

Romans 4:1-12

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Date: 27 August 2023

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[0:00] It's nice to be with you this morning. Please open up your copy of God's Word to Romans chapter 4. Our text for today's study will be Romans chapter 4, verses 1-12.

As we have studied Paul's letter to the Romans, it has been a concern that you all may grow tired of hearing Paul's argument that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Alone? I hope not. But Paul makes his case in mere minutes in the opening chapters of this book if we were to read it straight through.

But as we slow down to consider it in small bites, the lesson gets drawn out. Two weeks ago, I preached what I felt was the necessary introduction as we began our study of chapter 4, and we thought together about the five solas of the Reformation, Latin terms that were used in that day. The Bible alone is God's final authority, 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, solus Christus, and this salvation and all things exist for the glory of God alone, soli Deo Gloria.

[1:33] We gave particular attention to the doctrine of sola scriptura those two weeks ago because I want you to want to stick to the text, to really settle into our studies of long books like the book of Romans, to relish in its teaching and trust that God knew what he was doing as these books were penned and knows what he was doing as we open them and take them piece by piece together.

As we begin chapter 4, Paul continues to draw out his theme of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, with a particular attention in these first 12 verses to faith alone, sola fide.

Notice the beginning of verse 1, chapter 4. He then says, What then shall we say?

Let me draw you back just a little bit to Romans chapter 3, verse 21 and 22. And in response to the argument he's been making, this what then shall we say in chapter 4 and verse 1, Romans 3, 21 and 22, But now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law.

Although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction.

[3:08] So whether Jew or Gentile, just everyone not Jewish, we are justified, which means to be declared righteous through faith.

We are justified through faith, and through faith alone. Paul will continue to make this point in the first 12 verses of chapter 4.

Now, normally, we tend to follow a pattern in our preaching, which is a very old pattern of preaching. Many of the great Puritan preachers followed this pattern, and it goes like this.

Exegesis, that is, explain what the text says. Doctrine, what doctrines does the text teach, and then application. So what do we do with these doctrines?

Exegesis, doctrine, application. They would often title the sections of their sermons in this way, and they would announce them as they came to them. They would say, here is the exegesis, and go on to explain.

[4:16] And then they would say, here is the doctrine, and so forth. Now, we don't announce the sections like that as we preach, but we normally follow a very similar pattern.

Now that I've told you about it, you're probably going to notice it quite often. Exegesis, doctrine, application. But sometimes that happens for each point of the sermon, so often it'll go exegesis, doctrine, application, exegesis, doctrine, application, and so forth for however many points there

may be for that day's text.

Now today, though, I'm going to mix the outline up a little bit. I have already stated the doctrine. We are justified through faith alone. That is the doctrine presented in this text, sola fide.

To be justified means that God has declared you morally perfect. We use that term righteous. He's declared you morally perfect.

Roman 3.26 states that God is just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus Christ. So it is God who does the declaration.

[5:29] You cannot declare yourself morally perfect. And it is moral perfection that we are concerned with here. This is not physical perfection.

People spend a lot of time pursuing that, whatever that means. Or professional perfection, or any other way you may define perfection. Here we are talking about the only thing that will matter in the end.

Moral perfection. Have you kept God's law? So this is the doctrine. We are justified through faith alone.

So I now want to state the application. And then I promise we will exegete the text. So in brief, application as we approach these verses together.

Today you find yourself in one of either two categories. Most simply, one of two categories. First, today, you are either not justified.

[6:33] Or, I hope you can guess it, justified. You have either not been declared by God to be righteous, morally perfect. Or you have been declared by God to be justified, morally perfect.

If you are not declared righteous by God, then when you pass from this life and stand before him, he will cast you forever from his presence to a place of eternal punishment.

And the Bible says much about this, and oh, is there so much that could be said here. But I simply this morning want you to hear. Your soul is in a desperate state now and will be forever if you do not place saving faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

You are guilty and you will stand in judgment. You are guilty and you must be forgiven if you will avoid this eternal punishment.

God in his great loving kindness has made it possible for your sins to be forgotten. For you, excuse me, to be declared righteous.

