

XXIV. Romans in Biblical Perspective

The Gospel of God

“The Gospel for the Jew and the Gentile Expounded and Illustrated”

Romans 4:9–12

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I'd like to start by reading from Romans 4. This is the Word of God that is infallible, inerrant and sufficient for all the matters of life in Christ. Romans 4:1–8 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.”* [4] *Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.* [5] *And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,* [6] *just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:* [7] *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; [8] blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”* (Quote from Psalm 32, a psalm of David)

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.

Starting in the 7th grade, three times every year, was a moment that seemed to be less than challenging if I wanted to baseball, basketball and football and that was I had to get a physical before I played each of those sports. The physical would last I would say just under a minute with three things being done. One of them was to sit on the examine table while my legs hung over the side as he used a triangular rubber hammer which would determine whether I would play anyone of those three sports. It looked like a tommy hock to me as he was going to hit me on my knee with it and then the moment of truth would come – to see if my knee would fly up in the air after he hit it which is known as a reflex action. If it didn't happen then I would not play ball and probably be put in the hospital.

The moment was a reflex and the Apostle Paul has a reflex here and I want you to see it. This reflex needs to be ours as well. So far in this study of Romans, Paul has presented us with the two pristine, majestic statements about the Gospel. One it is the power of God unto salvation in Christ and two it is the righteousness of God for salvation in Christ. Having done that, he now gives us for three chapters the unfolding prosecution of all of humanity. All of humanity is indicted for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The indictment is we're all under sin, under wrath, helpless, hopeless, can't save yourself, in rebellion against God, wouldn't want to be saved, and under the power and practice of sin. Then we meet that wonderful word 'but' in the Bible – [4] *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us,* [5] *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—* (Ephesians 2:4–5).

Paul has been unfolding, in the book of Romans this Gospel of God. It is a Gospel of a triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A Father who authored your salvation, a Son who accomplished your salvation and the Holy Spirit who applies your salvation – praise be to God because He is our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Paul knows that no matter how careful he is, he will be misrepresented or misunderstood or what he says will get twisted or someone will come with an accusation. When that happens, not if, what is Paul's reflex?

His reflex involves two things. Number one, he starts asking questions while not giving answers. He asks questions to surface what the person is saying and thinking. I went to Westminster Seminary and I loved the words of Robert Dick Wilson. The previous seminary has succumbed to liberal Christianity and theology so Westminster was established. When this happened it was said ‘We establish this seminary not to withdraw from the world but to create pastors who can surface, confront and answer questions from the world.’ That’s what Paul does here in Romans. I will tell you the second thing in a moment but after Paul finishes this glorious declaration of the Gospel of God in Romans 3:14–21 he surfaces the four questions that they are asking him. I like to refer to them as the four framing questions of the Apostle Paul.

Paul knows he is being accused of preaching another gospel found in the Old Testament and that he has abandoned what everyone else is believing. The reason Paul knows the questions to surface is because they were his questions. I would be so bold to say that his questions were answered by Stephen. If I was living during the time of the Apostle Paul, I think the biggest problem I would have to wrestle with, is that days after I was a part of participating in the death of Stephen, I have come to believe everything Stephen said, yet I was a part of killing him. That had to have weighed on Paul but he knows he is forgiven in Christ – Praise the Lord!

As a reminder the Romans 3 text is where the Reformers came up with the five solas. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for the glory of God alone and the Scripture is our only rule of faith and practice. Paul knows what’s in the people’s minds because it was in his mind. Paul used to boast and we see it in Philippians 3. Paul says in Philippians 3:4–7, *[4] though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: [5] circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; [6] as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. [7] But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.*

Now where is his boasting? The short answer Paul gives in Romans 3 is that boasting is excluded. Then Paul gives a bigger answer to this in Romans 4:1–3. There is no room for boasting and the reason is because we’re saved by grace, not by works. The only thing your works bring is a reason for God to judge you, not a reason to pardon you. So, we are under His judgment. Then Paul goes to the second question of what law do you give if we can’t boast? Paul shows us the law can’t save us but it can show us we need a Savior, we can’t save ourselves and that Christ alone can save us. The law we have is the law of faith which means our salvation is a gift so we have nothing to boast about by the law of faith.

Then he goes to a third question which we look further into in this study and we’ll get to the fourth question in depth in the next study. In this study in Romans 4:9–12 Paul will answer the third question in an enlarged, expounded way how God can save Jew and Gentile. Before I get there, I want to go back to the second part of Paul’s reflex. Where does Paul go to answer the questions? He goes to the Scriptures and in his time it was the Old Testament which is where the Scriptures alone are our only rule of faith and practice. Paul doesn’t say the Scripture ‘said’ although he would be true in saying that, but he says the Scripture ‘say’ which means the Scriptures are alive – in the preaching and teaching of it. God is not giving us new revelation but he is illuminating us with it. He is speaking to us. Jesus says ‘My sheep know My voice and they follow Me’ (John 10:27).

