

Romans 4:13-25

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Date: 03 September 2023

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. I'm glad you're here with us this morning. Please take your copy of God's Word and turn to Romans chapter 4. Today's text is Romans chapter 4, verses 13 through 25.

! We will see in today's text, once again, that we are justified, which means to be declared righteous or morally perfect through faith alone.

Do not grow weary of hearing such good news. We will read it, and we will preach it, and we will recite it, we will pray it, we will sing it each Lord's Day when we gather.

Because of my fickle heart and wayward emotions, I need to be reminded of God's loving kindness to me in the person and work of Jesus Christ as often as possible.

And I believe that you do, too. So, just this week, in addition, on social media, a platform that's strangely now called X, I dipped my toe into a debate amongst professing conservative Christians concerning justification by faith alone.

[1 : 20] And to my great surprise, saw many deny this important doctrine. Beloved, I said to you some weeks ago, we are Protestants.

And we are at our very best when we hold fast to the solas. We believe and declare that the Bible alone teaches us that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.

And all of this is to the glory of God alone. We do not innovate. We hold. We do not waver.

We hold. We do not become distracted. We hold. We contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

This is the hill to die on. For our sake, for the sake of others, to the glory of God, we hold. And so join me as Paul continues to make his case in Romans chapter 4, verse 13, through the end of the chapter.

[2 : 28] Beloved, this is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good. And so we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Verse 13, for the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, there is no transgression.

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring. Not only to the adherent of the law, but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

As it is written, I have made you the father of many nations. In the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

[3 : 30] In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations. As he had been told, so shall your offspring be. He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead, since he was about a hundred years old.

Or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.

Fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. This is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness. But the words it was counted to him were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also.

It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus, our Lord. Who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Now, this is a lot of text for today.

Thirteen verses. And there are phrases in here that I want to just stop on for weeks at a time. But I think that the church will be better served to take it in a chunk and to move past it.

[4 : 39] So, as I read that to you, if there was a phrase that popped in your mind, you said, Oh, I can't wait to hear the extensive explanation of that. It may not come today. And the scripture so often gets to be unfolded or peeled back like an onion.

There's much to mine out of the text. We won't be able to cover it all today. Our time together is brief. The argument can be a little bit difficult to track, but we're going to do so our best with a simple outline, which is often three points, but today it's five.

So, let me give those to you quickly, and then we'll dive into the first point. So, number one, by grace alone through faith alone. We see this in verses 13 through 16.

Secondly, the object of faith, verse 17. Thirdly, the obstacles of faith, verses 18 and 19. Fourthly, the nature of faith, verses 20 and 21.

And lastly, the result of faith, verses 22 through 25. So, first, by grace alone through faith alone. Paul is going on to make this case that this is how we are justified.

[5 : 54] This is how we are saved from the wrath of God. By grace alone through faith alone. He speaks in today's text about the relationship between the law and the gospel, which we will see carried throughout the letter.

And it's an important, but sometimes difficult thing to get exactly right. The relationship between law and gospel. But we need to get it right.

In verses 13 and 15, Paul teaches us two important facts concerning the law. The first one is that you cannot be saved by the law.

You are not and cannot be morally perfect. And therefore, cannot be declared righteous because of your works. This is an absolute impossibility.

All of us have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Notice there in verse 13, the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be the heir of the world did not come through the law, because it could not, but through the righteousness of faith.

[7 : 09] This is the way that Abraham was justified. We see that at the beginning of chapter 4. If you weren't with us last week, I really encourage you to go back and read chapter 4, beginning in verse 1.

Or, perhaps just read from the beginning of the letter. We are justified by faith alone. But what do we make of verse 14?

There he says, It is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs. If this is the case, faith is null and the promise is void.

It doesn't seem to suggest that some people are able to keep the law? If anybody were to do it, then the promise would be void.

But perhaps we're helped by another translation of this verse from the NASB 95, where there it says, For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified.

[8 : 12] You'll also notice in verse 16 that same thing. Not only to the adherent of the law, but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham.

So this verse could be understood sociologically or nationalistically. I think that the former is correct. I think Paul is meaning to reference the Jewish people, but I think more than that what he's saying is those who attempt to live by the law.

Which largely would have been the partly Jewish audience that he's writing to here, but also applies to us. Those who have God's law and try to live by it.

Endeavor to be a people of or adherence to the law and to find our justification there. If we were able to do so, then the promise that comes through faith would be void.

