

The Importance of Faith

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 April 2017

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 0 0] Turn in your Bibles now to Romans chapter 3 and 4. So we're going to begin in Romans chapter 3 verse 27, picking up from where we left off and reading through to verse 25 in chapter 4. Now hear God's word.

Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By the law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also.

Since God is one, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith? Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means. On the contrary, we uphold the law.

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather, according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but his due. And to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one through whom God counts righteousness apart from works. Blessed are those whose lawless deeds. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.

It is this blessing then only for the circumcised or also for the uncircumcised. For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make the father, to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised. Man, how many times does it say circumcised? Here we go. I've read this through all this week. It didn't seem to say it quite that much. So the righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised, who are not merely circumcised, but who walk in the footsteps of faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. For the promise of Abraham and his offspring, that he would be the heir of the world, did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if his adherents of the law who were to be heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

[3 : 31] For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, there is no transgression. 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. As it is written, I have made you a father of many nations, in the presence of God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 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. 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. No unbelief made him, no unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith and he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness. But the words, it was, is counted to him, were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him, who raised from the dead

Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Well, may God bless his word as we come to it. Well, may God bless the reading of his word.

And then continuing our studies in Romans. And as we do, Paul really gets into the thick of it. He begins to explain something really very, very important. And despite the amount of times circumcision is mentioned, you know, when you say that aloud, you realize just how many times it's mentioned. Circumcision is not the main point of the passage. It's rather what circumcision points to, a bit like baptism. So we're actually going to approach this, just go through it nice and gently.

Having read it, you think, my word, that's a lot to take in. However, it's surprisingly simple what Paul has to say. And he has to say one thing. It's the importance of faith. It's the importance of faith in God. You know, Abraham is mentioned a lot and circumcision is mentioned a lot because Abraham believed God and on believing God, it was counted to him as righteousness. You know, how do you get right with God? Romans 4 says, believe him. Like, is it really that simple to get right with God? All I have to do is listen to the words of God and believe him. And Paul's saying, though in quite a detailed way, yes, that's exactly what I'm saying. The way that you get right with God, the way that you are counted righteous is by believing him. So if you ask the question, well, how did Abraham get right with

God? He believed God. Well, how do I get right with God? The answer that Paul gives is in exactly the same way Abraham did. There's no difference in exactly the same way Abraham did by believing God.

[7 : 09] Now that tells you something very important. And that is that right from the very beginning, the way that a person gets right with God has always been the same. You know, too often you hear Christians, you know, reject the Old Testament because, you know, that's saying something different than the New Testament. You know, and then they reject even perhaps certain parts of the New Testament because, you know, this doesn't fit in with 21st century life. No, God's eternal and we deal with an eternal God. Let's make it even more basic. How do you know that you're forgiven?

I'm not asking you what caused your forgiveness. I'm not asking you what God did. I'm asking, how do you know that you're forgiven? I don't know if you've ever sat down and thought about it. Perhaps you ought to. I think the answer is that's surprisingly very easy. There's only one way you can know, and that is you either believe what God says, that you're forgiven, or you don't. It's the only way you can know by trusting in the Word of God that says, I have forgiven you in Christ Jesus. How do I know that eternal life is real?

How do I know that I'm forgiven? How do I know that I belong to God? It's the same answer to all of these questions. Do I believe what God has said? It's really very, very simple. Do you believe God?

Do you believe that the words that I read are actually the words of God to you this morning, and do you believe those? That's Paul's point that he's making this morning.

The section on Romans here is, of course, about faith, and that we're justified by faith alone. Nothing else makes us right with God other than faith in God. But here's what Paul says that's surprising, or this is the one thing that you really need to know. In other words, if you're going to go away from here this morning and forget most of it, don't forget this bit, and that is the Word of God achieves what it wants. What does that mean? Well, to tell someone that they've got to have faith in God without ever telling them the Word of God is cruel. In fact, it's even an act of mockery.