Hebrews 4:12–13 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. [13] And no creature is hidden from His*

sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. The Bible has a heartbeat to it. God is speaking to His people through it.

One of my friends I got to know better after my conversion, as God also used him as part of the work of my conversion, his name was Kyle Therman. He used to do street preaching and the hard part was to get a crowd although if you're crazy enough you can get a crowd. He was on the streets of San Antonio, Texas and would put a hat down and begin to run around that hat yelling 'It's alive, it's alive, come here and look, I'm telling you it's alive.' When he got a crowd big enough he would reach over toward the hat and pick up his Bible and say 'It's alive, now let me tell you what it says.'

Now we are at Romans 4:9–12 where he will answer the question of whether God can save Jew and Gentile from the Scripture as he expounds, enlarges and illustrates his answer to this question. Paul believed – God said it, I believe it, that settles it. As he talks to the Jew who say they have Abraham as their father, then Paul says if you did then you would be loving Jesus as Abraham did because the Bible says that Abraham loved and longed to see the day of Christ. Abraham didn't have all that we have for the day of revelation for it was progressively unfolding but he knew the promises of God could only be fulfilled by God and that is fulfilled in the Son of God in who all the promises of God are yes and amen. Paul says Abraham didn't have anything to boast about because he wasn't saved by his works, but he was saved by grace alone in faith alone. Abraham received something Someone else merited for him and gave to him. Secondly, he was saved by faith which we see in Genesis 4. He wasn't saved when he offered up his son for that was an evidence he was saved which happened in Genesis 22 but we know Abraham was saved in Genesis 15:6 when the Scripture says [6] *And he (Abraham) believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

Here is this legal glorious work that God saves us through His righteousness by His power. So how do you get that? It is because God is an accounting God. How do you get a legal declaration 'justified and innocent' when the reality is, we're guilty and condemned? Is God unjust? Is salvation a legal fiction? In Romans 4:9–12 says the word 'count' in it five times. God counts our sins and holds us accountable. God will by no means leave the guilty unpunished (Nahum 1:3). The one who sins shall die.

Paul not only uses Abraham as an illustration but he also uses David. David was convicted of his sins and came to repentance for he was a murderer, adulterer, a liar and a cheat. David wrote out his confession and repentance in Psalm 51 and then in Psalm 32 and Paul quotes from Psalm 32 in Romans 4:7–8 which says [7] *"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; [8] blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."* In other words, God sent His Son to the cross and He took your account. The One who did not deserve the wrath of God, received the wrath of God so that we who deserve the wrath of God might receive the blessings of God. In Christ we are saved.

So what about Gentiles, can they be saved? Paul goes right back to the same illustration in the Scripture for the exposition and answer to this question. Let's get into our text for this study. Romans 4:9 says [9] *Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.* Abraham was blessed, David was blessed. David said 'how blessed is the man whose sins are covered and whom the Lord doesn't count his sins against him.' That word 'blessed' is in the Sermon on the Mount and most current translations will translate this word as happy. Happy belongs under blessed but I wouldn't translate blessed with happy because it's much more than that and it's not the happiness that most of us are thinking about.

What is the opposite of blessing? It is cursing. I think the best way to define blessing is to start with cursing. Benediction is bene which is Latin for good and dicte is Latin for word. At the end of our Lord's Day service I give the 'good word' to you from God secured in Christ. Then you indicate the condition of your heart to receive it. The benediction is a good word of blessing. It's not just to be happy but there is something more. The best way to understand it is to go back to the blessing we are talking about in this text. The verse that comes before Romans 4:9 is verse 8 which says [8] *blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.*

What man did the Lord impute iniquity? It was Jesus. Our sins (our account) were imputed to Him. Galatians 3:13–14 says [13] *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—* [14] *so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.* What happened next when Christ drank the cup of God's wrath to the bottom for all of our sins for all of eternity? The words of Jesus tell us in Mark 15:34 which says [34] *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?"* God cannot look upon sin or abide with sin. Jesus became our sin when God forsook Him and the wrath of God fell upon Him for all of our sins and its consequences as He took our place. Jesus was cursed that we might gain the blessing.

What is the blessing? It is the opposite of the cursing – He will never forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). What is one of the best blessings we find in the Bible? There is one in Numbers 6 which is an Aaronic blessing. Numbers 6:22–27 says [22] *The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, [23] "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, [24] **The LORD bless you and keep you; [25] the LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; [26] the LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.** [27] "So shall they put My name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."* This is the blessing that Abraham and David are point us to is Jesus and it's an intimate, saving, eternal, personal, inseparable, unconquerable, relentless relationship with God who made you right with Him and is at work right within you. This God is the One whose countenance is upon you who will not abandon you and will be with you until the end.

