

XXII. Romans in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel of God
“Boasting Excluded, Now Expounded and Illustrated”
Romans 4:1–2
Dr. Harry L. Reeder, III
August 29, 2021 • Sunday Morning Sermon

Let’s look at Psalm 34:1–3 which says [1] *I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. [2] My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. [3] Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together!* We will be looking at Romans 4:1–2 but I want to start with Romans 3:27–31 which says [27] *Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. [28] For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. [29] Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, [30] since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. [31] Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I love the book of Romans for many reasons but not the least of which is that Paul accomplishes what he set out to do and he mentions it multiple time which is to give us an exposition and glorious insight of the Gospel of God. He uses the term the Gospel of God time and time again for it is a Gospel of the triune God. It is a Good News message from the Father through the Son and by the Holy Spirit. Why does Paul say he is eager and unashamed to preach this Gospel? From my study I have found that Paul has five reasons for writing this exposition.

One, he is writing this because as he sees it as plan B to get done what he wants to do. He has been wanting to get to Rome to preach this Gospel but God has said ‘no’ in His providence so his plan B is that he will write this exposition of the Gospel of God. So, since he is not allowed providentially to go to Rome he will accomplish his purpose by letter.

Secondly, he wants to preach this Gospel because he wants the lost in Rome to be saved – he wants people who are lost in their sins to be saved.

Thirdly, he is writing this exposition of the Gospel because it is crucial for the discipleship of believers. In Romans 1 Paul told us he was writing to the elect of God. The Gospel isn’t simply the message we give to the lost, but it is the foundation, formation and motivation of the Christian life so it is part and parcel of discipleship.

A fourth reason Paul wants to proclaim this Gospel is because he wants to make some corrections. As I was studying for this, how true this is for as carefully as you can you pray through it, wordsmith it and you say but then when it gets back to you someone reports it to you and it’s not even close to what you said. Paul is no different for he preaches the Gospel and he is being misrepresented so in this letter he is correcting the misrepresentations of what he has preached in the Gospel.

The fifth reason he is doing this is because this church he wants to become his new Antioch. It was Antioch who sent him out on his three missionary journeys. He has another one planned and that is to go to the furthest extent of the Roman Empire which is Spain but he wants his sending church to personally and confessionally to know the Gospel before he goes.

To expound the Gospel of God you have to do something you know one likes to do but is something you have to do. The Gospel of God is seen as Good News when you understand the foundational doctrine of the Gospel of God and that is bad news. So, for three chapters in Romans Paul has given us the bad news and here is the summation of those three chapters. Because the Gospel of God reveals that the power of God and the righteousness of God has by the grace of God been summoned to save any and all, who by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone put their trust in Him. The bad news is the Gospel of God shows us that we're helpless, hopeless, dead in our sins, spiritually impotent and sinfully guilty. The indicted are under sin, wrath and the judgment of God with no hope. So, this Good News has been summoned by Jesus Christ and to show us all this Paul addresses four personal and prominent questions. These are questions Paul had asked himself and we see in Philippians 2 how Paul tells us what he used to boast in – himself and his works – which he doesn't do anymore and now his boast is in the Lord.

Paul loves questions for he loves to ask them, surface them, anticipate them and never to dodge them but to answer them. The four questions are found in Romans 3:27–31 which include the short answers to them and we covered them in the last study but I'd like to give them to you again. The first question was, what becomes of our boasting? If you have been saved by grace you exclude your boasting. The second question, is by what law is it to be excluded? Paul says it's excluded by the law of faith. You are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and your faith is not in your works but in the work of Christ and that faith you have originated from Christ. You have the righteousness of God and from God and the only reason you have it is because God gave you the ability to believe and that's how you were born again, until then you could not enter and see the Kingdom of God.

The third question he asks is, is God the God of both Jews and Gentiles or just of Jews only? That's simple for there is one God, one race and that one race which was made by God is lost and it's only through Him that any and all can be saved. And He draws His people from every tribe and nation. The fourth question is, if I can't be saved by the law or save myself, doesn't that just overthrow the law? Paul basically says he hasn't dismissed the law, for on the contrary, it is upheld and now you can use the law for what it was designed to do and that is to show you your sin, your need of a Savior and to point you to the Savior. Now, the law can be upheld.

