

The Law of Faith: Romans 3:27-31, Ephesians 2:8-9, John 10:28

Adapted from, The "Law of Faith," by Pat Damiani, Pastor of Thornydale Family Church, Tucson AZ

In his book, Fully Alive, Christian comedian Ken Davis recounted an incident from his college days. His class had been asked to deliver a persuasive speech in which they would be graded on creativity, persuasiveness and the ability to drive home their point in a memorable way.

The title of Ken's talk was "The Law of the Pendulum." He spent 20 minutes carefully teaching the physics principles that govern a swinging pendulum. Because of friction and gravity a swinging pendulum can never return to a point higher than the point from which it is released.

He then demonstrated what he taught by attaching a child's toy top to a three-foot string which was attached to the top of a blackboard with a thumbtack. He pulled the top to one side, made a mark on the blackboard and then released it. Each time the toy swung back, he made a new mark until the top came to rest in less than a minute.

He then asked the people in the room how many of them believed the Law of the Pendulum was true. The professor and all his classmates raised their hands.

The professor, thinking the presentation was over, began walking to the front of the room. But in reality, Davis was just getting started with his presentation. Hanging from the steel beam in the middle of the room was 250 pounds of metal weights attached to four strands of 500 pound test parachute cord. Davis invited the professor to sit with the back of his head against a concrete wall. He then brought the 250 pounds of metal weights to within an inch of the professor's face.

He once again explained the law of the pendulum and reminded everyone that if what he had said was true when he released the weights they would swing across the room and return short of the professor's face. He then asked the professor once again if he believed in the Law of the Pendulum. After a long pause, he weakly nodded and whispered "yes".

Davis released the pendulum. It arced across the class, came to a brief stop and then began to return, at which point Davis said he had never seen anyone move so fast in his entire life as the professor dove out of the way. Davis then asked the class again, "Does he believe in the Law of the Pendulum?" The students unanimously answered "no".

That's not the end of the story, though. A little later I'll share the rest of it with you.

For nearly three full chapters, Paul has now been teaching us about the failure of the Law to justify anyone. He has made it clear that whether religious Jew or pagan Gentile, no one is capable of keeping the law as a means of being righteous before God and that therefore we all need to heed God's good news. **We all need to be redeemed and justified; having God's wrath satisfied on our behalf by what God has done for us and not based on what we have done. That is the essence of the "Law of Faith" as Paul named it in today's text.**

Then what becomes of boasting?

It is excluded.

By what law? By that of works?

No, but **by the law of faith.**

For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

Romans 3:27-28

Now, if I were to ask how many of you believe in the law of faith, all of you, or at least nearly all of you, would raise your hands. But, as we'll see this morning, the real test of whether you really believe in the law of faith—just like the law of the pendulum—is by how you respond to it in your day-to-day lives.

Last week, in a few verses, Paul summarized God's plan for our salvation: **redemption and justification received by our faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice on our behalf** (3:21-26). So now this week, beginning in verse 27, Paul draws a sharp contrast between two possible approaches to salvation: either by works (by faith in the law or religion) or by the law of faith:

Here is a smart way to summarize his summary:

The difference between salvation by **faith in the law** or by **the law of faith** is the difference between "do" and "done"

The first option is: seeking salvation through religion (faith in the law).

Merriam Webster defines "religion" *as an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods.*

The Latin word literally means "to bind back" (re-ligio). So all religions of the world including some that would claim to be Christian, basically have chosen this option in which people are made right with God by "doing."

In essence the adherents of such religions are trusting that they can keep some form of law—a set of rules by which we are expected to live—to such an adequate extent that God will accept us based on what we "do". And Paul has gone to great lengths to show the Jews that they were attempting to approach God in this way, but that this kind of salvation by faith in the law is impossible.

