

No Big Heads Allowed

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[0 : 00] It's 131, if you're using a red-coloured Bible, 1131, and Ralph is going to read. He gives a reference.

So, Romans chapter 3, and reading from verse 27 to chapter 4, and verse 12. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law?

No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.

Do we then nullify the law by this faith? Not at all. Rather, we uphold the law. What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?

If in fact Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God.

What does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

[1 : 16] Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works. Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him. Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised?

We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before.

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith, while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe, but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.

[2 : 20] And he is also the father of all who believe, and he is also the father of the circumcised, who not only are circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Thanks very much, Ralph. Well, please follow with me as we look at this passage from Romans chapter 3, 27 through from 4, verse 12.

As we don't have PowerPoint, you won't see any headings, but on the back of the new sheet, there is place for you to take notes. There is also a big A4 sheet, which does have the outline of the talk on it, which, I don't know, Rob has some.

If anybody would like that to follow, you can just put your hand up and pass it along. But they are there for you if you want. And I do welcome any questions at all over our studies in Romans.

We don't cover everything in detail, and we try to give the big picture, the big ideas. So if there's ever any questions or anything you want to discuss afterwards, please feel free to do that.

[3 : 42] Well, let's pray together and ask for God's help. Our Father, we thank you again for your grace to us, and we recognize that having your word in a language that we can understand and hear is a part of your grace.

That you speak to us in our language. You speak to us in our ways. So that we may understand you, the creator and the savior of the world.

And we ask that right now, by your spirit, you would speak into our hearts, into our lives. Change us. Make us more like you. Help us to understand how we should respond to you.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So when was the last time you ever wrote a letter of thanks to your boss for your paycheck?

Or sent a card to say, thank you so much for your generous gift? Now that would be absolutely daft, wouldn't it? Nobody sends cards for something that you have earned.

[5 : 05] Unless, of course, you're looking for promotion. You don't say thank you because you deserve it. You've worked hard for it. You earned it. In fact, if you didn't get your wage at the end of the week or the end of the month, you'd be straight into their office.

You would be demanding it. It's your right. Your employer is obliged to pay you. Now hold that thought in your mind and let me introduce you to Fred.

Fred never bothered with church. His parents went, but he never saw the point. He always found that it interrupted his sport and his socializing.

The one Bible that he got from school, from the visiting Gideons, he used to balance his desk. In adult life, God and the Bible were of little use and relevance to him.

Fred has a good friend called Bob. Bob was the local vicar's son. He went to church all the time, not because he was forced to, but because he thought it was a good thing to do.

[6 : 15] He got so involved in church life, he became the youth leader, and later on he became an elder, having studied theology. Poor Fred was now struggling with a broken marriage, and he was hitting the bottle quite hard.

Bob, however, had a great family, and he was a well-respected man in the community. Now here's the question. Tell me, which one deserves God's forgiveness?

Who has earned God's acceptance? Fred or Bob? Which one does God owe? Well, if you're not sure what the answer is, look at verse 4 of chapter 4.

Now when a person works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. They've earned it.

They deserve it. However, to the person who does not work, that means who doesn't try to earn their salvation, but trusts God, who justifies the wicked, that's to put them right with God, their faith is credited as righteousness.

[7 : 34] And here is the unique promise of the gospel. When it comes to God's salvation and forgiveness, it's not about what we have done, but it's all about faith in what Christ has done.

It's not about our work, but Christ's work. Wages from an employer are always earned. You deserve it because of your hard work.

You receive your paycheck because of your performance. Salvation from God is never earned. It's always undeserved. The grace that we receive from God is because of Christ's perfect performance for us.

So if we don't earn salvation, how do we receive it? Well, have a look at verse 27 of chapter 3. Where then is boasting? Are there any big heads in this room? Is there anybody here this morning who thinks that they deserve God's forgiveness?

[8 : 41] Anybody here that think that because they've gone to church all their life, they've read their Bibles, they've never had an affair, that they've somehow have earned God's favor? Verse 27.

Where is the boasting? It's excluded. There are no room. There's no room for big heads in here. Why? Well, look at what it says.

On what principle? On that of observing the law because of something you've done? No. But on that of faith. For we maintain that a person is justified, put right with God, by faith, apart from observing the law, apart from doing anything.

You see, salvation is received by faith in what Jesus has done, not by works we have done. And it's important for us to understand how faith operates.

There's two things here. The first is this. Faith is not an intellectual exercise. It's a trusting exercise. I'm sure we all watched the news as we saw the Chilean miners brought to the surface.

[9 : 51] There was this metal capsule that was lowered down through a shaft which was no more than two feet, half a mile down, two feet wide.