[9 : 14] But nobody can. Nobody has and nobody will be a faithful adherent to the law. And therefore, faith is not null and the promise is not void.

If you back up a little bit into Romans chapter 4, there in verse 9 and following, Paul says, is this blessing then only for the circumcised or also for the uncircumcised?

For 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? So here there, him keeping the law.

God commanded a thing that he did. He says, No, 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.

His obedience and circumcision was the evidence of the faith that he had already expressed in God's promises. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised so that righteousness would be counted to them as well and to make him the father of the circumcised who were not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

[10:41] So if you're tracking with me, I hope that you are. The point is that you cannot be saved by the law. Secondly, we learn in verse 15 that the law exposes our sinfulness.

There Paul says, again, this is a verse I think we could spend much time on, but he says, in brief, the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, there is no transgression.

Now he is not saying that we get to remain blissfully ignorant. Not at all what he's trying to say. He's not saying run from any command because he's made the case extensively in the previous chapters that whether Jew or Greek, we have sinned.

Hear what he says in Romans chapter 3, verse 9 and following. He says, we have already charged. And he's referring to chapter 1, verse 18, all the way through chapter 2, verse 29.

We have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin. As it is written, none is righteous.

[11:58] No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside together. They have become worthless. No one does good.

Not even one. The law, whether written on paper or written in our hearts, exposes our rebellion against the most holy God.

It makes us aware of a need. And that need is met by Christ. The law is meant to lead us to Christ. Let me show you another place that Paul speaks to this in Galatians chapter 3. I think it would serve you to join me there. Galatians chapter 3. This letter being written specifically to address a heresy that was being taught in the church where Jewish people who had professed faith in Christ were coming and telling Greek-professing Christians that they must be circumcised in order to be found right with God.

You're going to be justified by faith plus circumcision is the claim that they were making. And Paul is addressing this and he is clear and pointed in his words.

[13:13] But he says this beginning in verse 23. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed.

So then the law was our guardian until Christ came in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come. We are no longer under a guardian for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.

So here we see in our text for today, Romans chapter 4, the law brings wrath. It shows us our transgression. And here Paul says it's a guardian for us.

Let me read to you a quote from an article published in Ligonier Ministries Table Talk magazine. I'd like to attribute it to an author but they didn't so I can't. But from Table Talk magazine an author writes, in ancient Rome the guardian was a slave entrusted with the care of another's child when the child reached age six.

Until the child reached adolescence the guardian was like a nanny who watched over the child and ensured that he made it to and from school. The guardian was not a professional teacher but he did serve as a tutor who at home reviewed with the child the material learned in the classroom.

[14:37] Additionally, the guardian was the child's main disciplinarian. He corrected bad manners and helped his charge learn etiquette. Depending on the individual, a guardian might discipline the child harshly with canings and whippings or with greater tenderness and care.

Some children hated their guardian. others formed a strong lifelong bond with him. This background enriches our understanding of the purpose of the law and why it is no longer the defining principle of the life of the believer.

If the Mosaic law is like a guardian, then by definition it was not a permanent guardian since the job of the guardian was over when the child was grown up.

Though the believing community learned much from the law, just as a child learned manners from his guardian, the law had the important job of taking us to school, of leading us to Christ.

So this is the point of the law Paul is arguing here in Galatians, right? To move us along, to bring us up into adulthood, right? Into a proper understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[15:51] It prods us in that direction. So, the law exposes our sinfulness that we might by faith believe in Christ.

Verse 16, that is why it depends on faith. In order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring, right? The faith that is granted by grace.

God, in his loving kindness, saving a people for his praise. Not only to the adherent of the law, but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

We are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, right? Beloved, this is of dire importance.

And brings us to our next point. Let's observe some things about Abraham's faith. So, the object of Abraham's faith.

[16:58] Verse 17, as it is written, the text says, and this is from Genesis chapter 17 and verse 5, I have made you the father of many nations.

In the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. The object of faith, Paul tells us, was the God of the promise.

This is what Abraham believed in, the God of the promise. His faith was not an aimless faith. faith.

He believed that God could and would do exactly what he had promised to do.

Now, this deserves some exploration, so join me in the book of Genesis, and let's look briefly at the account. We looked at it a bit last week. Let's go to Genesis chapter 15 and verse 1.

Genesis chapter 15. Begin reading in verse 1, and it'll lead us to a phrase in verse 6, which Paul is recounting for us again and again.