The second option is to develop a relationship with God that is based on what God has already "done" for us. This is the "Law of Faith." **The Law of Faith recognizes that there is absolutely nothing that I can do that will be adequate to earn or merit my salvation.** Paul has already presented a comprehensive case to prove that this is the only way that anyone—Jew or Gentile—can be made righteous before God. Remember the main theme of Romans?

The one who is righteous Will live by faith Romans 1:17

So here is what we will examine this morning--the "Law of Faith". First we need to answer three questions that naturally arise from this passage. Then I'll share some practical ways we can evaluate our own lives to see whether we really do believe the "Law of Faith" or if we're still trying to approach God based on faith in the law.

1. Paul has written a lot about faith and we've use that word a lot in church talk. But what do we really mean when we say "have faith in Jesus?" So the first question we must answer is: **What is faith?**

Unfortunately, most definitions of our English word "faith" fall short when it comes to understanding how this word is used in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament. The idea of faith as expressed in our English word for "faith," is more tentative; It implies hopefulness not complete assuredness. A typical response to a question such as, "Do you think Billy-Bob has really laid off the bottle for good?" We would reply: "I hope so, I have faith". See how our use of the word faith still leaves room for doubt?

But the Greek word (*pistis*) conveys a sense of full confidence, complete assurance; it means "having been fully persuaded". So when you ask a mountain climber does he really have faith in that little rope to hold his weight? His simple reply is "yep," as he jumps over the edge.

Another good example of the Greek idea of faith, is when your five-year old is standing up in the tree house (some 8 feet off the ground), and you hold your arms up and say "JUMP! I'LL CATCH YOU." With a laugh of joy she leaps off the platform into your waiting arms; no hesitation, just full assurance that she will be caught; that's faith the way the Bible uses the word. But now if we adults were standing on the same platform and Hagrid the friendly giant is down on the ground urging us to jump...we might hesitate for a bit, take a few moments to think about it; you know Hagrid can be clumsy and often makes mistakes. So if we do jump we are not really exercising "faith" as much as we are hoping that he will not drop us. That's our common understanding of faith

But, biblical faith or belief is more than just an intellectual assent to a set of facts, and also a lot more than just trying to have faith; hoping. Faith is either being fully convinced right now, or it is not really faith. That is why it is so wrong for people to say something like, "If you just have a little more faith, then God will answer your prayer, or take care of your need." With faith, you either have it fully or you don't have it.

Three characteristics of biblical faith are

1. A firm conviction that what God reveals is true
2. A complete surrender to that truth
3. Conduct that is inspired by such a surrender

There is one more important idea about such faith that we must address here: **Such faith, as the Bible describes it, is a gift from God, not something I can produce on my own.** One of our Confirmation class verses is Ephesians 2:8-9 (see note on faith at end of this sermon).

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

So, even the faith by which we respond comes first as God's gracious gift to us. Notice that Paul addresses the idea of boasting here, just as he does in our Romans passage. And here he makes it clear that we are prohibited from boasting because even our faith

is a gift of God. That makes sense if we think this through completely because, if faith is something I can develop myself, then I would have something I could boast about. But since faith is a gift of God, that prevents me from boasting even about the fact that I have faith.

The second question we must answer arises out of verse 31:

2. How then does the Law of Faith "uphold the law"?

Paul anticipated the charge that the Jews were likely to lodge against what he was teaching. If they couldn't be saved by adhering to the law, did the salvation that God provides through faith in Jesus overthrow the law then?

But Paul turns the tables on them and reaffirms the point he has been making all along: The Law of Faith upholds the Law...because it accepts the law's requirement that sin be punished by death.

The law said that if you sin, you die. So on the cross, Jesus died to satisfy that demand of the law on our behalf. And when we appropriate His death into our lives through faith, God considers the law to have been completely upheld. Justification by faith not only does not overthrow the law—it is, in fact, the only way that the keeping of the law is even remotely possible.

