

Romans 4:1-12

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[0 : 00] So, the first point this morning. Justification by faith apart from works eliminates the ability to boast. It eliminates the ability to boast. Verses 1-5 is where we find this from our text.

! The word in the church is not exempt from those same things.

Lines from movies like, show me the money. Or, a man's got to do what a man's got to do. Sit and stew in our minds. Our society, and not just America, is full of examples.

Athletes embody this me first attitude. The wide receiver from the NFL, Terrell Owens, famous for saying, I love me some me.

Grammatically incorrect, but I love me some me. It's so bad among athletes that college football is starting in the next three weeks that the NCAA sets up regulations and celebration rules that if a player scores a touchdown or does something great, he starts celebrating himself.

[1 : 21] He's penalized 15 yards or whatever it is, and he hurts the team. What they want is they want the players to celebrate the team and not the individual. It just comes out of that person, though.

Which is ironic, because isn't that what sports are good for, is teaching kids about teamwork? It just comes out of us. Let's be realistic.

It's what we are born with. It's why we have to teach our kids how to share. We went to see a Votie Bauckham conference last weekend, and one thing that he reminded us of is, you know, parents will complain, well, my kids just don't share.

And he asked a question to that parent. He said, did you teach them how to share? Ouch. Ouch. As a parent of four, yeah, did I teach my kids how to share?

I don't know. Or do I just yell at them and say, share with your brother or sister. Be nice. We have to teach them these things, because we are born with selfishness.

[2 : 31] It is no wonder that pornography is a multi-billion dollar business, because we think about ourselves. We're selfish.

It feeds into that. Adam and Eve, when they sinned, they acted on the self-gratifying desire and not on the selfless God-given joy. So to our text, we can go all the way back to chapter 3, verse 27, which reads, Then what becomes of boasting?

Paul says, It is excluded. This work of salvation is a work of God, so there is no boasting. It is terminated. It is not possible.

And in chapter 4, verses 1 and 2 says, What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather, according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about.

Agreed. The next three words, or four words, but not before God. It is impossible to boast before God.

[3 : 42] Before we go any further, I thought it would be good if I could define salvation for us. Not the act of being saved or not the way you get saved, but the three phases of salvation.

Because I'm throwing around this word justification, and some of you might not even know what that means. So, here's where we sit. Three phases of salvation. We have justification, we have sanctification, and we have glorification.

Now, justification is that moment of being in right standing with God. When Christ, through His obedience on the cross, bore the wrath from the Father that we deserved.

So, because of Christ's death, He gave us, or in Christ's death, He gave us His righteousness. So now, as a Christian, we are righteous in Christ.

We are made right. We are not judged by our sin. Our sin is covered by the blood of Christ, and we are made right and can stand before the Father. Sanctification is the ongoing process.

[4 : 45] So, justification is a one-time thing. Okay? It is a one-time at salvation, at faith. Now, sanctification is an ongoing process of God perfecting us through trials, through struggles, through discipline, and through everyday life.

Now, on one hand, we are perfect. Okay? On one hand, at justification, we are made right. But on the other hand, living it out, we're not. Romans chapter 7 reminds us that we still struggle to fight against the flesh and sin.

But God is perfecting us. He is working in us. He is setting us apart. And the last thing, the last phase is glorification. Now, this is the final perfection of every saint.

This is what we look forward to when God will perfect us. This is what Peter talks about as the living hope. The hope that we'll never die, that never changes until it comes to fruition.

We have this hope, this glorification that's going to happen. Okay? So these are the three phases of salvation. So when I talk about justification, I'm talking about that moment, that moment of faith when we are made right before God because of the work of Christ.

[6 : 11] So, justification by faith apart from works eliminates the ability to boast in ourselves. It is impossible to boast.

And when he's talking about boast here, he's not talking about check out these skills that I have. Watch me on the court or watch me on the field or look how good I can spill these words or write or whatever it is.

He's talking about works that we think lead to salvation. This kind of boasting. It cannot be done. It cannot be done.

The world around us is saturated with self-indulgence. It is no surprise when we try to base salvation on our own works. No surprise when we try to say, look what I've done.

Before Christ, we are selfish. So that selfishness even infiltrates our religious beliefs.

[7 : 15] So, if I just go to church, if I just love my neighbor, if I just tithe, or if I just attend a new members class, or if I just get baptized, then, then, I can be saved and go to heaven.

