

# Romans 4 Intro

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Preacher: Nathan Raynor

[0:00] Let me invite you to take your copy of God's Word and turn to Romans chapter 4. It's very good to be back with you this morning. I forgot about how many children this church has.

I'm glad for each and every one of them. We've been working verse by verse through the book of Romans as I've had the occasion to preach. And the plan for this week was Romans chapter 4 verses 1 through 12.

When the bulletins were produced on Thursday, folded and stapled very carefully by yours truly, this was the plan. But then I began to write the introduction to Romans chapter 4.

We've been thinking a lot in these early chapters of the book of Romans about justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. I've said to you repeatedly, that's the theme of this letter. And it begins in Romans chapter 1 and verse 16. There Paul says he's not ashamed of the gospel, for it's the power of God for salvation to all who believe.

[1:09] For the righteous shall live by faith. And it begins to expound upon that. Why? Why do we need this alien righteousness, this righteousness that comes from God?

And he begins to lay that out for us in verse 18 of chapter 1. And then he begins to think about and write about the relationship between the gospel and the Jewish people and the Gentile people. But again, driving this point all along. Justification comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. And I've said to you, I think this is timely for our church, because if we don't get clear the gospel, if we're not redundantly clear on the gospel, then we're going to get distracted by other things.

And so, as I come to chapter 4, and I'm looking to expound on these first 12 verses, if you're there now, you may have in your Bible a subheading similar to mine, Abraham justified by faith.

He's going to go make an Old Testament argument to us about justification coming through faith from Abraham. And then he makes an argument from the mouth of David.

[2:26] And I begin to think, why are we still talking about this? And so I start to write an introduction to set you up for that. And it's an introduction that became a sermon itself in the process.

I thought yesterday, I really need to do this first, and then we'll get back into Romans chapter 4. So, go with me, if you will, to 2 Timothy chapter 3.

I want to talk in brief about the five solas of the Protestant Reformation, and then draw our attention more narrowly to sola scriptura.

The Bible alone is God's final authority. In Latin, sola scriptura.

And it is on its pages that we learn that we are saved by God's grace alone, sola gratia. Through faith alone, sola fide. In Jesus Christ alone, sola Christus.

[3:39] And this salvation and all things that exist for the glory of God alone. Soli Deo Gloria. We are Protestants.

And this is not an insignificant declaration. More than 500 years ago, the Protestant Reformation began, and we are still protesting.

Not just against Roman Catholicism, but also against any world system that says, you can be saved by your works. Which they all do.

That is the mantra of our day. We are not Protestants in theory or by name only. It's not a tip of the hat to our history.

A little more than five years ago, the leadership of your church had to stand against our own denomination's campus ministry. Because they thought it a good idea to partner with the Catholic

organization on campus for an evangelistic event.

[4:46] And we cried, no. No. No. Justification comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Let us not be unclear about this.

Let us not be a people who are distracted by lesser in-house disagreements. We need to grip tightly to the solas. For there is much work to be done.

Beloved, the boldest thing you can do is not take to social media to decry or defend every disparate view. The boldest thing you can do is preach the good news of Jesus Christ to your children, to your spouse and other family members, to your neighbors and co-workers, and to one another.

We are Protestants. We are Protestants. And we are at our best when we hold fast to the solas.

We do not innovate. We hold. We do not waver. We hold. We do not become distracted. We hold. We hold.

[5:55] We hold. We contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. And so you may see, as I begin to write an introduction, my concern is that you might get bored with the message of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

My concern is that we have in us a desire to be innovative, to expand and to explore. And I want to call us this morning to the old ways.

If you want to think of it as boring, go right on ahead. But the text, back to the text, back to the text, back to the text. May we never grow tired of hearing the gospel proclaimed.

Now, I want to be clear. The Protestant Reformation was not the beginning of Christianity.

Christianity. God has had a people that he has sovereignly rescued from the fall by a promise that has been fulfilled in Christ.

The truth of God had not been lost to the world to be rediscovered by an Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther in the 16th century. The truth of God had been preserved by God, although largely lost to the Western world, buried in a Latin translation and by Roman Catholic tradition and papal infallibility, which at very best obscured the truth and at very worst replaced it.

[7:25] God had long been working among his people in Europe to ignite the purifying flame of the Protestant Reformation. A popular analogy goes that God had been stacking the kindling for centuries and that he used Martin Luther's writing as a spark to ignite the fire that burned so brightly across Europe to purify the church.

Faithful men, known and unknown, were used of God. Men like John Wycliffe, who in the 14th century defied Rome and translated the Bible from Latin into English.

They were all fallible men, but they were men used of God. Our history traces through redemptive history by way of the church we see in the book of Acts, through the Reformers and the Puritans to today.