[7:51] I believe that as you have gathered with us today, that God is doing a work in your life. I just say it matter of factly. There are better places to be if you care nothing about the eternal state of your soul.

If you are living for this life, there are more fun things to be doing. But I hope that you are concerned about the eternal state of your soul.

And that I believe that God is at work bringing you to this place on this day. He's either given you parents who love you enough to bring you to church or a friend that has invited you.

Or he has compelled you to come on your own. Any number of possible other reasons exist. How it is you found yourself sitting and listening now to God's word.

But you are not here by accident. Hear God's word to you this day. Turn from your sin. Flee to Christ. Let this be the day of your salvation.

[8:57] If you are declared righteous, I believe this represents the majority of people who are here with us today. If you are declared morally perfect by God, you also need to heed the words of today's text.

Because perhaps you need to be reminded that if you are justified, then you are justified by grace alone through faith alone. We can be declared righteous and heir in two ways as we respond to this declaration.

We can first live as if the way we live doesn't matter at all. The argument goes something like, I am saved by faith alone.

So how I live is inconsequential as long as I have faith. There's a lot of people in our day that live in this way. Or secondly, and I think this is typically more true of us, I know can tend to be true of me. We can live as if we began by faith, but now we must be continually justified by our works. I forget sometimes.

[10:15] And it is subtle and it creeps up that I'm justified, declared righteous by God. My salvation, my eternal standing with God, does not depend on me, but on Him and the work that He has accomplished.

Now both errors stem from forgetfulness and a misunderstanding of the difference between justification and sanctification. Both justification and sanctification are brought about by grace alone through faith alone.

God gives to us His Spirit and declares us righteous in justification. He removes the guilt of our sin as He punished it in Christ as He hung on the cross.

He grants us the moral perfection of Christ that was gained by His sinless life. I like it when I hear someone say, we are saved by works but not our own, the works of another.

And they're talking about Jesus. Jesus' perfect life. When we are justified, we become His. He makes us His own.

[11:29] In sanctification, we are brought degree by degree, bit by bit, into conformity with who He has declared us to be by the power of the Spirit within us.

He has declared that we are something, and sanctification is bringing us to that reality. Declared, not made righteous, declared righteous.

Sanctification is the process by which we are being made righteous, which will be fully realized when the Lord Jesus Christ returns. We will be finally made perfect in that very last day, but we are meant to be moving in degree toward it in between now and then.

If we rightly understand this, then we will not live however we see fit, but we'll want to see our lives bear witness to our faith in Christ. Evidence what we believe to be true of who God has made us.

If we rightly understand this, then we will, when we fail to live as God would have us, we will not lose all hope, but we'll repent and press on.

[12:44] I think many good, God-fearing Christians think they must have some long extended time of penitence. How sad must I feel over my sin when I sin?

And this gets asked to me fairly regularly, and here's the answer. As long as it takes to get you back to the cross, back to the reality that if you are in Christ, then God has declared you righteous.

Grieve over your sin, but only as long as it takes for you to go back to the truth of what God has accomplished on your behalf in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We cannot live as if how we live does not matter. Neither can we live as if how we live is all that matters. Beloved, let us not forget that we are saved by the works of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that out of wonder, love, and awe, by grace alone, through faith alone, in the power of the Spirit, let us press on in holy endeavors.

[13:54] because of what God has done for us, sola fide, through faith, let us press on to holiness.

holiness. This is the application. Now to our text and the exegesis. Romans chapter 4, verses 1 through 12.

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

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, but not before God.

For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due.

[14:57] And to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.

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. Is this blessing then only for the circumcised or also for the uncircumcised?

See there, Jew and Gentile. 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?

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.

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 them the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

[16:13] So, simple outline for you this morning. Just three points. Number one, sola fide cries Abraham.

Number two, sola fide cries David. And number three, sola fide cries the church. Number one, sola fide cries Abraham.

Paul appeals to what the scripture has to say about Abraham. What shall we say was gained by Abraham? If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about.

