

XXV. Romans in Biblical Perspective  
*The Gospel of God*  
“The Lawful Use of the Law Expounded and Illustrated“  
Romans 4:13–25  
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September 26, 2021 • Sunday Morning Sermon

I’m going 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 4:1–12 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.”*

[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.* [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.*** [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, [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.* 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.

It is not my desire when my wife wants to go shopping. My desire is to be with her but not shopping and she told me I was supposed to go, so we go. One of the things I do not like while doing this is to go into a store and those working for the store don’t realize I don’t want to be there. I think stores need to start putting chairs in their store for people like me to be able to sit while my wife shops. I hate to walk into a women’s store with no chairs for men to sit in while we endure these moments. I do know one thing that captures a person’s attention while shopping and that is a sign that says ‘guaranteed.’ Then I will check to see if there is small print underneath that word.

The guarantee is crucial. That is where we are in the text for this study that we’re about to look at. God makes two guarantees in this text. Paul has so far identified himself, his love for the church at Rome, his desire to be there, has given his purpose of this epistle very clearly, his passion to preach the Gospel of God and has given us these two glorious pinnacle blessings of the Gospel – it the **power** and the **righteousness** of God unto salvation. Then Paul has done the hard work of laying the ground work of why the Gospel of grace is necessary if anyone is going to be saved and how amazing the Gospel is because he has taken all of humanity bringing us to the bar of God’s justice as everyone is indicted. Then ends it at Romans 3:23 where all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. We are all helpless and hopeless as he gives the profile as well of the indicted for none seek Him no not one (Romans 3:11).

The only reason we want Him is that He sought us and changed our ‘wanter’ so Paul has done this glorious work to bring us to this point, but Paul also knows whenever you preach and teach the Gospel there will be opposition. Paul knows that part of the opposition is that there will be misrepresentation and accusations to his preaching and teaching of the Gospel, because Paul himself used to make them before he was converted. So Paul surfaces their questions and he knows what they are because he has heard them and he had them himself at a time in his life.

Paul used to boast so in Romans 3:27–31 he asks, where is boasting in all this? Paul also used to declare the fact that one was saved by works, so he asks where is this law of faith as opposed to a law of works so by what law is boasting excluded? He used to say before his conversion that a person had to be Jew to be saved so his third question is, does God save Jew and Gentiles? His fourth question is, do we overthrow the law by faith? He has already given the short answer to all four of these questions at the end of Romans 3, so now we come to the fourth question and Paul’s exposition of it as he expounds his answer to all four questions with illustrations in Romans 4. He knows what illustration to use because he knows what those are saying who are misrepresenting him.

Paul’s instinct takes over. Paul’s instinct isn’t his logic or meeting something head on as a lawyer to destroy it, but his instinct is – what does the Scripture say. Paul tells them about Abraham. Abraham didn’t rejoice when he saw circumcision or law but he rejoiced when he saw My Day – the day of Jesus – and that’s what Jesus said. What an ingenious move for Paul goes back to the Scripture directly to Abraham as he answers the questions with exposition and illustration from Abraham’s life.

Paul tells us boasting is excluded because we’re not saved by works therefore, we have nothing to boast about. We are saved by grace through faith, through the finished work of Christ and then Christ gives by His Spirit the gift of faith. 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.* Paul illustrates this through Abraham and we see in Genesis 15:6, *[6] And he (Abraham) believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness.* Abraham received a righteousness from God, the righteousness of God, by faith through the power of God so that now he has, not earned this righteousness, but received and rested it on something that was counted to him.

By what law did Abraham receive this? It was by the law of faith, not the law of works for no works were justified. Certainly, Abraham did things that were honoring to the Lord but he also showed he was a sinner so he can’t be saved by his works, because the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We have all sinned, including Abraham. Abraham was saved by the saving faith of Christ’s whereby we rest in Him alone. Abraham didn’t understand all that we understand about Christ but it was still the righteousness of Christ that saved him, believing God that He would fulfill His promises and the promises of God are yes and amen in Jesus.

Paul then answers the other questions using Abraham’s salvation and circumcision. The question is can Gentiles be saved or do they have to be circumcised first? No, for Paul uses the Scripture for this because Abraham was saved in Genesis 15:6 but he wasn’t circumcised till Genesis 17. Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, was saved by grace prior to becoming a Jew so Abraham was saved as a Gentile.