[18:11] He's quoting again and again. He believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. So, beginning in verse 1. After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision.

Fear not, Abram, I am your shield, your reward shall be very great. But Abram said, O Lord God, what will you give me? For I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eleazar of Damascus.

He's remembering these grand promises that God has made, and he said, but I'm still childless.

How will it come to pass? Verse 3, And Abram said, Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.

And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, This man shall not be your heir. Your very own son shall be your heir. And he brought him outside and said, Look toward heaven and number the stars if you are able to number them.

Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. And then verse 6, And he, Abram, believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness.

[19:16] He believed, he believed that God would do what God said that he would do. Now, this belief is tested later in the book of Genesis.

So turn to Genesis chapter 22. A number of things have happened. Verse 1 says, After these things, I encourage you to read them, God tested Abraham.

What was he testing? He was testing his faith. Testing his faith. And he said to him, Abraham, and he said, Here I am. He said, Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.

Kill your son. Sacrifice your son. Right? The one whom I've said the promise will come. Right? And the account says simply this. Verse 3, So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and his son Isaac.

And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar.

[20:36] So he takes the things he needs, he travels three days and comes to the place. Verse 5, Then Abraham said to his young men, Stay here with the donkey.

I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you. Very significant verse we'll see in just a moment. Right? I and the boy will go and here I and the boy will return.

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac's son and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together.

If you read on or if you're familiar with the story, we discover that Abraham intended to follow through on the sacrifice of his son. At the very last moment, God stays his hand and provides instead a ram for the sacrifice and then restates the promise that he made to Abraham.

So we pick up in verse 15. And the angel of the Lord came to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven as the sand that is on the seashore and your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because you have obeyed my voice.

[22 : 07] Now remember, the whole matter was a test of his faith so his obedience proved his belief. This is why we have to read and understand the Bible in its context.

You can simply pull out verse 18 and go, See? It was the obedience that justified him. But if we look at the narrative in its total, no, no, it's his obedience that simply showed that he believed.

It's a confident belief, an unwavering belief in God's providence. It evidenced his faith. But it was his faith that was counted to him as righteousness.

Now with this in mind, I want you to join me in a New Testament text. Go to the book of Hebrews, chapter 11. Remember Genesis 22 and verse 5.

I kind of pointed out to you. The author of Hebrews in chapter 11, a chapter that begins with a definition of faith. There he says, Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

[23 : 16] And he launches into this great hall of witnesses. All of these people that by faith were commended before God. And in verse 17 of Hebrews 11, he says this, By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.

And then, verse 5. Verse 19 is widely agreed to be divine commentary on Genesis 22, verse 5. Remember it said, Abraham said to his young men, Stay here with the donkey. I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you. I and the boy will go, will worship, and I and the boy will return.

Listen to the divine commentary from Hebrews 11, verse 19. He, Abraham, considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead.

Abraham went to go sacrifice his son, believing in God's promise. God had said, It's going to be through Isaac that all of my promises will be realized. And Abraham had the kind of faith that believed that promise, so much so that God would still accomplish his purpose.

[24 : 42] We'll just let it read the scripture for us. That's okay. So, Abraham believed that God could and would do what he had promised to do.

This is incredible. I don't know how you wiggle out of justification by faith alone. I don't understand it. I don't understand it. I think, perhaps, people have different Bibles than I have.

Verse 17 of Romans 4, as it is written, Genesis 17, 5, that I have made you the father of many nations. In the presence of the God in whom he believed.

Who gives life to the dead. Little stars go off in your head. Right? He gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

I think here, Paul is talking about God's massive might, his bringing about the creation of the world, to give us confidence that he can also bring about faith in us.

[25 : 48] It wasn't humanly rational for Abraham to think that he could be the father of many nations, but he believed in the God who made the promise, despite the obstacles to that belief.

So let's consider briefly the obstacles of faith. Point number three, verses 18 and 19, the obstacles of faith. In hope he believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, so shall your offspring be.

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead, since he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

I notice two obstacles in these verses. Do you see them? Let's note the easy one first from verse 19.

It was not biologically possible for Abraham and Sarah to have a baby. Not biologically possible. I sometimes just adore Paul's writing when he calls Abraham here that he was as good as dead.

[26 : 55] He was essentially a dead man, and then he parenthetically says he was almost a hundred. He was 99 years old. They would require divine intervention for this promise to come true.

