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The Law of Faith

Romans 3.27-31

Series: The Pure Gospel

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The Village Church

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I. Introduction

- A. There are literally dozens of religions in the world
 - 1. They can be categorized cultural traditions
 - a. Abrahamic religions
 - b. Indian religions
 - c. Folk religions
 - d. African religions
 - e. Chinese religions
 - f. Japanese religions
 - 2. They can be categorized by geographical origins
 - a. Middle eastern
 - b. East-Indian
 - c. African
 - d. Eastern
 - e. Native American
 - 3. They can be categorized by the nature of the god conceived
 - a. Monotheism – one God
 - b. Polytheism – many gods
 - c. Pantheism – everything is god
 - d. Multiple religions within each of those categories
 - 4. And then there are those who claim no religion at all
 - a. Those are the folks you don't have to take seriously
 - b. Because everyone is religious
 - c. In fact, human beings are incurably religious
 - d. Because every single human being, acting humanly, places something or someone, at the pinnacle of their value system
 - e. And whatever that is – even if it is themselves – that is god for them
 - f. They are just as religious as everybody else
 - g. The most ardent and self-proclaimed atheist is deeply religious
 - h. And if you poked and prodded enough you would discover their system of belief and ritual
- B. What is it then that sets Christianity apart?
 - 1. What distinguishes Christianity from all the other religions?
 - 2. We discover what that is in our text this morning

3. It is called **"The Law of Faith"**
 4. John MacArthur once said that there are only two religions in the world
 - a. In spite of all the religions that everybody could name
 - b. In spite of all the university classes that people take on world religions, and that list and categorize the various religions
 - c. In spite of the multitude of various religious rituals and sacrifices and traditions and beliefs
 - d. He said there are only two
 5. There is **the religion of human achievement**
 - a. Which is human beings working to fulfill duty and obligation
 6. And there is **the religion of divine accomplishment**
 - a. In which God does the work on behalf of human beings
 7. Only Christianity is a religion of divine accomplishment
 - a. Every other religion requires humans to do and to be something in order to please God, or to gain Nirvana, or discover peace, or to save the planet, or to ...
 8. But in Christianity – God does it
 - a. "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life." (**John 3.16**)
 - b. God did it
 9. And it is by believing in His Son, by faith in His Son – that we don't work, but that we receive everything that we, as human creatures, need
 - a. Because God has done the work
 - b. The religion of divine accomplishment
 10. Summed up by this phrase: **"The Law of Faith"**
- C. **Romans 3:27–31** (ESV) —
1. 27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded.
 2. By what kind of law? By a law of works?
 3. No, but by **the law of faith**.
 4. 28 For we hold that one is justified **by faith** apart from works of the law.
 5. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also?
 6. Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who will justify the circumcised **by faith** and the uncircumcised **through faith**.
 7. 31 Do we then overthrow the law **by this faith**? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.
- D. The law of faith sets Christianity part from every other religion – indeed, from every other religious impulse
1. And our text this morning gives us three reasons why Christianity is unique
 2. And why the gospel of Jesus Christ does what no other religion could possible do

II. **The Glory of the Gospel**

- A. But first, let's go back and remind ourselves of what the essence of Christianity is
1. What is the essence of the gospel

2. Which is what the book of Romans is about
3. What is the glory of the gospel?
- B. Recall that Paul introduced us to the gospel all the way back in Chapter 1
 1. **Romans 1:16–17** (ESV) —
 - a. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel,
 - b. for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes,
 - c. to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
 - d. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”
- C. Then Paul goes on to establish why we need this gospel
 1. We need this gospel because, in spite of all the things we think we need, the one thing we truly need to be right with God is righteousness
 - a. We need God’s righteousness
 - b. And we don’t have it
 - c. Only God has it
 2. And so, from 1.18-3.20 Paul establishes the need for the gospel
 - a. Based on the fact that we, in and of ourselves, are not righteous
 - b. We don’t measure up to God’s righteousness
- D. **Romans 1:18–23** (ESV) —
 1. 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.
 2. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.
 3. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.
 4. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
 5. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,
 6. 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. [idolatry]
- E. Paul then goes on to show, in Chapter 2 and 3, that whether one is of the Jewish religion, or of some other kind of religion, whatever characterizes the Gentile religions, everyone lacks righteousness
 1. **Romans 3:9** (ESV) — 9 ... For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin...
- F. And just in case you didn’t catch the universality and pervasiveness of sin in humanity, this is how Paul described the human race as it regards our relationship with the righteousness of God
- G. **Romans 3:10–12** (ESV) —
 1. 10 as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one;
 2. 11 no one understands;
 3. no one seeks for God.