Paul, having given us the four questions, will give us longer answers for those questions starting in Romans 4. In Romans 4:1–2 he will again answer question one. Then he answers the question about the law of faith that excludes boasting again in Romans 4:3–8. Then he answers question three in more detail in Romans 4:9–12. Then he answers question four in more detail in Romans 4:13 through the end of the chapter. When he answers these questions again he will expound on the answer and give an illustration and that is the reason for my title for this study. Also, when he answers these four questions in Romans 4, he appeals to the same illustration in all four of them. Who is that illustration? It is Abraham. How does Paul do it? He answers these four questions again by asking more questions. Let's look at our text for this study.

Romans 4:1–3 says [1] *What then shall we say was **gained by Abraham**, our forefather according to the flesh?* [2] *For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.* [3] *For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."* (quote from Genesis 15:6)

Another way to look at Romans 4:1 is what resources did Abraham have to gain salvation or did he bring to bear to accomplish salvation? Abraham wasn't just the forefather of the Jews

but of the Gentiles as well and we see this in Romans 4:11 which says [11] *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.* Abraham may be a biological father of the ethnic Jews but he is the spiritual father of all who believe, Jew or Gentile. The question Paul is asking in Romans 4:1 is what did Abraham, our forefather in the faith, gain in salvation from his own abilities and resources.

Then Paul answers it in Romans 4:2 for if Abraham by his own resources and abilities accomplished his salvation then he has something to boast about, but Paul quickly then says ‘but not before God.’ My first official job was working as a grill man at McDonalds. I could turn out 48 hamburgers in three and a half minutes but they don’t do it that way anymore. I remembered I had to punch a time clock at work and at the end of the week I took my time card to my boss, who then added it up and then gave me my wages. I then went home and said to my dad, ‘dad look what I made this week.’ Then my dad would say ‘alright then pull out \$10 because that’s your board for you’re going to start learning to pay.’

So, what did you do to gain salvation? The Bible says in Romans 6:23, [23] *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* What I bring is not to gain salvation, for the only thing I bring is the problem I need to be saved from. According to what Paul says here, if you are justified by works then you can go to the Father and/or the world and say ‘look what I did!’ But if you realize you are helpless and hopeless, you are going to say ‘look what He did!’ The Bible doesn’t tell you to quit boasting so I’m going to keep boasting, but the Bible says we don’t boast in ourselves but in the Lord.

When I read Romans 4:3 ([3] *For what does the Scripture say?*) I immediately thought of the family I grew up in and the churches we attended when I was growing up because my family always quoted this verse whenever they were faced with a theological issue or a conundrum that the culture was bringing to them. It was not, what does the world say or what do the business people say or what do the medical people say, but first, what says the Scriptures? All that I need for faith and practice is in the Word of God.

I want to give you five reasons to think about this phrase – what says the Scriptures? The first thing this says to you is that your Bible is not a dead book, for it is living. It doesn’t say ‘what **did** the Scripture say?’ It says ‘what **does** the Scripture say?’ When God’s Word is read and preached, God Himself begins to speak to the heart of His people. I remember a man saying to me ‘pastor, I would just like to hear God say His Word, I know I have the Bible but I’d like to hear Him verbally, so can you pray for that?’ I said ‘No, but open your Bible and start reading it out loud for that’s God speaking. Prioritize and prepare to hear preaching that is faithful to God’s Word that the Spirit of God is blessing because in it, faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ (Romans 10:17). God speaks to the heart of His people through His Word. My sheep know My voice (John 10:27). This Bible is complete, the canon is done, but it’s not dead.

The second reason we ask what does the Scripture say, is because it has a singular message that is progressively unfolded. What is that message? It is the glory of God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer through the preeminence of Christ. Wherever you go in and obtain it that’s the message you’re going to hear. Luke 24:27 says [27] *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He (Jesus) interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* John 5:39 says [39] *You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me.*

Paul told Timothy in II Timothy 3:14–15, *[14] But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it [15] and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* What are the sacred writings Paul is referring to? It is the Old Testament. When the Bible speaks of itself, notice what it says. This is *the* Book and yes it has 66 books within it, but this is the Word of God and He is speaking to us with a singular message – that is, boast in the One (Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer) who made you, saved you, and sustained you. This is revealed to you through the preeminence and prominence of Christ.

The third reason why we uphold the Scriptures is because it is a singular Word (message) it is non-contradictory. That means if I ever have a problem with a text, I go to the clearer text because I know that text I have a problem with can't contradict the clearer text. God doesn't contradict Himself. People are saying Paul has a novel gospel and Paul is getting ready to use the Old Testament, by exposition and illustration, that his Gospel is not novel, but it is the old path. It is exactly what the Bible has been revealing throughout 1600 years coming to this very point – it is God's Word and it is non-contradictory.