That's not the way it works. It is impossible for those actions to lead to salvation. And that's the point that Paul is making here. If we think that those things are going to lead to salvation is a strand of legalism.

John Stott says, legalism is the misguided attempt to earn our salvation by obedience to the law. And we make laws all the time.

If I just do this. Let's say, let's say you are a humble, you are a humble introvert. Let's say you would never brag or boast about anything you have done.

You say, that's not me. I would never do that. There's going to be a time when you are going to be forced from your gut, from your soul.

[8 : 27] There's going to be a moment when you're going to be forced to explain why you chose to live the life that you live. There's going to be that time before the King of Kings at judgment.

And the news for you is going to be very bad. you will say anything to avoid the punishment that sin deserves.

Now, as a Christian, we won't have to talk. We'll have an advocate for us who says, who claims us, whose righteousness we now have.

See, the gospel works the opposite in us and out of us. See, we, with being self-centered and selfish, we want to exalt ourselves.

We want to boast about what we can do and accomplish. The gospel, though, changes that. We start boasting about what God has done. The justification that He has shown us by faith.

[9 : 32] That's why we're called to be salt and light to our neighbors. It says, don't hide it.

It says, don't cover it with a basket. Don't cover the light with a basket. We have this to share. The gospel changes that from the inside out.

So verse 1-2, now 3-5. It gives us the account of Abraham receiving righteousness. It says, for what does the Scripture say?

Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Now, the one who works his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due. And to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

It is nothing that Abraham did, but it is what God did in Abraham. God gave him the faith to believe. And because he believed, he was counted as righteous.

[10:40] Verse 5 says, and to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. righteousness. This same action of being counted can be applied to you and to me.

The same counted that was applied to Abraham can be applied now to us. But, like Abraham, we have no room to boast. We are the clay in the potter's hands.

Read Romans 9. Take a look. The clay doesn't say to the potter, why did you make me this way? The clay just gets molded into whatever he gets molded into. When God changes our hearts, He gives us something to boast about.

I've already referenced this. Matthew 5. You are the light of the world. Nobody will cover the light with a basket. It is something to boast about. It is something to share what Christ has done.

That light only comes from Christ. Matthew 13. 44 tells of the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which a man found and covered up.

[11:59] Then, in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and he buys the field. The work of God is big enough and good enough to boast about and it's also good enough to sell everything and go buy a piece of land.

So, the grace of God can move us to sell everything. Would you? The grace of God can cause us to stop going to school and move to the mission field.

Would you? The grace of God can cause you to run to Iran. Would you? The grace of God can cause you to stay right where you are.

Can you? In all situations, the light that God has put in you must not be covered by a basket. And the way it's covered by a basket is that self-gratifying part of us.

That selfish part of us. Once we cover the light, who's going to see it? They're going to see us and see what we treasure. So, don't treasure what you think is light.

[13:15] Treasure the actual light and let the world see it. So, not only does justification by faith apart from works eliminate boasting, it is also a blessing beyond our comprehension.

Verse 7 and 8. quoted from Psalms, David wrote this and it says, Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin. Now, this truth, to measure blessing is impossible.

And this blessing is huge. So, I've made a list to give us a glimmer, just a fraction of this great blessing.

So, in Christ, your sins are forgiven. Any and everything, past, present, and future. In Christ, your sins are covered by the blood of Jesus, which means God the Father sees only the blood and not the sin.

[14:27] In Christ, your sins will not be counted against you. In Christ, your sins have been blotted out. In Christ, your sins have been thrown as far as the east is from the west.

In Christ, you are righteous before God. In Christ, you have been adopted into the family of God. In Christ, your inheritance is immeasurable. In Christ, you can call Abba, Father, Daddy.

In Christ, there is nothing you can do that will make God love you any less. In Christ, there is nothing you can do that will make God love you any more. In Christ, you can live with a confidence and a boldness in Christ.

In Christ, you have hope beyond this world. In Christ, you can love those you wouldn't love otherwise. In Christ, you are being perfected, so rejoice.

In Christ, God is working all things for your good. In Christ, the Creator of the universe who spoke the stars and the mountains and rivers into existence wants community with you.

[15:38] In Christ, you are not alone and will never be alone. In Christ, you have a comforter who can relate to anything you go through. Anything.

In Christ, God is for you no matter the struggle. In Christ, God is always at work for your joy and His glory.

All of this from Scripture, all of this can go on and on and on. fraction of the blessing. Now, I would encourage you to make your own list.