But what does the scripture say? Verse three, Abraham believed God and was counted to him as righteousness. His belief, his faith was counted as righteousness.

This is a quotation from Genesis chapter 15 and verse six. Paul's a good preacher. He is using the scripture to help people understand the plan of God.

[17:12] So I would like to ask you to join me in Genesis chapter 15. I think it'll serve you well to see those first six verses and I'll draw your attention to some neighboring material as well.

So as you're getting there, Genesis chapter 15, it's back in Genesis chapter 12 that God calls Abraham, then called Abram, and tells him, Abram, and I will make of you a great nation.

This is the beginning of verse two of chapter 12 and this will be tied together a bit later as I read to you from the book of Galatians. He there says, part of the promise he makes, God makes when he calls Abram, I will make of you a great nation.

You will be the father of many people. back to Romans chapter 4. And a number of things come to pass. If you're not familiar with the story, you should read the story, the things that are happening. Some significant things happen in between chapter 12 and chapter 15. There we read, after these things, beginning of chapter 15, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision.

[18:26] 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.

And Abram said, Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir. He's saying, how am I going to be the father of nations? How is this possible?

I don't have a son. Verse 4, 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.

Now, Abram is very old at this point. If my memory is serving me correct, someone's going to come up and tell me that I'm wrong at the end of this, I'm sure. I believe he's 87.

[19:28] Ben. Something like that. He's in his 80s, to be sure. His wife, Sarah, is yet to be pregnant. So, none of this has actually happened yet.

In a vision, he goes out and God says to him, look toward heaven and number the stars. If you're able to number them, so shall your offspring be. And then verse 6, which is what Paul is citing in Romans chapter 4, and he believed the Lord.

He believed the promise, and God counted it to him as righteousness. Now, it is not until Genesis chapter 17 when circumcision comes up, and this is at least 13 years later.

At least. Probably more, but it's at least 13 years later. So, Abram's faith is counted to him as righteousness long before the circumcision.

So, what is it that Abram has to boast in? Nothing. There's nothing to boast in at all. Right? He believed the promise of God, and God declared him morally perfect.

[20:45] And Paul's just going on to explain that back in Romans chapter 4. Now, to the one who works, he's reasoning with us. If you work, then you're due your wages. It's good to thank your boss for your paycheck.

It's not a bad thing to do, but I hope that you earned your paycheck. You traded labor for those wages. They're not counted as a gift, he says in verse 4, but as your due.

Of course. Typically, a good boss will say that, oh, no, thank you for working. I appreciate that. But the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

So we are justified by faith alone. The point is being pressed. Paul writes later in Ephesians chapter 2, verse 8 and 9, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of work, so that no one may boast.

Beloved, if we have anything to boast in at all, it is what God has done on our behalf in the personal work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are undeserving of the salvation that is ours.

[22:01] Why do we continue to act as if we must deserve it? As if we must earn it? May it never be. May we press on in holiness because of who God has declared us to be by grace through faith.

So Abraham, the story of Abraham cries out to us, sola fide. But also David, Paul goes on in Romans 4 verse 6, just as David also, he is just reiterating, he is driving his point, he is piling up the argument, speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteous apart from works. 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.

This is Psalm 32 verses 1 and the first half ish of verse 2. David had committed egregious sins.

David had committed sins that there was no reparation for in the law.

David had no hope of going to the temple and giving the forgiveness of his sins for the sins that he had committed. So what does he do? He throws himself on the mercy of God.

[23:25] By faith he believes that somehow God's promises will be true and his sins will be forgiven. Turn to Psalm 32.

Let's read it in its entirety. When Paul cites these texts it's most likely his original hearers knew the psalm. He's pulling out a piece of it but they would have heard it in its entirety as this letter was read to them.

Psalm 32.

Read all 11 verses. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

For when I kept silent my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me.

[24:35] My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. He's under the conviction of his sin. He's not crying out to God and it's destroying him.

I acknowledge my sin to you, verse 5, and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Therefore, let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found. Surely, in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.

He's talking there about judgment. Water was frightening to these people. In judgment we will not find him. Let us cry now while he is to be found.