4. 12 All have turned aside;
 5. together they have become worthless;
 6. no one does good, not even one.”
- H. And then Paul summarizes
- I. **Romans 3:19–20** (ESV) —
1. 19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.
 2. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.
- J. You see, the religion of human achievement – whatever its form and tradition – is of no value in the sight of God
- K. But then comes the gospel
1. In fact, then comes the great “But”
 - a. And you know how I love the “buts” of the Bible
 2. God has an answer to the deplorable circumstances of humanity
 - a. God has provided a means by which we humans, bereft of our own righteousness, might receive the righteousness we need
- L. **Romans 3:21–26** (ESV) —
1. 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—
 2. 22 the righteousness of God **through faith** in Jesus Christ for all **who believe**.
 3. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
 4. 24 and are justified **by his grace as a gift**, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
 5. 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received **by faith**. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.
 6. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.
- M. That’s the gospel
1. That’s good news!
 2. That’s the glory of the gospel!
- N. Our text this morning then tells us the implications of this gospel
1. The consequences, the results of the gospel, the effects of the good news
 2. The things which set apart the gospel from the religion of human achievement in all its forms
- O. There are three areas that are mentioned, summed up in “the law of faith”
1. The law of faith
 - a. **Destroys pride**
 - b. **Affirms one way to God**
 - c. **Establishes the Law of God**

III. The Effects of the Gospel

A. Pride Destroyed

1. From the earliest of Christian history theologians spoke of the seven deadly sins
 - a. Gluttony
 - b. Lust
 - c. Greed
 - d. Envy
 - e. Sloth
 - f. Wrath (anger, rage)
 - g. Pride
2. But always, it was recognized, that even though the list of sins, these “cardinal” sins, these deadly sins, were, well, deadly
 - a. One of them was the worst
 - b. And that sin was pride
 - c. Pride was the primordial sin
 - d. The sin which preceded, and set the stage, for all other sin, all rebellion against God
3. The first sinner was Satan – who sinned, presumably, even before the creation of the human race
 - a. Most biblical scholars see the prophecy in Isaiah 14 as extending back beyond time to the fall of Satan due to pride
4. **Isaiah 14:13–14** (ESV) —
 - a. 13 You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven;
 - b. above the stars of God I will set my throne on high;
 - c. I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north;
 - d. 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
 - e. I will make myself like the Most High.’
5. Pride was the sin of Satan – but ironically, it was his undoing
6. **Isaiah 14:15** (ESV) —
 - a. 15 But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.
7. But pride was also the sin of Eve
 - a. Who wanted to “be like God, knowing good and evil” (**Genesis 3.5**)
 - b. But of course, Eve didn’t become like (she was already like God in a sense, having been made in His image)
 - c. But she became like Satan, fallen and corrupt
8. Pride was also the sin of Adam
 - a. He couldn’t abide the one restriction on his so-called freedom
 - b. Succumbed to the temptation of Eve, at the forbidden fruit
 - c. And so brought the entire human race into ruin
 - d. And from that time on, human beings were said to be made, not in the image of God, but in the image of Adam
9. Pride is not just the primordial sin; it is also the worst of sins
 - a. It has its own uniqueness

- b. C.S. Lewis has written most perceptively on this in his classic text, *Mere Christianity*; it bears reading
- 10. Lewis: There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. I have heard people admit that they are bad-tempered, or that they cannot keep their heads about girls or drink, or even that they are cowards. I do not think I have ever heard anyone who was not a Christian accuse himself of this vice. And at the same time I have very seldom met anyone, who was not a Christian, who showed the slightest mercy to it in others. There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others. The vice I am talking about is Pride.
- 11. Lewis: [Pride is] *essentially* competitive – competitive by its very nature... Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest....
- 12. Lewis: The Christians are right: it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began.... Pride always means enmity – it *is* enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God.
- 13. Now the ironic thing is that there is no greater sphere in which pride rears its ugly head than religion
 - a. Religion – that is the religion of human achievement – is the locus of the very worst expressions of pride
- 14. Boice: For it is in religion alone that we are able to claim that God, and not mere human beings, sets his approval on us as superior to other human beings. Moreover, the more demanding or rigorous our “religion” is, the more prideful we become.
- 15. Jesus Himself calls attention to this propensity of religion to be a setting for pride – using the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector
- 16. **Luke 18:11–12** (ESV) —
 - a. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus:
 - b. ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.
 - c. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’
- 17. Even if the Pharisee did do all those things – it was for him an occasion for comparison and pride
 - a. By contrast, the response of the tax collector was notable
- 18. **Luke 18:13** (ESV) —