Look at Scriptures. Treasure the God of the Bible by exploring His Word. Make a list for yourself of these things. If all this is true, if every bit of this is fact, then live different than the Mormon.

Live different than the Jehovah's Witness. Live different than the Jewish rabbi or the Catholic priest. Because they don't have these truths to cling to. Don't just be the nice guy.

[16 : 49] Be the girl of the guy who loves Jesus. So not only does justification by faith apart from works eliminate boasting, which is a good thing, not a bad thing, not only is it a blessing beyond our comprehension, but it also defines works as an outpouring of faith.

And this frees us. Find this in verse 9 through the first part of verse 11. Read along with me. Is this blessing then only for the circumcised or also for the uncircumcised?

We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.

He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. Now, Paul gives us three questions.

Now, these questions he sees are going to be asked when he goes ahead and asks them and answers them for his argument. Now, we're going to focus on the last question first.

[18 : 02] That was the timing of Abraham being counted as righteous. When was it? Was it before or was it after circumcision? Now, if you're like me, knowing the stories that I know from the Bible, I'm not going to think of circumcision as the moment of salvation for Abraham.

I might think of, okay, when was Abraham righteous? Was it before he went and followed God and God called him?

Or was it after? Or I might think of where he took Isaac up. Was it before he took Isaac up to be sacrificed or after? Because those are big deals to me. I mean, those are great moments of faith. Not circumcision. Although, as you'll find out, I mean, Abraham was pretty old. Here's why it revolves around circumcision.

John MacArthur wrote, and he put it best, and I'm just going to quote him. No sense to me trying to write it. Most Jews in the New Testament times were thoroughly convinced that circumcision was not only, not only the unique mark that set them apart from all other men as God's chosen people.

[19 : 18] So, it not only set them apart, but was also the means by which they became acceptable to God. So, they put all this weight and all this importance on this one act so that they could be acceptable to God.

See, many Jews believed that salvation was based on their obedience to God in being circumcised. circumcised. Now, on top of that, their eternal security.

So, they could say to God, look, God, I'm circumcised. I'm in heaven. Listen to this. Rabbi Menachem writes in his commentary on the book of Moses, our rabbis have said that no circumcised man will ever see hell.

They have made circumcision a big deal. Listen to this. From the Jewish book entitled Akedeth Jezahok, Abraham sits before the gates of hell and does not allow that any circumcised Israelite should enter there.

So, Abraham sits and if the man is circumcised, you're not going in here, buddy, go over there. You don't want in here, you don't want in hell. They have elevated circumcision.

[20 : 42] Now, I'm not telling you these things to say, look how much research I did. Listen to these words. Our rabbis have said that no circumcised man will ever see hell.

That's a big deal. Abraham sits before the gate of hell and does not allow that any circumcised Israelite should enter there. They have elevated a religious act and thought, believed, that this religious act saved them.

This religious act is where they became righteous. It's like any other religion, though, truthfully. Religion has been created by man for the purpose of being God or reaching God without Christ Jesus.

Religions have been created by man for the purpose of being God or reaching God without Christ Jesus. But, justification by faith apart from works is not a religious activity or an action.

It is a God activity. And because it is God, the works are a result of what God has done. So the timing of Abraham being justified is an important question.

[22 : 06] Now, we can just read the text or we can go to Genesis 15 and see where Abraham was made righteous and then Genesis 17 where he gets circumcised and say, okay, well, it clearly was before.

Pretty simple for us. Verse 11 of Romans chapter 4. Abraham received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

circumcision was established by God first as a sign of the covenant between God and Abraham. Genesis 17 11.

It was to remind the Jewish people of the covenant that God had made and to remind them who they belonged to and to set apart the people of Israel as God's chosen people. That was the purpose, nothing more, which is a clear example of how we can deform even the good things that God sets up for His children. Now, in Abraham's case, obedience, Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised.

[23 : 20] Obedience followed being made righteous. Because he was righteous, he followed, he obeyed. He wasn't counted as righteous before and then once he obeyed, poof, he's made righteous.

It is clearly communicated in Scripture that it was before. Likewise, for us, our actions should flow from what God has done, not flowing to what God is going to do.

So if we work hard enough, God will then save us and find us worthy. Our actions should flow from what God has done.

Which means we look forward to loving those we think we can't. We love the body of Christ. We love gathering with the saints.