Verse 7, you are a hiding place for me. You preserve me from trouble. You surround me with shouts of deliverance. And then the voice of the psalm changes.

[25:38] It's now God speaking. He says, I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

Be not like a horse or a mule without understanding which must be curbed with bit and bridle or it will not stay near you. Do not be stubborn like a horse or a mule.

Many are the sorrows of the wicked but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice O righteous and shout for joy all you upright in heart.

Right? So David throws himself on the mercy of God and understands that as he does so God will forgive his sins.

It has been repeatedly stated that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone and Jesus Christ alone. But how can it be that those people who lived before Christ were justified?

[26:41] How is this true of Abraham and of David and of many other saints? The author of Hebrews gives us some help in this matter beginning in the beginning of chapter 11 of Hebrews.

There he says, now faith is the assurance of things hoped for. The conviction of things not seen. Wasn't this true of Abraham and of David and many others like them?

Verse 2 he says, for by it the people of old received their commendation. Then verses 3 through 12 of Hebrews 11, we see a list of people like Abel and Noah and Enoch and Abraham.

And then in verse 13 he says, these all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country that is a heavenly one.

[27:53] Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city. Faith, future promise. Then in verses 17 through 38 we get more of these people of old listed.

And in verse 39 the author of Hebrews says, And all these though commended through their faith did not receive what was promised since God had provided something better for us that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

So the people of old awaited the promise of the coming Christ that the church would be gathered together that all of us one day will rejoice together in the presence of God.

Brings us to the third point. Sola fide cries the church. This church that this letter was written to in Rome and us today is the blessing only for the circumcised or also the uncircumcised.

Praise be to God. The answer is for both. I think some of you may be ethnically Jewish. Most of us are not. I'm so grateful that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all of us.

[29:17] And he makes this argument. When was the righteousness counted to Abraham? Before or after he was circumcised? And it was most certainly before. As I said, at least 13 years before.

There's a great gap of time from the beginning of Genesis chapter 15 to the beginning of Genesis chapter 17. Not justified by works of the law.

The law bears witness to our sinful state and our need of a savior. It helps us be aware of our transgression. Once counted, declared righteous, it helps us to know how we ought to walk to please our God.

But we are not justified by works of the law. Galatians chapter 3. Last text for today.

Verse 6 and following. There Paul says, Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Genesis 15 6.

[30:20] Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying in you shall all the nations be blessed.

Remember that back from the beginning of chapter 12? In you shall all the nations be blessed. And here Paul says under the inspiration of the spirit that this was the scriptures preaching the gospel. That's cool. So cool. Verse 9 Galatians 3 So then those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham the man of faith. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse for it is written curse be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them. And there what he's saying is if you're! counting! on your keeping of the law to save you've broken it and you're cursed. It will not save you. Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law for the righteous shall live by faith.

The Bible alone is God's final authority 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!

[31:41] fide in Jesus Christ! alone solus Christus and this salvation and all things exist for the glory of God alone solely Deo Gloria.

Now in a few minutes the band's going to come and they're going to lead us in the song In Christ Alone. So I just want you to take a few moments and let me read these lyrics to you that you might sit and think and meditate on their truth and then we'll sing the song together In Christ alone my hope is found He is my light my strength my song this cornerstone this solid ground firm through the fiercest drought and storm!

What heights of love what depths of peace when fears are stilled when strivings cease my comforter my all in all here in the love of Christ I stand in Christ alone who took on flesh fullness of God in helpless babe this gift of love and righteousness scorned by the ones he came to save till on that cross as Jesus died the wrath of God was satisfied for every sin on him was laid here in the death of Christ I live there in the ground his body lay light of the world by darkness slain then bursting forth in glorious day up from the grave he rose again and as he stands in victory sin's cursed has lost its grip on me for

I am his and he is mine I bought with the precious blood of Christ no guilt in life no fear in death this is the power of Christ in me from life's first cry to final breath Jesus commands my destiny no power of hell no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand till he returns or calls me home here in the power of Christ I'll stand let's pray together