The events of the Reformation were significant and we would not exist as a people for God's possession if not for them. I am not saying that God couldn't have established a church in the Americas without the Reformation, but I am saying that God chose to start a church in the Americas with the Reformation, and we should want to know our history.

We do not want to be known for what we are against, but sometimes to be clear about what you are for, you must state what you are against. The Protestant Reformation began as an attempt to bring correction to the Roman Catholic Church, but upon Rome's rejection of the plain teaching of Scripture, the Reformers abandoned Rome.

[9:05] We are Protestants, and we will protest any teaching, not just Roman Catholic teaching, any teaching against justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone.

We must be clear on this. Luther once said, the time for silence is past, and the time to speak has come.

So let's talk just a bit about Martin Luther before we get into our text today, and the event that happened on October 31st, 1517, as well as the events that followed.

Martin Luther was training to be a lawyer, and he was deeply troubled by the status of his soul. In a lightning storm, ironically praying to Saint Anne, Luther promised that if he survived the storm, he would become a monk.

It was seen as the highest devotion to God in his day. Well, he did survive the storm, and he kept his promise. He became an Augustinian monk.

[10:18] Still troubled by the state of his soul, he was tasked with translating the book of Romans, and not far into chapter 1, he came to verse 17, and the phrase, the righteous shall live by faith.

See, the trouble of his soul was that he thought, I can never do enough. I am not measuring up to God's law, and he was right about this. But then he saw the good news, that the righteous shall live by faith.

On October 31st of 1517, Luther nailed a document that we know as the 95 Theses to the Wittenberg church door, which outlined 95 reasons that the selling of indulgences was not biblical. You see, the Roman Catholic Church had constructed, as all worldly moral systems do, a system of works-based salvation, do good and good will follow.

And they had monetized it in order to build a massive building. At the end of February to the beginning of March of 1518, the 95 Theses were translated into German without Luther's permission by a printer and widely distributed.

[11:37] A lot of people want to give Luther all the credit. He did write the document, but didn't intend for it to be widely distributed. Luther was excommunicated from the Catholic Church in January of 1521, and he was then summoned to the Diet of Worms in April 17th of 1521, where he was asked the questions, Do you acknowledge the authorship of books that had been brought to the Diet and bore your name?

And will you stand by them or retract anything in them? Luther asked for 24 hours to consider his response, and it was at the end of this 24-hour period on April 18th of 1521 where he said the following famous words, Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by clear reason, for I trust neither Pope nor Council alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves, I am bound by the Scriptures I have cited, for my conscience is captive to the Word of God.

I cannot and will not recant anything, since to act against one's conscience is neither safe nor right. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand.

May God help me. Martin Luther was declared a heretic and traitor to the state and sentenced to death. But a kidnapping was staged and he was hidden away in a castle where he promptly translated the New Testament into German in a matter of months.

Why? Because he believed in sola scriptura. He saw the great importance of putting the Bible into the people's hands.

[13:27] And so let's look at 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 14, and into chapter 4, and verse 4 briefly this morning. Before we read it, I would like to remind you, as I do each Lord's Day, beloved, that this is God's Word to us, written for His glory and our good.

We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Paul writes to Timothy, but as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.

And now from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good one.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead and by His appearing and His kingdom preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season.

Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

[14:56] So a brief outline for this morning. Number one, the scripture alone is God's final authority. Number two, the scripture alone is God's final authority for justification.

And number three, the scripture alone is God's final authority for sanctification. So firstly, the scripture alone is God's final authority.

We'll take the text a bit out of order. Look at chapter four, verses one through four. Here we see Paul give to Timothy a simple charge.

A big charge, but a simple one. Two, verse two, preach the word. Be ready, all the time is what he's saying, to bring about the correction and the encouragement that the church is going to need.

And at the end of verse two, he says, with complete patience and teaching. Do this work of preaching the word with patience and careful attention.

[16:07] Do it in season and out of season. Do it in various forms and fashions. It's important that you do this work, Timothy, because, verse three tells us, a time is coming, and I say to you, and is here, when people don't want to hear sound teaching.

They don't want to sit under the plain explanation of scripture. They want it entrapped with lots of frivolities. Beloved, I will tell you, I am so tired of seeing the kind of youth group shenanigans that go on around us in church.

It is absolute silliness that goes on in the churches of our age. Why is this allowed to happen? Why is it tolerated?

I just look at these things and I go, you all would leave immediately if I did some of the things I see happening. Why do these guys get away with this stuff? It's because the people, they're gathering for themselves, they're accumulating teachers.

There's lots of them piled up that are suiting their passions, their desire to be entertained, their desire to live the lives that they want to live, to make a Christ of their own creation.