Which means we are willing to go anywhere, wherever that leads us. Which means we love God's creation more than others. Which means we hate sin.

[24 : 25] Which means we mourn for our lost friends. and which means we cherish the mercies of God which are new every day. Now one of the major arguments against this doctrine of justification by faith apart from works has been that this kind of thinking leads to loose living.

Well, if you were born again, if you were made righteous without having to do anything, then now you have a license to go do anything. That's the argument.

Well, I say it leads to obedient living, and Paul does as well. Turn to Romans chapter 6. Two chapters. Romans chapter 6.

Verse 1, he starts by saying, what shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? And his answer, by no means. But look at verse 17.

Romans chapter 6 verse 17. But thanks be to God that you were once slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.

[25 : 39] Verse 18. And having been set free from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness. Which means, if you're a slave of something, you're going to do what the slave master says.

And if you're a slave to righteousness, then you're going to do righteousness. out of being made righteous, we do then righteous things. Abraham was righteous and he obeyed rightly, which means he, in his case, was circumcised.

Our fourth point this morning. Justification by faith apart from works allows that all people can be children of Abraham. allows that all people can be children of Abraham.

Turn back to Romans chapter 4 verse 11 and 12. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still circumcised.

The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised so that the righteousness would be counted to them as well. And to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

[27 : 05] Now God counting righteousness to Abraham when he did before allows that all types of people, no matter their ethnicity or race, their religious background or their non-religious background, black or white, Jew or Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised can call Abraham their spiritual father.

I started to feel in the Martin Luther King speech there for a second. We too can walk as Abraham walked. We too can be counted as righteousness.

righteousness. It also means though that God will have mercy on who he wants to have mercy on. We cannot and must not put limits on who we think God should or will save.

That is not our job. Our job is to proclaim and boast about Christ. Not to judge somebody and say, God, you're not going to save them. They're long gone.

All people can be children of God. Any type of person. No matter who. So I can look at the Muslim on TV and say, who's bombing things and say, yes, he can be born again.

[28 : 31] He can receive the grace that I have been shown. Because he is no worse than I am. That's what justification by faith does. It shakes up our thinking.

Verse 11 says, again, Abraham received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still circumcised.

Circumcision was the seal that confirmed or authenticated being counted righteous. It reminded the Jews and God of the covenant that was made.

It's what made that covenant binding. Now, we too have a seal. We have the Holy Spirit. In Christ, we have the Holy Spirit.

We are secure in Christ with the seal of the Holy Spirit. Authenticated, confirmed by the Holy Spirit.

[29 : 31] Now, if any person, any people group can be counted as righteousness, the opposite is true as well. Not everyone who was circumcised was counted as righteous.

Ishmael was circumcised but not part of the covenant. For you today, what matters is not what you've done or what religious guidelines you follow.

What matters is whether or not you have been counted as righteous as in Christ. To be counted, this word counted, talks of an exchange or a credit.

The only way that your bank account can be credited is by putting money in it. Credit that account. Either you or the bank had to have the money to then credit your account.

With me so far? To credit someone, there must be ownership. God is the owner of righteousness. He is righteous and He is the source of righteousness.

[30 : 39] He has given it to those who believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. There is nothing fancy or difficult about this. It's clear and it's simple.

There are three things that you have to do in order to believe. Just three. Three simple things. The first thing is you have to admit and realize that you are a sinner unable to be righteous apart from the work of God.

Second thing is that you have to believe that Jesus lived a sinless, perfect life for sinners like you and me. He died for your sin and rose from the grave to free you from the bondage of sin.

So believe that you are a sinner. believe what Jesus did. And the third thing, Jesus can and will give you a new life if you repent of your sins and believe that he is Lord.

So you repent and you believe. God, I will give you a new life if Now we don't say that every Sunday morning. But in a topic like justification by faith apart from words, we can get the doctrine, we can get the knowledge, but we have to have our lives changed.

[32 : 04] Otherwise it doesn't mean anything. So I throw those three things out at you and I plead with you, if you do not know Christ, believe in him this morning.

I hope and I pray that I have shown you clearly how it works. Now I know there's guys in this room, there are guys in this room that would love to have a conversation with you.

Just look around, there's tons of guys. There's John, there's Wes, there's Josh, there's Nathan, there's me, there's Daryl, there's Stan, there's tons of guys in here that if you do not know Christ, that they would love to talk to you about it.

Don't wait. Don't hesitate. Let's pray together. Let's pray.