And it would bring the miners safely to the surface. Now, every single one of those miners believed that if you stepped into the capsule and closed the door, the laws of engineering would begin to operate and they would be hoisted to the surface and they would be rescued.

They knew, they believed, that's what would happen. But unless they actually stepped into it, they would never be rescued. Because believing in something intellectually is not having faith in

something personally.

Belief will always leave you on the outside. Knowledge will just leave you on the outside. Faith is the opposite. Faith means you will actually entrust yourself.

And in the miners' case, it's entrusting themselves to the capsule. They step in, close the door, in faith, that it will bring them to the surface.

[11:02] Belief won't save you. Faith does. Now, in the same way, we are entrusting ourselves to the perfect work of Christ on the cross. I don't just believe he died for my sin.

Lots of people can believe in the person of Jesus, that he was here on earth 2,000 years ago, that he died. Lots of people believe that. But we have to have faith in his death for my sin.

To have faith is to step into Christ, closing the door on everything else, and saying that he is sufficient, completely sufficient, to justify us, to put us right with God.

So that's the first thing. Faith is not an intellectual exercise. It's a trusting exercise. And second, faith is not just an exchange with God, but a channel to God.

I'm sure some of you here have Tesco club cards. Do you? Tesco club cards? Tesco club cards. Every time you go shopping, you cash in your little card, and you get some extra points.

[12:14] And after so many weeks of building up your points, you can cash them in, and then you can get your shopping for free. But it's not really free, is it?

They tell you it's free. The advertisement says, here's your points, get your Tesco shopping for free. But in reality, you've actually paid for all of those points in previous weeks.

And then you bring in your card, and you exchange them for a bag of spuds, or whatever else is in your trolley. Now in the same way, we can think that we have to cash in our faith to God.

I will only find salvation if I have enough faith built up, if I have enough faith points in my life. But faith is never measured like that.

You can't measure it in terms of quantity. It's not an exchange that we do with God. Like saying to God, well, here's my faith. I've been working really hard.

[13:12] I've built up my faith. And I'm giving you my faith. Now in return, you give me your salvation. That works. No, faith is a channel to God.

through which we receive the free gift of salvation. So no one here this morning can say, I have more faith than you.

Or the reason why I'm a Christian and you're not is because I have more faith points than you. You see, there's no big heads allowed. And if there are any big heads, the door is over there.

You can leave. Faith is simply trusting in what Jesus has done. His work, his performance, his ability, and not mine. Faith is a channel.

It is the means by which salvation flows freely to us. And this is how it is for everyone, regardless of your race or culture.

[14:16] Look at verse 29. The question is being asked, who is this for? Is God the God of Jews only? Just of religious people?

Is he not the God of Gentiles too, the people who are not religious? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God. Who will justify the circumcised, the religious people by faith?

And the uncircumcised, the non-religious people, through the same faith? You see, you might be the most committed person in church.

You might never have even bothered with church. You might think yourself very moral. You may be struggling this morning because you're so conscious of all the things you've messed up with this week.

But it doesn't matter whether you're a Fred with a broken, messed up life, or a Bob who is the moral pillar in the community. There's just one God and he operates with all of us in exactly the same way.

[15:21] The only way we receive our salvation is by faith, not works. So there's no room for big heads in here.

You can leave. Well, if salvation is not received by, if salvation is received by faith, we're still asking the question, what is it that I actually have to do?

Surely I have to do something. Well, the answer is no, you don't have to do anything. Look at chapter 4, verse 1. What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? Now Abraham was considered the father, the hero of the Jewish people. Dads used to tell their kids stories about Abraham at night.

But most importantly, what Abraham did, they did. How Abraham lived, they must live. He was their hero, he was their father. The way he was, they've got to follow.

[16:23] So Paul introduces their hero, Abraham, and he's asking them questions about, well, let's see how he got his salvation. So in verse 2, if in fact Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about.

In other words, God, I've obeyed you, so you owe me. But not before God. What does the scripture say?

This is a quote from Genesis chapter 15. It says, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. So there's a very straightforward question here.

What did Abraham do to achieve his salvation? Answer, absolutely nothing. There was nothing he could point to. There was nothing that he had actually done. He simply believed.

He had faith in what God said he was going to do. So our salvation is achieved by God's gift of grace, not our good performance.

[17:28] It's by grace, not performance. Suppose you're going for your job interview. You're going to bring along with you your CV, aren't you?

Your CV is a record of your performance. how well you've done in college, the grades that you've earned, the position that you held in your last job, the promotion and so on and everything that you've deserved is all there on your CV.