- a. 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven,
 - b. but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’
- 19. Jesus, then, cast the deciding judgment
- 20. **Luke 18:14** (ESV) —
 - a. 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.
 - b. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”
- 21. Lewis: Whenever we find that our religious life is making us feel that we are good – above all, that we are better than someone else – I think we may be sure that we are being acted on, not by God, but by the devil. The real test of being in the presence of God is that you either forget about yourself altogether or see yourself as a small, dirty object. It is better to forget about yourself altogether.
- 22. There’s only one way we can forget about ourselves and destroy our pride
 - a. And that’s through the gospel
- 23. **Romans 3:27–28** (ESV) —
 - a. 27 Then what becomes of our boasting?
 - b. It is excluded.
 - c. By what kind of law? By a law of works?
 - d. No, but by the law of faith.
 - e. 28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.
- 24. Only the gospel – in which we are justified, declared righteous before God, “by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (**Romans 3.24**)
 - a. Only the gospel removes any basis for pride
- 25. Paul understood that implicitly
- 26. **Philippians 3:4–9** (ESV) —
 - a. 4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.
 - b. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:
 - c. 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;
 - d. 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.
 - e. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.
 - f. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as **rubbish**, in order that I may gain Christ
 - g. 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law,

- h. but that which comes **through faith in Christ**, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—
- 27. All of his religious accomplishments – he counts as rubbish
 - a. As one Puritan once put it, “Who praise his own dunghill?”
- 28. The gospel destroys pride
 - a. The religion of human achievement always does the opposite
 - b. Only Christianity, only the gospel, the religion of divine accomplishment, cures us of this primordial malady of humanity

B. **One Way Affirmed**

- 1. The second effect of the gospel is to affirm that coming to God is simple
 - a. There is only one way to God
- 2. **Romans 3:29–30** (ESV) —
 - a. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only?
 - b. Is he not the God of Gentiles also?
 - c. Yes, of Gentiles also,
 - d. 30 since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.
- 3. Paul expresses this truth of Christianity – that there is only one way of become right with God – using the two main religious categories of his day – Jews and Gentiles
 - a. Those who were circumcised and those who were not
- 4. But he says both groups must come to God the same way – through faith
 - a. The “law of faith” once again carries the day and establishes the principle
- 5. This, of course, is quite controversial in our day
- 6. Some would say that all religions are essentially the same
 - a. That God is at the top of a mountain
 - b. And that each religion is its own road up the mountain
 - c. But they all eventually get to the top, and get to God
 - d. In other words, all religions are essentially equal
- 7. Edward Gibbon, the great historian, had a cynical way of putting it in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*
 - a. To the common people all religions were “equally true”
 - b. To the philosophers all religions were “equally false”
 - c. And to the magistrates all religions were “equally useful”
- 8. Others see the differences in religions and come to the conclusion that some religions are better than others
 - a. And they explore various religions, and try to find one that best fits
 - b. Kind of like shopping for a new suit or dress
 - c. And they land on the one they like, claiming it to be the best
- 9. But to the Christian, all roads are leading somewhere
 - a. Because of the gospel – the religion of divine accomplishment – believers are declared righteous by grace through faith – Christians are on the road to God
 - b. Every other religion is running away from God

10. You could see this in Adam and Eve
 - a. Once they sinned (through pride!), they hid themselves from God
 - b. The last one they wanted to see was the altogether holy and righteous God
11. Remember how Paul has put it
12. **Romans 3:10–11** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one;
 - b. 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God.
13. **Romans 1:21** (ESV) —
 - a. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him,
 - b. but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.
14. This, of course, is hard for us to hear in this supposedly tolerant age
 - a. We’re supposed to suppose everyone’s the same, equal
 - b. Although these days, in our culture, we’re increasingly being told that Christians are less equal than others
15. But the way Paul expresses it, there is one way for Jews to come to God and another way, a different way, for Gentiles to come to God
 - a. There is only one way
 - b. And it is by faith – the “law of faith”
16. **Romans 3:30** (ESV) —
 - a. 30 since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.
17. This simplifies everything – and is extraordinary good news – unless one is too rooted in pride to see it
 - a. There is nothing sectarian or divisive about the gospel
 - b. The gospel is the only true means of inclusivity
18. The gospel flings wide the door of salvation to every human being
 - a. Salvation is available to the Jew
 - b. Salvation is available to the Gentile
 - c. Salvation is provided for men and women
 - d. Salvation is provided for black, for white, for Hispanic, for Indian, for Asian
 - e. Salvation is provided for the American and the African
 - f. For the European and the East Asian
19. In fact, there will be those from every people, tribe, tongue and nation in heaven
 - a. Because some from every people, tribe, tongue and nation will have believed in the One whom God has sent for our salvation
20. Jesus Himself taught this very thing
21. **John 14:6** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
22. Peter put it this way