The third question answered by our text is:

3. Is there more than one way to be saved?

In verses 29-30 once again Paul is addressing an objection that He expects his fellow Jews to raise. That objection goes something like this: "*This idea of justification by faith is just fine for these Gentiles who don't have the law. But God gave us Jews the law so that we could be saved by observing the law.*" So they were basically claiming that God had two methods of salvation—one for the Jews and another for the Gentiles.

By now, the answer to that objection should have been clear to them, but since the Jews still hadn't "gotten it", Paul takes another approach here and answers that objection like this: **Since there is only one God, there is only one way to be saved.**

Paul reminds the Jews of the Shema, the central prayer in the Jewish prayer book that begins with these words: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. (Deuteronomy 6:4, ESV). Paul reminds his readers that there is only one God. And He is God of both the Jews and the Gentiles. Therefore God has only one plan of salvation

for everyone. This is a theme he will develop further as he talks about how Father Abraham was justified.

So remember ...

The difference between salvation by **faith in the law** or by **the law of faith** is the difference between “do” and “done”

Now that we’ve answered these questions, let’s close by making this really practical. Let’s admit to ourselves, even if we came to God through the **law of faith**, it’s easy to fall back into basing our relationship with God on our **faith in the law**. And when we do that it has an impact on both our relationship with God and our relationships with others.

I know this might now be making a few of you nervous. So let’s be very clear with each other. I’m not suggesting that if some of these tests are true in your life that you are not saved or that you haven’t responded to God on the basis of the law of faith that fully trusts in what God has done for you.

But my goal is to point out that all of us probably do some things, from time to time, that might indicate we’ve gone back to operating on the basis of what I can do rather than what God has already done for me.

HERE ARE SOME INDICATIONS I MIGHT BE LIVING BY “FAITH IN THE LAW”

Some indicators of living by “faith in the Law”
1. **Constant doubts about my salvation**

First, let’s acknowledge **doubt is normal**, even for genuine disciples of Jesus. The Bible is full of examples of people who were fully committed to God, but who had their doubts from time to time:

- Elijah fled from Jezebel and asked God to take his life because of his doubts.
- David and the other authors of the Psalms often expressed their doubts to God.

- When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus if He really was the person who John had earlier described as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”.

In spite of their doubts these people were all able to be used by God after they took those doubts to God and let Him remove them.

But those I am addressing here are the ones who consistently struggle with doubts about whether they are really saved and about whether their sins have been forgiven. They often worry that if they commit some sin and die before they get a chance to confess it that their salvation will go right out the window.

That kind of constant worry about “my salvation” is an indication that deep down inside I am still holding on to the idea that I am somehow still responsible for my own salvation, that my faith is in what I can do and not in what God has already done for me.

If I am living by the Law of Faith, I will remember that my salvation is 100% God’s work. So if my salvation is all based on what God has done and not what I do, then there is nothing I can do that will undo what God has done for me through Jesus. Jesus confirmed the security of my salvation with His own words:

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish,
and **no one will snatch them out of my hand.**
My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all,
and **no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.**
John 10:28-29 ESV

First, it is clear that eternal life is something Jesus gives to us, not something we earn or merit. Notice also the words “**no one**” that Jesus uses twice in these verses. “No one” includes me, too. If God has given me eternal life as a gift, no one, not even me, can snatch me from God’s grasp.

Some indicators of living by “faith in the Law”

1. Constant doubts about my salvation
2. **Comparison**
To unbelievers and to believers

This is why Paul had to remind the Jews that the gospel excludes boasting. The Jews believed that they were superior to the Gentiles and they continually boasted of their adherence to the law, even when they failed to do so completely.

Christians often do exactly the same thing today; they do things that make them appear to the world as being "holier than thou." It happens almost always because we are boasting in some way in our own human righteousness and claiming that it somehow makes us superior to unbelievers.

We also have a tendency to expect unbelievers to act like believers when they are not. When we do that, we are essentially comparing their lives to ours and drawing the conclusion that we are somehow superior to them in God's eyes because we keep the law better than they do. That is exactly the kind of boasting that the gospel should prevent.