Now whether you get the job or not depends on how well you've performed over the last number of years and how well you're going to perform in the interview. So you're only going to get the job on your merit.

But with our salvation, the record of our life, our CV is never good enough. The grades that we have scored throughout life, the points that we build up, it counts for nothing.

So in God's grace he offers us the free gift of his performance record. It's like he gives us his CV and he credits us with his righteousness and just as it was for Abraham, so it is for us.

[18:41] We achieve salvation by grace, not by our performance. And then he introduced another character, King David, in verse 6. He was another hero of the Jewish people, the greatest king that there was for them.

And he's also an example of how all of this is true. Verse 6, David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the person to whom God credits righteousness apart from works, apart from performance.

Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against them.

Now we might call this the great exchange and we have to be careful here that we don't confuse it with what we said about earlier about faith not being an exchange.

Here we're talking about exchanging between what we have and what Christ has. And there's two things here as well. First, our faith, our record, or by faith rather, our record is given to Christ.

[19:53] And Christ's record is given to us. It's like Christ takes on himself our CV. He takes on our record of how we have lived. All our disobedience has been cashed in or credited to Christ.

And then second, in exchange, by faith, we take on the CV of Christ. The complete and perfect record of Christ's life is given to us. All of his obedience is credited to us.

So there's a complete exchange. It's my life for Christ's life. And this is what David was celebrating in verses 7 to 8. He talks about those sins that are covered and the sins that the Lord will never count against them because they have been counted to Christ.

And his Christ righteousness has been counted to him. Now that does not mean that we are now perfect in our thoughts, words and actions.

It doesn't mean that just because we have Christ's righteousness, that we have his obedience, that we love everybody perfectly as Christ loved us. I think we all know that we're not perfect.

[21:07] But what it does mean is that when we have Christ's record, we have a new position. Our position before God has changed. Our status has been completely transformed.

That means we are now treated by God as if we are obedient like Christ. we are treasured by God as if we are blameless like Christ.

Now this has huge implications for us today, right now, even now as we sit because maybe you're feeling a little bit guilty and you're feeling a little bit ashamed of things that have been said and done through the week and you're wondering how is God going to look at me?

How is he going to treat me? Well it means when we do fail and fall and when you fail and fall this week and you will, our status does not change.

Even when we do disobey and rebel, our position before God doesn't change. Remember, we have been given Christ's perfect record. All of that has been credited to us.

[22 : 07] We have his CV. So we are forever and always under his grace. So when he looks at you, when you've messed up, he sees Christ.

He doesn't see you in all your mess. And we so often fall into the trap of thinking that okay, I understand this side that salvation is achieved by grace but somehow my salvation must be maintained by performance.

So grace gets me in but performance keeps me there. But that's completely rubbish. That's turning everything upside down. We can never rely on our performance.

Our performance is always flawed and broken. We rely fully and totally on the perfect record of Christ which is forever credited to us. It can't be taken away from us.

No matter how many times you sin and fail, it is always there. So there is no big, so there's no room for big heads because we all fail miserably but we are all covered by Christ's righteousness.

[23 : 19] So there's nothing we can do to achieve salvation. It's something that we receive by faith. But you say there must be something we have to do.

It can't surely be just nothing. There must be something that we have to do. No, there's absolutely nothing we can do. It's by faith. faith. But there is a way that we should respond.

We're going to look here in verses 9 down to verse 12. Now in this section here we must remember that the church that Paul is writing to is racially and culturally mixed.

It was made up primarily on the one hand of Jews who were very moral and had a very religious background and the rest were made up of Gentiles. People who were very liberal and they didn't have a religious background.

And the religious Jews were always falling into the way of superiority. They were suffering with the big head syndrome. After all, God had given them the special sign of circumcision.

[24 : 26] The mark that you belong to God. You are his special people. And therefore they thought they were better than everybody else. And somehow all the other people were second-rate Christians. They were the ones that kind of sat back in the corner of the church.

They weren't really part of the true family. So this issue had to be tackled and this is what he does in verse 9. So he asked the question, speaking particularly to religious people, is this blessedness, this salvation, this forgiveness, is it only for the circumcised, for the religious people, for the good moral people?

Or is it also for the uncircumcised, the immoral people? For we've been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.

So, Mr. Jew, let's have a look at your great hero Abraham. Let's see again how he got his salvation, verse 10. Under what circumstances was it credited?

Was it after he was circumcised? Or before? Now that's an important point. If it was after, they would all be saying, you see, Abraham did something, he obeyed God, and because he obeyed God, God owed him something.