Abraham had to believe that God would bring this thing to pass because it was not biologically possible for this to be the case. God calls us to the same kind of faith, a faith that rests on his word,

on the things that he has said would happen, his character and his promises for us.

This is an astounding hurdle to overcome. God told him a thing would happen that was not biologically possible to happen and he believed that it would come to pass. But there's also a second obstacle that I notice.

There's an interesting turn of phrase at the beginning of verse 18. In hope, he believed against hope. Paul distinguishes between belief and hope.

They are similar, but they are not the same. I'm going to spare you the Greek this morning for the sake of time and perhaps my small understanding of Greek.

[28 : 13] Hope is the desire for something that may become true. The desire for something that may become true. In this case, that he should become the father of many nations.

Paul says, in hope, he believed. He had faith that the thing hoped for, God's promise, that he would become the father of many nations would come to pass.

He hoped that it would be, and he believed in hope. Recall the author of Hebrews' definition of faith from the beginning of chapter 11. Now, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the confidence of things hoped for, good promises, things we would like to see come to pass.

hope. So, what does Paul mean in hope? He believed against hope. It feels contradictory, doesn't it?

I think that Paul is communicating that an obstacle to Abraham's faith was that the promise was such a grand, wonderful promise that it just seemed too good to be true.

[29 : 26] I mean, what a thing to hope in. A man with no heir, he's 99 years old, he has no heir, no potential posterity, a man who Paul says was as good as dead, to hope that he would have children, and grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

Not only that, but that he would be the father of a thousand generations that would span the globe, and they would belong to God. A grand number for the praise of our God.

What a thing to hope in. Now, I am approaching my mid-forties, which is not very old in the grand scheme. It's far away from 99.

But I can already feel a tug in my soul to make my last years last. I want to leave behind a rich legacy of faithfulness to our God, which expands beyond my biological children, and grandchildren, and great grandchildren.

That's one of the reasons I love pastoring a church. I love that you're having children, and we're raising up generations that we are endeavoring prayerfully, and fervently to see be faithful for our God.

[30 : 50] Maybe this is why I sometimes wear a cardigan and start to forget things, because I'm looking forward to where we might go someday. What a thing to hope in.

The thing that Abraham was hoping in was much higher. He was going to be the father of the nations that would praise God. What an incredible, lofty thing.

So in hope, Abraham believed against the audacity of his hope. What a massive promise. It's a very cool turn of phrase.

In spite of the obstacles of faith, he had faith. So let's look fourthly at the nature of faith.

We're going to land the plane very soon. Verse 20 and 21. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

[31 : 56] So let's note two things about the nature of faith. And we've said this to some extent already. Number one, faith is unwavering.

Notice in verse 20, no unbelief made him waver. And in verse 21, he was fully convinced. Now, I don't think that he had no doubt ever.

In fact, if you read the account, there's some doubts that creep in. I don't think this is suggesting that he never had any unbelief, that his faith was absolutely perfect.

I think we see Abraham have some weak faith, but it ultimately did not cause him to abandon his faith. He was fully convinced that this grand thing that God had promised would come to pass.

John Calvin wrote of this text, Believers are never so enlightened that there are no remains of ignorance, nor is the heart so established that there are no misgivings.

[33 : 07] Secondly, notice about the nature of faith, that faith grows as we center it on God. Paul says he grew strong.

He grew, which means there was a process. He started at one point and grew strong, got stronger in his faith as he gave glory to God.

Beloved, the meter, the measure of your faith, the place that you focus your attention, should not be on your self. It should not be on your performance.

It most certainly should not be on your feelings, but should be centered on God, the one who is unchanging and the one who made the promise.

His faith grew and our faith will grow as we center our faith on God himself. Fifthly, and lastly, the result of faith, verse 22 through the end of the chapter.

[34 : 15] That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness. But the words it was counted to him were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also.

It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus, our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

the salvation of Abraham and the salvation of all his spiritual offspring. This is the result of faith.

Paul will speak of Jesus' active obedience to the law in chapter 5.

Here he focuses our attention on his passive obedience, his sacrificial death on our behalf, and his third day resurrection. Jesus died in our place, took the wrath of God on himself that we deserve.

And he rose three days later proving that he is the Christ. Paul here helps us to see that God's promise to Abraham is fulfilled in the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[35 : 30] He'll write later in Romans chapter 10, verse 9 and 10, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. saved. So we believe and confess that the Bible alone teaches us that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone, all to the glory of God alone.

Let's pray. as