reign forever with the Lamb of God.

Unto God Almighty, sitting on the throne,  
 And the Lamb victorious, be the praise alone.  
 God has wrought salvation, he did wondrous things;  
 Who shall not extol Thee, Holy King of Kings?  
 William Kuipers