Fourthly, Paul appeals to the Scriptures because of the supremacy, inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture. He doesn't need any other arguments. God's Word settles all arguments. The Bible is our final rule of faith and practice – sola Scriptura. Martin Luther said at the Reformation, 'unless you convince me by Scripture, here I stand, I can do no other, God help me.'

Fifthly, you see the instinct of a true Christian. A true Christian has a passion and an instinct to go to the Bible. Is that your instinct? Is that your passion? In preaching, do you want and look for God's Word expounded faithfully or do you look for a religious celebrity speaker to give you a pep talk? When you are listening to God's Word preached, do you get excited about going to other passages that support the text or do you think, 'how many passages is he going to turn to?' Do we have that hunger, that instinct to get to what is the foundation and fixed point of everything? God has spoken – what says the Scriptures?

From here Paul will expound on the answers to his previous four questions, from the Scriptures and he will use the Scriptures to give an illustration of his answer. In other words, Paul goes on a Bible search to answer these questions and to give a fuller answer starting with – where is our boasting – he goes to more Scripture, plus he uses the Scriptures to give an illustration from someone they think is contradictory to what he is saying. These people thought Abraham worked his way to heaven, he was someone they revered and Paul is about to show them that Abraham is not a contradiction to the Gospel of God, but that Abraham is an illustration of the Gospel of God. Paul will do this with all four of his questions.

A few studies back I said to bear with me because this was the seed text of the Reformation and every time I have read it I have tried to emphasize faith, grace, Christ for this is the text that gave us the five solas – sola gratia, sola fida, sola Christus, sola scriptura, soli deo gloria. The church of the Reformers believed you were saved by grace, through faith in Christ and the key word is alone which I've tried to emphasize. So far we have identified three of those solas in Romans 3:21–31. Now we are seeing the last two solas, for we are not only saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone but it's because the Scriptures alone say so. It is not what Harry Reeder says or Briarwood but we who preach the Gospel are reporting what God has said in His Word. Now we're also getting the fifth sola, for it's not about you and it's not about me, but it's for the glory of God alone. That is our joy. So, Paul is going to show through

an illustration that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone for the glory of God alone and that the Scripture is our only rule of faith and practice, and the Scripture's substantiate that.

Paul goes right to the Scripture in Romans 4:3 when he says [3] *For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."* Paul quotes from Genesis 15:6 here. So, Abraham was justified, he was saved. So how did Abraham gain salvation? Genesis 15:6 says it is not through his righteousness but it's an alien righteousness that is given to him as his righteousness. How did he get it? It wasn't by works but by faith. So, how did he get the faith? We know about the Promised One but Abraham didn't know all about that, but he did know that God had made the promises and He would fulfill them because He takes an oath by Himself and of Himself for there is no One greater to swear by and Abraham believed the Lord. So Abraham now has righteousness that wasn't his that has now become accounted to him and therefore justification – he is right before God. Abraham gained faith by grace.

Ephesians 2:8–9 says [8] *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Where is that faith? It is in Christ. Hear me please. Faith does not save you. Harry, I not only believe, and believe in God but I get emotional when I believe in God. Ok, that qualifies you to be a demon. Demons believe in God and tremble (James 2:19). There is only one way you are saved and that is your faith is from God by grace and in Christ alone. [47] *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes (in Me) has eternal life* (John 6:47). You can't be saved without righteousness and faith is not righteousness. Faith is the instrument that brings you to Christ so that you have the righteousness of God now from God. I'd like to go to one more text.

John 8:39–59 says [39] *They answered him, "Abraham is our father."* Jesus said to them, *"If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, [40] but now you seek to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. [41] You are doing the works your father did."* They said to him, *"We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God."* [42] Jesus said to them, *"If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but He sent Me. [43] Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear My word. [44] You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. [45] But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. [46] Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? [47] Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."*

[48] *The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?"* [49] *Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. [50] Yet I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks it, and He is the judge. [51] Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death."* [52] *The Jews said to him, "Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet You say, 'If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste death.' [53] Are You greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do You make yourself out to be?"* [54] *Jesus answered, "If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing. It is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' [55] But you have not known Him. I know Him. If I were to say that I do not know Him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know Him and I keep His*

word. [56] Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad.” [57] So the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” [58] Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” [59] So they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

Jesus basically told them their father was Satan because your sonship is shown by what you do and they were doing Satan’s work, not the work of God manifested in Abraham because when God worked on Abraham believed God, saw His Day and rejoiced. What was Abraham’s boast? It wasn’t circumcision or Isaac, it was the Lord. Abraham saw the Day of Christ, when he was called out of the land of the Chaldeans to a place he didn’t even know but he followed Him. He saw His day when God made the covenant with Abraham – to give him a seed, a nation and bless all the nations through his seed. Then he made the covenant with blood in a sacrifice as he separated the sacrifices. Did Abraham go through the sacrifice to God? No, the smoking pot and flame went through the sacrifice to Abraham. God, by grace, comes to save His people. We don’t work our way to Him. He comes to do His work to save us. Abraham saw His day and was glad.