Paul then answers their question about the law and salvation. Most people tend to pass right over Romans 4 but it is so rich for all of the solas of the Reformation come from this chapter. We are saved by grace alone (*sola gratia*) through faith alone (*sola fide*) in Christ alone (*solus Christus*) for the glory of God alone (*soli deo gloria*) and the Scripture is our only rule

(sola Scriptura) of faith and practice. God also gives us two guarantees from Romans 4 and I am praying God gives me the wisdom to effectively communicate those to you in this study because I know He loves to save people and I want you to be saved. I pray God gives you ears to hear this today. Paul communicates this with such richness and clarity. Paul tells us that those who are saved are those who are blessed that the Lord does not impute iniquity and the only reason you don't have iniquity imputed to you is because there was another Man that went to the cross and your iniquity was imputed to Him. Cursed is He who hung on the tree for you (Galatians 3:13). He is the One who blesses you with the power and righteousness of God.

Paul, you can't just get rid of the law, can you? This what we take on in this study – Paul's declaration, exposition and illustration of this question. First, is Paul's declaration through God's promises to Abraham. Romans 4:13–15 says *[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. [14] For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. [15] For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.*

God's promises to Abraham were that He would make him a nation, give him a seed, and give him a land. This would also apply to his offspring. Paul is not saying here that faith is righteousness but he is saying that faith is the instrument through which righteousness from God is given to you. God gave Abraham the Promised Land and where was the Promised Land? It was Israel, Palestine given in the days of David, Solomon and later Hezekiah but that was the down payment because according to this Romans 4 text Abraham was the heir to the world. This is my Father's world. There is another King coming, another Seed coming and in that one I'm going to give you the world and when I finish it's going to be the new heavens and the new earth. A new city will come down and God will be with His people. This is what He promises him. What does Abraham do? The Bible says that he believes God and when he believed God he was given something greater than the land by God for He gave him a righteousness by faith.

What is Abraham's offspring? It is not simply those who are circumcised in the flesh, but they are all who believe who are circumcised in the heart. Do you have to be circumcised to be saved? Yes and no – you don't have to be circumcised externally but you do have to be circumcised in the heart. Paul says in Romans 2:29, *[29] But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.* They are those who worship God, put no confidence in the flesh and glory in Christ alone. It is the work of the Spirit of God in our hearts whereby we believe in Him and those are the offspring of Abraham.

Paul's exposition begins in Romans 4:14 and he begins by saying if it is by doing (adhering to) the law that you get the promise then the promise is null and void. By this, he is telling us that no one can adhere to the law therefore no one has a chance for the promises. He is giving us a guarantee. The guarantee is that if you want to work your way to heaven through adhering to the law, you're done – can't be done. Faith is void because you are working for your salvation and therefore the promises are void because it's impossible for you since the law brings wrath. Not only can the law not save you, but if you think you are saved through the works of the law you can forget the promises because you can never attain them by your works. If you think your resolve and your attempt to do what's good before God will save you, you will end up under the wrath of God. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Why? It is because sin is defined by the law.

What is sin? Sin is the transgression of or the want of conformity unto the law of God. To trespass is to step across the boundary – a breaking of the law. Sins of commission are trespassing and sins of omission are not doing what God teaches. Sin is cosmic treason against a holy God. When we sin in thought, word or deed it is rebellion against a thrice holy God. The law shows us sin, its sinfulness and that we are under the wrath of God. It can't save you. It wasn't given to save you. It was given to show you that you need a Savior.

When does God give the law to the people? Abraham was saved in Genesis 15 and circumcised in Genesis 17 but the law wasn't given until Exodus 20 which was 430 years later, plus the law comes through Moses. Exodus 20:2 says [2] *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (bondage)*. Did God give the law while they were in bondage or after He delivered them? It was given after for the law wasn't given for them to do to get saved. The law is given to show us sin, the majesty of the Savior from God's grace, who sovereignly delivers His people and whose grace is greater than all our sin and its sinfulness. The law has its evangelistic use – I'm a sinner and need a Savior.