[17:31] They're gathering teachers that will support this very thing, not men that will just boldly proclaim what the text says. And they're wandering off into myths, away from the truth.

If there was ever a day to cry, *Sola Scriptura*, this is that day. Now the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* is known as the formal principle.

When the Supreme Court is trying a difficult case, they look to other legal decisions and laws to see what unites them or norms them. They look for precedent.

They look to consensus among legal decisions and laws as an appeal to an authority that is greater than themselves. If you keep up with Supreme Court decisions, you'll hear much of this language.

Martin Luther, during the Reformation, pulled in his legal training when referring to Scripture as the norm of norms that cannot be normed.

[18:39] Stating, it is the absolute authority because it is from God himself. Nothing else can change the meaning of the Scripture. The text, it stands on its own.

The norm of norms that cannot be normed or, in the Latin, if you want to nerd with me for a moment, *norma normus non normata*, which is cooler to say.

*Norma normus non normata*. All this to say, we believe in *Sola Scriptura* and saying that is to say that we believe that the Bible is God's final authority.

It is a closed canon. We're not looking for extra revelatory information. God has spoken in his word. If somebody says to me, God told me, I say, book, chapter, and verse, please. How has God told you? from the text, I would love to see it there.

[19:43] Now, to say that Scripture is the final authority is not to be misunderstood, that Scripture is the only authority. The Bible should not be read alone.

Martin Luther once said, the Scripture's authority is not a naked authority. So we have helps as we open up the text. I'm glad for this. I don't sit in a cave just with the text.

We have some helps and some ways that we can bring understanding and bearing to the text. We have church history. We're making a bit of an appeal to that today, aren't we?

Not as an ultimate authority, but as an authority. What has the church believed about this, one doctrine or another? If we find ourselves coming up with some novel idea about the Bible, it may be, likely is, dangerous.

Something new to be discovered. Hmm. If perhaps no Christian in the history of the church has thought what you think could be a problem for your theology, what has time taught us about any

given doctrine?

[20:55] And we see helps from church history in the form of creeds, confessions, and catechisms. These tools are a great way to discover what the church has believed historically.

We have used here the Apostles Creed. That's found embedded in the Heidelberg Catechism. The Heidelberg Catechism, as we've been reciting it together on Sunday mornings, has been explaining the Apostles Creed, what is meant by that.

And you will note, if you ever look at any of these confessions, at the footnoting that's right there in your bulletin for the Scripture reference, right? The Bible being the ultimate authority, right?

The Norma Normas Non Normata, right? The confession is not on the same level as the Scripture, but helps us to understand what the Scripture teaches on any given doctrine.

These are helpful things to us. They ought to be taken up and considered carefully as they read the text. Jeremiah chapter 6 and verse 16, there God says, stand by the roads and look and ask for the ancient paths where the good way is and walk in it and find rest for your souls.

[22:19] Isn't that good? Stand by the roads and look and ask for the ancient paths where the good way is and walk in it and find rest for your souls. But then God says in Jeremiah chapter 6 and verse 16 of Israel, but they said, we will not walk in it.

And I pray that we would be ones who say we will walk in it, right, the good way and find rest for our souls. You also have, along with the Scripture as a way of reading it and understanding it, the teaching of your leaders.

The author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 13 and verse 7, remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God, those who worked to faithfully unpack the text for you, those who are considering the culture in which we live and the needs of our fellowship and are working prayerfully to get out ahead of you and help equip you for the days in which we live.

So the Scripture alone is God's final authority. Paul says this to Timothy, you need to continue to preach the word because people aren't going to want to hear it, but keep doing it anyway.

And as we'll see at the very end of chapter 3, it's because God is himself its source and it is a sufficient text. Second point, the Scripture alone is God's final authority for justification.

[23:54] If you're unfamiliar with this term, it means to be declared righteous, holy, without wrong, with all the law keeping required of you before God.

You can see why we use the word justification. We're not trying to be churchy, but it summarizes a big idea. We will all stand before the judgment of God one day.

We will either be sent to eternal punishment as a reprobate, or we will be seen as justified, as having all of our sins expunged from our record and being given righteousness by Christ.

And the Scripture alone is God's authority for justification. We see this in verse 14 and 15 of chapter 3. There's this exhortation there to Timothy to continue in what he had learned, what he had learned from Paul and how as a child he was acquainted with the writings by his mother and his grandmother.

And at the end of verse 15, Paul there says, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

[25:10] The Scripture teaches us that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. And we must hear this message.

It must be taken up and read. It must be proclaimed to us. We must hear the good news of the word that we might be saved.

I was really grateful for a bit of an anecdote. Many years ago I went together for the gospel with some men from our church and a man named Ash Harris who some of you know was there with us. And at the beginning as a curiosity, most of the men at this conference are leaders in churches or seminary students. And they had us all stand up and then be seated as questions were asked about how it was we heard the gospel.