In the same way, it is easy to start comparing my life to other believers. And when I do that, one of two things is going to occur. I am either going to end up boasting because I view myself as being more spiritually mature than someone else or I'll be discouraged in my walk with Jesus because I don't feel like my life measures up to that of others.

The law of faith invalidates either of those mindsets. God's love for me is not dependent on how mature I am. Certainly it is God's desire that all of His children grow in their relationship with Him and continue to become more and more like Jesus because God knows that is what is best for us. But His love for me is not dependent on how well I do that.

So when I begin to measure my life against those of other believers I am essentially living in a manner that is more consistent with faith in the law than with the law of faith. I need to constantly remember that my salvation and my worth to God are not a result of anything I have done, but only a result of what God has already done for me.

Some indicators of living by "faith in the Law"

1. Constant doubts about my salvation
2. Comparison
 To unbelievers and to believers
3. **Dependence on my religion**

Lastly, are we dependent on our religion? Earlier we defined religion as "an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods." While being a disciple of Jesus is a relationship rather than a religion, it is easy for religion to begin to take the place of that relationship. Things like the form of our

worship gatherings, and even practices that Jesus commanded such as baptism and the observance of the Lord's Supper can easily become nothing more than mere religious rituals by which we believe we are somehow earning favor with God.

When we do that we are essentially mixing in "works of the law" as a means of our justification and that leads to boasting which undermines the law of faith.

Obviously, I am not suggesting that being baptized or observing the Lord's Supper aren't important. After all, Jesus commanded that every single believer participate in these religious observances. But they are merely outward evidence of an inward relationship that has already been entered into based upon what God has done for us, not something we did to merit His favor.

Once again, I'm not suggesting that if one or more of these things are true in your life that you aren't saved or that you're in danger of losing your salvation. If you find yourself occasionally doing these things, I hope this message will just be a reminder to keep up your guard against falling back into relying upon faith in the law rather than the law of faith.

On the other hand, if you live like this consistently, then perhaps you do need to evaluate whether you have really received the gift of salvation through faith in what Jesus has already done for you, or whether you've merely deceived yourself into thinking that you're right with God as a result of your own righteousness. And that brings us back to this truth:

The difference between salvation by **faith in the law** or by **the law of faith** is the difference between "do" and "done"

Earlier I said that I would share the rest of the story about Ken Davis' presentation of the law of the pendulum.

Davis recounts that one of the most fascinating and unexpected outcomes of his lesson was that after the professor had bailed out of the chair, one of the other students volunteered to sit in that same chair. Although he flinched when the pendulum swung toward his head, he stayed put. And once the entire class saw the validity of the law demonstrated, they all wanted to do it. As Davis writes:

The desire to live by real faith is not only adventurous; it's contagious.

The same is true, with the law of faith. Certainly, it is very adventurous to live according to the Law of Faith. It goes against every single part of my human nature that tells me that I have to do something to be right with God. But when I live in a way that bears witness to the fact that I belong to God because of what He has already done for me, there is no doubt that is also contagious.

Note on Ephesians 2:8-9: there is always much discussion among theologian types as to whether this verse is referring to "saved" as the gift of God, or "faith" as the gift of God; it is not clear from the structure of the Greek. I think that both are God's gift. Because, as pointed out in the text of the sermon, if the act of faith arose from our own power then that could also be a form of works about which I might be able to boast: "I have more faith than you have."

But since the Bible also teaches that before we are "saved" we are essentially spiritually dead and that God's salvation actually brings us back to life. I point out that dead people (also enslaved people) can do nothing of their own volition. How can a dead person generate faith? See the verse below and think about how you might resolve this question of faith:

You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved ***us⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ****—by grace you have been saved. (Ephesians 2:1-5).

It would also be a good study to read and see how closely Paul's introductory chapters in Ephesians (1-2) parallel with his opening chapters in Romans.