[25 : 47] But look at the answer. It was not after, but before. So it's a crushing blow because all of a sudden they realise that their great hero of the faith, Abraham, who they thought was this most wonderful, obedient person, actually became a Christian before he ever did anything that was obedience.

In our terms, he was never baptised, he was never confirmed, he never took communion, he was in fact a Gentile, verse 11. He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

Christ. You see, if we understand our salvation rightly, it will never lead to superiority, instead it will lead to unity.

Nobody will be going around thinking, I'm better than you. Now we're quite a mixed bunch here, aren't we? Some people here are from a religious background, some people aren't.

Some of you here this morning have been baptised, some of you haven't. Some of you are members of this church, and some of you aren't.

[27 : 08] Some of you have been here for quite a few years, some of you have only been here for one year. Now the question I want to ask us all is, if you're a Christian, how did you receive your

salvation?

What did you do to achieve your salvation? Well if we are true Christians, the answer will be exactly the same. There was nothing that we could do to earn our salvation, it was all by faith, faith in the work that Jesus did for us.

So what is that going to mean for us as a church family? It will mean unity, not superiority. So nobody can claim to be better than anybody else.

No one can feel that because I've been here longer than you, I have more rights than you. And nobody can think, well because I'm a member, my opinion is more important than anybody else's. It's back to verse 27, where's the boasting? Nobody can boast. And if you do think you are better than anybody else, the door is over there and you can leave.

[28 : 16] And that's the big issue that he is tackling here as he writes to this church in Rome. Look at 11, verse 11 of chapter 4.

Halfway down, verse 11, we'll pick it up where it says, so then, he is the father of all. And it starts talking about circumcision, but we're going to take the word circumcision out and we're going to put baptism in to make it a little bit more contemporary for us.

So listen as we read. So then, Abraham is the father of all who believe, but have not been baptized, in order that the righteousness might be credited to them.

And he is also the father of those who have been baptized, who not only are baptized, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was baptized.

So, can we see that the issue here, the important factor is faith. It's not about the external issues at all. And quite frankly, it doesn't matter whether you've been baptized as an infant or an adult, those issues aren't going to save you.

[29 : 40] It doesn't matter whether you've been confirmed or taken communion, those things aren't going to save you one little bit. No water or sprinkling will do that. The big important issue is being pointed out here, is that it's by faith.

And it's not just the start with faith, but look at the end of verse 12, who walk in the footsteps of the faith, who continue by faith.

So we start with faith in Christ, and we continue with faith in Christ. Now, I'm not saying that baptism isn't unimportant, it is, but it's most important that we understand the priority.

Faith is important. And that's what makes Christians one. That's what unites us. That's what pulls us together here. It's not because we're all Baptists that we're all one.

It's all because of our faith in Christ, our common faith in what Jesus has done. Now, all too often, believers can become very judgmental.

[30 : 51] They can boast in their good life, I'm better than you. But in the church, there is no room for big heads. There's no room for judgmental attitudes.

There's no room for superiority. There's no room for thinking, I'm better than you. Why? Because we are all saved by the same faith.

We're all messed up. We're all big, filthy, dirty, rotten sinners. We've got nothing in our account to bring to God.

By faith, we receive from His account, and He fills it with righteousness. Look at Romans, chapter 15.

Romans 15, verse 5. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and one mouth we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[32 : 29] Accept one another then, just as Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God. Do you see the way we treat each other?

The way we love each other? The way we care for each other? The way we all recognize that we're Christians because of what Christ has done, and it's our faith in Him.

That'll be to the praise of God, so that when people join with us, as people meet with us, they will see the unity. They will see a unity that it's not about labels or denominations, they will see that they are united in their common faith in Christ, and that alone is what is going to draw people to God.

Let's pray together. Our Father God, we want to thank you for two things.

we want to thank you for our salvation. We want to thank you for all that Jesus has done for us on our behalf, recognizing that all that we have is simply by that act of faith, trusting in you, the channel by which we receive Christ's righteousness, his CV, his record, his performance, his life, in

exchange of mine.

[34 : 11] Thank you for our salvation. And we thank you too for our unity. We thank you for the family of this church.

We thank you for the measure of care and love and support. We thank you for the way in which people pray for one another.

other. We thank you for the way in which people help. We thank you for the way in which people are welcomed and accepted into this community here.

We thank you that we have this unity because of Christ. Christ. And so we pray and we ask that you would protect it.

That we would always remember the priority is our faith. And that we would always focus on Christ. And that we would be always an opening, welcoming, caring people.

[35 : 19] and we pray this so that other people may find Christ. That they will come to love him and to trust in him too.

We thank you for one another and we thank you for Jesus. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing together how deep the Father's love for us.

I haven't got a page or a number.