Jesus appeared to Abraham as an angel of the Lord, a pre-Incarnate appearance of Christ, by the tents and he and Sarah, his wife, get a great laugh that at 90 plus years old they are going to have a baby. Abraham saw My day and rejoiced, boasted in Me. Then there is Mount Moriah where Isaac, Abraham’s son is taken up to be sacrificed and there is the lamb, he saw My day and rejoiced. Abraham is not a contradiction to what I’m telling you for he is exhibit A. You are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, so what does that mean? Here’s the takeaway.

The takeaway is as the Scriptures reveal there is only one way to be saved from our sins and that is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, therefore it is in God alone that we glory and boast. Here is the supremacy and inerrancy of Scripture. When the issues of life come where do you go for your answer? I understand common grace in general revelation but where do you go for God’s consistent, supreme, inerrant, sufficient answer? II Timothy 3:16–17 says *[16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* Do we by reflex go to His Word for answers?

Paul gets challenged and misrepresented and by instinct where does he go? He goes to the Scripture. Do we have a hunger for God’s Word? Is it supreme in our life? I’m not being accusatory here. I’m asking you to stand before God and ask, where do you go first? CNN? Fox News? YouTube? Or what says this living Scripture? This is my filter and foundation for everything – God’s Word rules my life. Hebrews 4:12 says *[12] For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

Secondly, it’s amazing how many times we can look humble but we’re really trying to get glory for ourselves. We are glory hounds until God’s grace saves us. Now we want to be glory bound. We want to give glory to God. God’s worship and praise is the greatest delight of our life. What God is doing in our life is our greatest joy in life so that by God’s grace who have been saved, desire His praise now that alone would God receive glory.

Since the Scriptures say we are helpless and hopeless and that our only hope which is a sure hope is found to be saved from our sins by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, and today you have not come to Him, will you today being a beneficiary of God’s grace, having shown you from His Word that you need a Savior, come to Christ alone as your Lord and

Savior? This is the day of grace that has come to you, now will you come to Him alone this day? I'm not simply asking you for a profession of faith because you're not saved by a profession of faith, you are saved by the possession of faith. Do we make professions of faith? Yes, but you're not saved when you sign a card, when you go forward, when you stand up or raise your hand and make a profession. When you are saved by faith He takes over, He is your life – it's possession. Galatians 2:20 says [20] *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.* I invite you to know the joy of the boast in the Lord instead of the emptiness of the deceptive boast of self.

To believers, let's get on the journey together to put worship at the foundation of life – Lord's Day worship and then daily worship – which is boasting in the Lord. Let's boast in the Lord and in the Lord alone, for that is our desire. That needs to become our priority and our passion. Abraham gained salvation, not by doing and earning, but by believing and receiving. Let's praise Him forevermore. Our boast is in the Lord and may it fill all of our lives and mouths. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the privilege we have to hear what the Scriptures say. So for those reading this who have been brought to this by your grace, would You this day by grace bring them to faith in Christ? If you would like to respond to that invitation, please call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we would love to talk and pray with you about it. Now Father, fill us so that we are not known by boasting in anyone or anything and never ourselves, may it be excluded and may the passion and priority of our life be to praise God from whom all blessings flow. To God be the glory, Amen.

Power Point

A Summation

Because the Gospel of God reveals that the power of God and the righteousness of God has been summoned to save any and all helpless and hopeless sinners by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone—Now Paul addresses four prominent and personal questions.

Paul's Four Questions

1. What becomes of our Boasting?
2. By what Law (principle) is Boasting excluded?
3. Is God the God of both Jews and Gentiles or Jews only?
4. Is the Law of God overthrown through a salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone?

Life Takeaway

As the Scriptures reveal, there is only one way to be saved from our sins, and that is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Therefore we boast and glory in God alone.

The Supremacy, Inerrancy and Sufficiency of Scripture – "Sola Scriptura"

From Glory Hound to Glory Bound

Two more questions