So, Paul is asking the question, can the Gentiles have this blessing or is it just for the Jews only, because he knows it's out there. He goes right back to Abraham. Romans 4:9–11a says [9] *Is this blessing then only for the circumcised (sign of the Jew, the covenant), or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was **counted** to Abraham as righteousness. [10] 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. [11a] He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.*

Paul is basically saying here to let the Scriptures answer your question. Paul knows what they are really asking and that is, can a Gentile be saved as a Gentile without becoming a Jew and therefore circumcised, receiving the sign? Paul is saying yes. We know that Abraham was saved in Genesis 15 but was not circumcised until Genesis 17. Circumcision was the sign and seal, it wasn't salvation. Salvation was by faith in Christ. Circumcision was after, later. Abraham was saved as a Gentile in Genesis 15. Then he received the sign and seal of the Old Covenant which is circumcision.

The sign and seal are sacraments. In the Old Testament there were three of them. One was given in the days of Abraham which was circumcision which is the initiatory sign for the believer and the household. The second sign and third sign were given in the days of Moses and that was the Sabbath and the Passover – the renewed covenant meal with the Lord. The word

significant has the word sign in it and it means it is something important. Signs teach something and they point to something. They are significant of something. A seal confirms something. In the older days people would signify something that came from them by dripping wax on a sealed envelope and stamping it with your signet ring. So, the signs and seals of the covenant are messages from God to point you to something and then for God to declare to you – I'm faithful and will do what I promised. The sign identifies its significance but the sign is not identical to the significance.

The Bible teaches us that circumcision is pointing us to two realities of God's blessing in the covenant. We are not saved by generation. The foreskin of the flesh was cut off to say that you can't be saved by generation, for you must be saved by regeneration. That is why you need circumcision of the heart. Then the other reality of circumcision was the shedding of blood which was a symbolic sacrifice where Someone has to take your place to pay for your sins. Hebrews 9:22 says *[22] Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.* So, the lamb in the Passover was pointing to Christ and a renewed relationship with Him. Circumcision was pointing to Christ. The Sabbath was pointing to the Lord of the Sabbath – come unto Me all who are weary and heavy laden and **I will give you rest** (Matthew 11:28).

Circumcision, while saying the blessing of regeneration and justification that is provided in Christ's atoning work, is pointing to Christ and not itself. It's not pointing to your faith. You can be saved and circumcised in heart for when Jesus goes to the cross by the power of God, He circumcises your heart when you are born again for He cuts it out and gives you a new heart. Then He cuts away your sin record as He nails it to the cross and cancels it as He gives you a new record. You can be saved without the external sign and seal of the covenant but you can't be saved without the internal Reality. You can have the external and internal and be saved. You can have the internal and not the external and be saved. If you have the external but not the internal then you're not saved. That is why not all who are circumcised are Israel, the Scriptures say.

I want to give you an illustration. Let's say you and I had a fit of ignorance and one afternoon we drove on highway 280. All of a sudden, we see a sign that says Sylacauga and you say 'pastor we're in Sylacauga' and I said 'How do you know?' You say 'I saw the sign.' The sign identifies what is significant but if I got out of the car and removed the sign and then drove back to where we started, we don't bring Sylacauga with us. The Sign Giver is teaching us something. You need a new heart, a new record and only Christ can give it to you from the cross.

Here is another illustration. Marriage is a covenant. When I do marriage ceremonies, I ask the groom 'what sign did you bring to acknowledge the faithfulness of your promises and their sincerity?' He says 'this ring.' Then the woman to indicate that she believes him, in a very weak moment, says 'I believe you' and wears the ring. You don't need a ring to get married. It's a sign we use to tell each other something. The purpose of the covenant sign is the Covenant Maker telling the covenant receiver 'I've made a promise and I promise you I will do it.' If that woman is fascinated and absorbed with the ring this marriage will never last. The ring won't do it. In all the time I've done these ceremonies I have never yet seen the bride look at the ring for she looks at the one who gave it.

That is what circumcision is there for – not to look at circumcision because it can't save. It's there to tell you, the One who does save and how He saves – in Christ. That's why when Jesus comes those three signs are done away with – it is not because they are obsolete but because they are fulfilled. Christ is our circumcision, our Passover and even the Sabbath is

moved to the first day of the week because Christ is our Sabbath rest. He worked on the day of Atonement and rested on the Sabbath, then came forth on the first day, thus they established the Lord's Day. Now, circumcision is replaced by baptism. The Passover is replaced by the Lord's Supper. Don't look to your baptism. I'm not saying the signs and seals aren't important for they are glorious and God ordained them but they can't save you.