The law has its discipleship use – now that the love of God has got hold of me, for the love of God I want to keep His commandments so He teaches me how to love Him. Jesus says 'If you love Me you will keep My commandments' (John 14:15), not if you keep My commandments I'll love you. Why do we love Him? It is because He first loved us (I John 4:19). He has delivered us. In this culture right now where everyone is dividing up politically and socially, you unite theologically. What should I do to love the Lord and my neighbor who is made in the image of God, in a way that will honor the Lord? The law guides us in discipleship on how to love God and my neighbor and how to live for the One who saved me.

Thirdly, when we love it and live it, it restrains sin in society. It stops the mouths of men and women. Let me tell you what the law can't do. It can't save you and praise God because Abraham would have to have lived 500 years to get saved. There is more to this so let's look back at the text for this study.

Romans 4:16–17 says [16] *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, [17] 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.*

We just got another guarantee for if you're trying to work your way through the law you are under God's wrath, but if by faith you confess your sins and put your trust in the God of glory to save you with His righteousness, then you get the guarantee of grace. God's grace is greater than all our sin. There are three great words here – by, through and in – By grace, through faith, in Christ. You can't get in Christ without faith and you can't have faith without grace. Ephesians 2:8–10 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. [10] For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* When God by grace begins a work, He finishes it. There is your guarantee. It's not in your working ability but God's working ability for you at the cross and in you by His Spirit.

I love the first question of evangelism explosion that says 'if you were to die tonight do you know where you would spend eternity?' About 90 percent of the people I ask this to, give me a works answer and that means they can't know. With that, the answer will be they will be under wrath but by grace when you put your trust in Christ you can know. One of the reasons

the Bible was written was so that you could know. I John 5:13 says *[13] I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may **know** that you have eternal life.* God is able to deliver you and will deliver you. When you are saved by faith that is tied to the guarantee of the supremacy and success of God's grace.

Paul goes back to the Scriptures in Romans 4:17 and shows how God is making a royal nation out of all the nations for He will make disciples from all the nations. The very Gospel will spread through the work of the Kingdom as it is preached and men and women are brought to Christ. You will never believe in redemption if you don't believe in the power of God in creation. Everything you see wasn't until He spoke. That which existed was not space, time and matter that arranged itself in some cesspool accidentally and through mutations. It was the hand of the Almighty who brought it into existence – the formless He formed and the empty He filled.

What He does in creation, He does in redemption. We are dead in our sins and He takes us out of a spiritual boneyard with His power as His Word from heaven is preached and spoken to your heart. He gives you a new heart when you come to Christ. Paul goes back to Abraham for his illustration. He gives Abraham a seed and we see that we are helpless and hopeless. Our hope is the Lord. God is able with His power and His righteousness.

Romans 4:18–25 says *[18] 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." [19] 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. [20] No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, [21] **fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised.** [22] That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." [23] But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, [24] but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, [25] **who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.***

Abraham believed God was able to do what He had promised. The seed Abraham gets is Isaac which means laughter and that's what Abraham and Sarah did when God said they were going to have a child – the laughter of faith. God did not waver. It was not because Abraham looked at his body but God is able. Israel is a down payment to the world. Isaac is a down payment to all who believe and to a greater Seed – Christ, who would come not simply to a shriveled womb but an untouched womb and the virgin will give birth to the Seed. Then He through the womb of His church spreading the Gospel will give birth and bring dead sinners to life throughout all the nations. Abraham becomes the prime example of living by faith on what God is able to do.

The Bible says very clearly that God will by no means clear the guilty. We are guilty so how do we get clear/unguilty? God takes our sins and He imputes them to Jesus and then He takes His righteousness – Divine righteousness – and imputes it to us. So, I am no longer guilty, I'm forgiven. The gates of hell have been shut. Jesus went there, knocked them down and paid the penalty, grabbed the keys and set us free. The gates of heaven are now open. My credentials are now the righteousness of Christ, not my forgiveness. Be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and its power. The power of God brings us from death unto life and the righteousness of God brings us from guilt to innocence. I am justified before God – not by the law for that brings wrath, but it is grace that brings me to Jesus through faith and He brings me home. Why?