23. **Acts 4:12** (ESV) —
 - a. 12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
24. Now this really goes against the grain of our supposedly tolerant culture
 - a. It makes the hair stand up on the back of the necks of some
 - b. It makes the blood pressure rise
25. If this idea of Christianity that there is only one way of salvation really bothers you, let me ask you a question
 - a. When you die – and you will – and you stand before God
 - b. Will you have the chutzpah to tell God
 - c. “You know, God, Your sending Your Son to this earth, to live a life of righteousness, and then to die on the cross, taking upon Himself the punishment that I deserve for my sin...”
 - d. “That wasn’t enough, God. You should have done more.”
26. Really?
 - a. Would you really tell that to God
 - b. That the gospel of Christ
 - c. Christ dying in the place of all those who would ever believe in Him
 - d. Was not enough
 - e. And all He asks of you is that you believe in Him
 - f. In Jesus
 - g. In Jesus alone – not in any accomplishment of your own
27. The law of faith affirms one way to God
 - a. Open to any and all who come to Him by faith in Jesus

C. **The Law Established**

1. Finally, the Law of God is established by the gospel
2. **Romans 3:31** (ESV) —
 - a. 31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?
 - b. By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.
3. What? Wait a second
 - a. Didn’t Paul say – just now! – “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law”
 - b. Doesn’t that mean that the Law of God is nullified?
 - c. That the Law of God – embodied in, say, the Ten Commandments – set aside entirely
4. Paul says “By no means!” or as other translations have it, “God forbid!”
5. No, because you see, Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law of God
6. In the gospel, the Law of God was affirmed and established
7. That’s what Paul meant when he said...
8. **Romans 3:26** (ESV) —
 - a. 26 It was to show his righteousness [the righteousness of God] at the present time,
 - b. so that he might be just [one who upholds the Law of God] and the justifier [savior] of the one who has faith in Jesus.

9. You know, if God decided to grade on a curve – that’s when the Law of God gets trashed
 - a. If God said, “There are Ten Commandments” – but if you can get seven of them – you’re good”
 - b. Or even eight of them; or nine of them – you’re ok
 - c. But what about the other three, or two, or one?
 - d. Are they simply ignored?
 - e. That’s when the Law of God gets nullified
 - f. That’s when God says, “Ok, I said Ten; but I didn’t really mean it; we’re ok with seven; or you know what – I’ll take what I can get – how about just three or four; just do the best you can...”
 - g. That’s when the Law of God is trashed
10. Or if God said, “I don’t care how many of the Ten Commandments you can do, but if you can get more of them than, say, 50% of everybody else – that’s good enough”
 - a. “I’ll just take the top half of the human race”
 - b. “I know I said, Ten Commandments, but I didn’t really mean it”
 - c. “Just do better than a bunch of other people”
11. No, if God grades on a curve – there is no Law of God
 - a. God grades on a curve, the Law is overthrown
12. And James puts it this way:
13. **James 2:10** (ESV) —
 - a. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.
14. When God said Ten Commandments – He really did mean Ten Commandments
 - a. They aren’t the Ten Suggestions
 - b. Nine isn’t good enough
15. But that’s the glory of the gospel!
 - a. You and I could never measure up!
 - b. “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20.3)
 - c. We already blew that one!
 - d. We’ve put so many things before God in our thinking and in our conduct
 - e. We can’t even get past number one!
16. But Jesus did!
 - a. He fulfilled the whole Law of God
 - b. He was without sin – none
 - c. And not only that, He took upon Himself the punishment we deserved for our Law-breaking
 - d. So the just punishment of the Law was in fact enforced
 - e. Enforced on Jesus – our substitute
17. So Law was upheld, was affirmed
 - a. In Jesus’ life of righteousness
 - b. And in His death in our place

IV. Conclusion

- A. Is that good news to you?
 - 1. That's either deeply offensive to you
 - a. Because you can't stand the idea that God wouldn't just look the other way, forget about His Law
 - b. And just save everybody – or almost everybody
 - c. At least save me
 - 2. Or this is the greatest news imaginable
 - a. And you can't wait to cast yourself on His mercy
 - b. On the basis of Jesus' life, death and resurrection
 - c. As He fulfilled the Law on your behalf
 - d. As He destroyed pride, that worst of all primordial sins
 - e. And as He simply says, "Come to Me; believe in Me; trust in My work on your behalf"
 - 3. And be like the tax collector "Have mercy on me, a sinner!"
- B. Oh, I pray that you would not be offended by this gospel
 - 1. That you would find it to be unimaginably good news
 - 2. And that you would give yourself to this gospel as the pearl of great price, as the treasure hidden in the field
 - 3. And that casting pride aside, cast yourself on Jesus