Circumcision and baptism cannot convert you or confer anything to you but they do confirm what God has promised to you in Jesus. So, when you come to a baptism and the Lord's Supper, what do you do? You don't come to the sign, the seal and the sacrament, but you come through the sign and the seal to Jesus. It Christ alone who saves you, not anything or anyone else. We ought to start cheering when we see believers coming to baptism, the sign and seal because God has promised and He is faithful. The purpose of the sacrament is not for you to believe in it or to highlight your faith or to declare your faith to the world. The purpose of the sacrament is for God to declare His faithfulness to you and you look to Him. That's reason to cheer for He will never leave me nor forsake me. I am cleansed. I am covered. I am changed and being changed. He will bring me home because He will finish His work that He has begun and that's what Paul's answer to them is for saving a Jew and Gentile.

So, what's the purpose of this sign and seal. Romans 4:11b–12 says *[11b] 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, [12] and to make Him 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.*

Guess who your spiritual daddy is? Abraham and it doesn't matter that you're not a Jew because the verse says he is the father of all who believe. You may say that you're not circumcised but you are for we see those who are of true circumcision in Philippians 3:3 which says *[3] For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—* That is us – those circumcised in heart and in record. You can be saved without the external sign of circumcision or baptism but you can't be saved without the internal. You have to have a circumcised heart and record in Christ who cut your sin record and gave you His record and cut out your old heart and gave you a new heart. And you are a new creation in Christ. The pouring and the sprinkling of baptism are pointing to those who are sprinkled with the blood and the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon them and they are sealed by the Holy Spirit. You receive the internal by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

The reason I'm making a big deal about Abraham being your 'spiritual daddy' is because so many say they do wish Abraham was their father and he is for he is the father of all who believe – whether Jew or Gentile. The reason it is important to me is because if he is our spiritual father because of Christ who saved Abraham by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, then we too are not only in the same spiritual family on this earth headed to our heavenly father through His Son who redeemed us, but we're all brothers and sisters. Harry, I'm old – praise the Lord. Harry, I'm young – praise the Lord. It doesn't matter age, ethnicity, color, gender for there is the antidote to the sinful divisions of this world. We are in Christ, Christ is in us, it's the hope of glory and we're one family – brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of our heavenly Father and all look to the same earthly spiritual father. Away with all this political, sociological manipulations and divisions that cannot deliver reconciliation and unity!!

Yes, to the Gospel of Jesus Christ – the ministry and message of reconciliation with all of our wonderful God-given diversity of background!! We are one in Christ! Same blood, same righteousness, same Spirit, one in Christ and we esteem one another more highly than ourselves. This is so precious to me because it brings assurance and joy and brings us together in Christ but

we are not saved by what we have or what this world identifies us with. We are saved by Christ so here is your takeaway.

The takeaway is the sacraments, signs and seals of the covenant of grace do not and cannot convert and confer – they confirm and point us to Christ. When you come to the Lord's Supper or see a baptism look to Jesus, who cannot abide or look upon sin but will abide and be with you by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It's not circumcision, baptism or our works, it's by grace through faith in Christ and Christ converts us by His power. Christ cleanses us by His blood. Christ covers us with His righteousness. Christ changes us by the power of His Spirit. We are His and He is ours.

One of my greatest challenges is to tell you two things – apart from Christ you are under judgment and you have no hope and I plead with you to come to Christ because secondly, if you come to Him, He will in no wise cast you out. His face is upon you. His Spirit with within you. He will never forsake you because His Son has redeemed you. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Please Father speak into the hearts and lives of Your people as only You can. If you are reading this today and have not yet come to Christ, please do not let this day end with you being under the curse of God. Leave this with the blessing of God, with hands outstretched and a heart that has been outstretched and say to Jesus 'I surrender all.' If you would like to pray with someone about this, please call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we'd love to pray with you and help you start this journey with Christ. If you have Christ in your life, then let's go out with the joy of our salvation – the reality of how we're saved – converted, cleansed, covered and being changed all the way home and rejoice in the Lord. His Word, His sacraments, and worship are not the object of our faith – our faith is not the object of our faith. It is Christ alone, praise God from whom all blessings flow, hallelujah, Amen.

Power Point

The Gospel for the Jew and Gentile

1. So, what becomes of our Boasting? (4:1–3)
2. By what Law (principle) is Boasting excluded? (4:3–8)
3. Is God the God of Jews and Gentiles or Jews only? (4:9–12)
4. Is the Law of God overthrown by salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone? (4:13–25)

But the Real Question Is...

Do you have to become a Jew – circumcised – to be eligible for salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone?

Life Takeaway

The Sacraments (signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace) do not and cannot convert or confer; they confirm and point us to Christ, who cannot abide or look upon sin, but will abide and be with you by grace alone, through faith alone, in Him alone.

Christ Converts–Cleanses–Covers–Changes