Jesus was delivered up for our transgression and Jesus would not have gone to the cross if we were not sinners and if He was not gracious. There would have been no one to go to the cross if He was not gracious. There is a redemption because there is a Redeemer. We provide the occasion for redemption – God delivered up His Son. His Son delivered up Himself. Hebrews tells us the Spirit of God delivered up Jesus to the cross, from the garden – is there any way this cup shall pass from Me? Hear the humanity of Jesus. Jesus says ‘I delight to do Your will O God My Father.’ The Father has delivered Him up for us all.

How do I know the atonement satisfied the holiness of God for my sins – which are so many, so pervasive, so ready to erupt in rebellion against God, if not for His grace. Jesus didn’t come out of the grave to justify you – He came out because you’re justified. Romans 4:25 says [25] ***(Jesus) who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*** God had declared His work glorious.

The takeaway is pretty simple for there are two guarantees here. I have prayed all week for you and I’m pleading with you not to leave this study with the guarantee of the wrath of God, but with the guarantee of the grace of God. Your baptism won’t save you. Your resolutions won’t save you. Your sincerity, your tithing, your attendance at church or your good works, none of that will save you. You have no idea how much I love the Lord’s Day and seeing those who come to worship. I love the rhythms of the Christian life as well but none of that can save you. It’s only Christ by grace through faith.

He is giving you a warning that if you’re not in Him you are under sin and under wrath. The law can’t save you and you don’t have the power to use the law to save yourself. And you are not promised the next breath. Ecclesiastes 9:12 says [12] ***For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.***

I want you to enjoy life now in Christ and I certainly want you to have eternal life in Christ. Jesus says in John 6:47, [47] ***Truly (Amen), truly (amen), I say to you, whoever believes (in Me) has eternal life.*** The question is, do you believe in Him? Do you know what that question is? You will not believe in Him as your Lord and Savior if you don’t believe God. Abraham believed God. There is a hell to lose and a heaven to gain and it’s only in Christ that you can gain it. Do you believe Him? You have to believe Him.

When I was a kid in 1958 Billy Graham came to do his Billy Graham Crusade at the Charlotte Coliseum and my dad was going to be an usher. He told me he had worked it out for me to go with him and so I went with him. I will never forget 1958 for three reasons. One, was the passion of Billy’s preaching, wanting people to come to Christ and even though I wasn’t saved yet it laid hold of my heart and was part of God bringing me to Himself. Billy always said ‘The Bible says...’ for he had the same instinct Paul had. The second thing I remember was the sanctified use of a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken for you can take up money in those buckets in that coliseum. The third thing I remember was looking at the choir trying to find where my mother was and I saw the summer wear of the women on a hot day. The men had on short sleeve, tie and shorts. Then I heard that song the way Cliff Barrows leads it – Blessed Assurance;

*Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!  
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,  
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood*

*Chorus:*

*This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my Savior all the day long;*

*This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my Savior all the day long.*

I pray that this is your story. Do you believe God? Then come to Christ by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Holy Spirit please speak to the hearts of all who are reading this today. God if there is anyone reading this who were yet not seeking but brought to this study, I pray that You will nurture in their heart a desire to seek Jesus today. Those who are seeking today may they hear, not a works salvation of the law although we love Your law for it leads us to Jesus, but they hear of a grace salvation – by grace through faith in Christ and today they say ‘God, I believe You, I come.’ Father, for those who know You I simply ask that we have the joy of our salvation – the guarantees of grace. As Your Word 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.* When You begin a work, You finish it. May we help those flee the wrath to come and the guaranteed wrath of all who are apart from Christ. May we rejoice in the guarantees of God's grace, not our works and we put no confidence in the flesh and we glory in Christ, praising God all the day long. Blessed assurance Jesus is mine, by grace I am His, Amen.

### Power Point

The Lawful Use of the Law

I. So, what becomes of our Boasting? – Romans 4:1–3

II. By what Law (principle) is Boasting excluded? – Romans 4:3–8

III. Is God the God of both Jews & Gentiles or Jews only? – Romans 4:9–12

IV. Is the Law of God overthrown by salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone? – Romans 4:13–25

The Lawful Use of the Law

A Declaration

An Exposition

An Illustration

Life Takeaway

*Two Guarantees*