And I was very encouraged as a pastor of, a father of children, a pastor of a church full of children, that the predominant group that sat, sat when the question was asked if your parents shared the gospel with you and you came to faith in Christ because of that proclamation, sit down.

[26:23] And I mean the stadium was like kind of sitting. A massive number of the people in that room came to faith because of the faithful preaching of the gospel by their parents being encouraged parents.

But then I was especially encouraged as Ash Harris did not sit for that or many other invitations to sit and finally he was part of the group of like, okay, well any other way I can't think of, go ahead and sit down.

And so I just leaned over and said, Ash, when did you first hear the gospel? And Ash first heard the gospel when he was deployed in Iraq and had been handed a New Testament by a military chaplain handing him out and Ash said, this seems important and stuck it in his pocket.

And he'd come back from a particular mission that was rattling to him and he sat in the shade of a Humvee and he opened up the book of John and began to read about the word made flesh.

And Ash became a Christian through the reading of the text. So whether it's proclaimed from our mouths or taken up and read, the scripture is what teaches us how it is we come to faith in Christ.

[27:45] Paul writes in Romans 10, I'll look forward to unpacking this in some time, a year maybe. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.

But they have not all obeyed the gospel, for Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us? So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Psalms 19, verse 7 and following, the law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever. The rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

[28:49] More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. moreover, by them is your servant warned, and keeping them there is great reward.

The Bible, like sola scriptura, the Bible alone is God's authority for justification. It is the way in which we are made wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Beloved, we should be a people of the book for our sake, for the sake of others. Thirdly, the scripture alone is God's final authority for sanctification.

Look at verses 16 and 17. For growing up in the faith, having been justified, how is it that we then pursue holiness?

We're given the spirit of Christ that we might understand, apply, and be empowered to live the word of Christ. Christ.

[29:57] Here Paul writes, all scripture breathed out by God, exhaled by God, he's the very source of it, and it's profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, in holiness, in right living, in law keeping.

It's profitable for these things, and it's profitable to the extent, he qualifies, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Not some good work. We don't need extra revelation to tell us those things. For every good work, it's a sufficient guide for all holiness.

Again, Martin Luther, he said, a simple layman armed with scripture is to be believed above a pope or a council without it.

Scripture is powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the joint and the marrow. It lays bare our hearts.

[31:09] It shows us where we need to repent and pray for the grace to pursue holiness in Christ. So we should want to hear it.

We should want to hear its corrections. It should be sweet to us to be shown our sin that we might repent and pursue Christ.

Psalms 119, verse 9 and following, how can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you.

Let me not wander from your commandments. I have stored up your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. So the word is of great importance and working through it with care matters greatly.

Coming back to what may feel like the simple truth of the gospel. We say to you beloved, especially men, the hill we need to die on.

[32:19] The justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Everything else is subservient to this. Things to discuss and consider, but not the hill to die on.

I am grateful that when we began meeting as a church almost 15 years ago, God had firmly concreted in our hearts the doctrine of the sufficiency of scripture. I am so glad that God had exposed us to the Reformation and to the Puritans, that we could cry together as young men sola scriptura.

I am grateful that God kindly took us to the text and to faithful Christians of the past that took us to the text. I am grateful that our great desire was to see Christ magnified through the teaching, understanding, and living of his word.

I am grateful that God has gathered a people who desire the same. I am grateful that the pressure I feel from you is a pressure toward faithfulness.

I am so glad for that. I don't stand up here in opposition to you as I try to be faithful with the text. I know you want faithfulness. That's such an encouragement to me and I know to the other men who preach on Sundays.

[33:41] You just want us to bring you the text. Keep at that. Pressure us in that way. I am grateful that you would take serious issue with me dressing up as a Disney character on a Sunday morning.

Ask me if you don't know what I'm talking about. Fire me the Sunday that I do it. That's how you know I'm ready to be fired, right? I show up. I show up as a Disney character.

I am grateful that next week you will gather once again and hear me Lord willing proclaim the excellencies of a salvation that is told to us in the scripture alone and that comes to us by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone to the glory of God alone.

so that was my introduction to Romans chapter 4 verses 1 through 12. I hadn't quite written all that but I had written a lot of it and so we'll pick up the text next week Lord willing but in closing let me read to you a poem by Martin Luther.

Feelings come and feelings go and feelings are deceiving. My warrant is the word of God not else is worth believing.

[35:03] Though all my heart should feel condemned for want of some sweet token there is one greater than my heart whose word cannot be broken.

I'll trust in God's unchanging word till soul and body sever for though all things shall pass away his word shall stand forever.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together.