[9 : 42] Well, you've got to have faith in God. You've got to have faith in God. No, that's not what Paul says, is it? How do you get faith in God? Well, you've got to have it. No, yeah, you've got to have it, but how do you get it? The Word of God achieves what it declares. What does it declare? It says that all those who have faith in God, all those who believe God, are counted as righteous. Great. How do I get the faith? All of those who have faith in God's Word are counted as righteous. Wonderful. How do I get the faith? Romans 10, by hearing the Word of God. See, Paul's argument is very, very simple. The way that I get faith in the Word of God is by hearing the Word of God. Don't tell somebody to have faith. Tell them the Word of God. It's the only thing that can give them faith. It's the only thing that can produce faith in their life. Don't go looking for something that doesn't exist. It needs to be created. And faith in a person's life is created by God speaking to them. It's created by the Word of God. So the very

Word of God that says you must have faith in God is the very Word of God that gives you that faith to having God. That's Paul's central point here. Don't underestimate how important that is. You know, we want to see people grow in their faith and yet they don't attend Bible studies. You know, we want to see people step out in faith but they don't read God's Word enough. We want to see people hold on to the promises of God but they don't hold on to the Word of God. You know, all of these things that depend on faith cannot be strengthened in any way unless the Word of God produces that faith in the first place. That's what Paul is saying. The faith that we need to believe the Word of God comes from the Word of God. That's how simple it is. Romans 10 verse 17, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. That's how you get faith. You want somebody else to have faith in God? Don't tell them to have faith. Tell them the Word of God. Why? Because it's only the Word of God that can produce it. That's

Paul's central point here. We are made right with God by believing him, by believing him, his words. Abraham is made right with God because he believed what God spoke to him.

You know, how interested are you attending to, you know, broken relationships? I'm talking about, you know, perhaps your tense relationship between you and God or perhaps a relationship that you have with somebody else but that other person doesn't have a relationship with God. Yeah. How interested are you in mending their broken relationship with God?

Well, your interest will be seen in how much you tell them the Word of God. Yeah, I'm not talking about sit them down and give them a sermon. I am, however, saying that every word that comes out of your mouth should be gospel-centered. You know, we shouldn't have a mix here. Just keep it real.

[13 : 17] And allow the Word of God to produce faith in people. Now, we all need to hear the Word of God, whether we've been saved five years, ten years, or we're not saved at all. Because it's the only thing that can produce faith and continue to produce faith in us. You know, life is extremely difficult.

It's even more difficult when you're a Christian struggling with faith in God. It's unbearable at times to think, you know, what is tomorrow going to hold? What is next year going to hold? Or is, from my point of view, what is the next four and a half years going to hold?

Bearing in mind that that's the time frame that I'm now currently working under. Well, I have to go back to the Word of God and trust what he says. Right? It's the only thing that can build the faith up that we need. Life is too difficult without it. Abraham, despite everything that he had going on in his life, didn't waver. His faith got stronger and stronger as he continued to hold onto the Word of God. So what does this mean? Well, the first thing it means in terms of salvation is this. You can't boast for being a Christian. There's no boasting. We're saved by faith alone.

We're justified by faith alone. And so Paul says, look, given that this is the case, no boasting. You know, none of you are here who are saved are saved by what you did. You didn't do anything. All you did was listen. God did everything. Yeah, you are to have faith in God's Word, but remember how the faith in God's Word is produced in you. It's by God speaking to you. So no boasting. You know, Abraham couldn't boast that he was made right with God because he did something. You know, David couldn't boast that he was made right with God because he did something. You know, I can't boast that I've been made right with God because I, you know, that I've done something. All that Abraham did was believe. All that David did was believe. All that you have done is believe, and you must continue to believe in God's Word. It's very simple. So no boasting. No boasting saying, you know, I've been a Christian 20 years. No boasting. You've been a Christian 20 years by the grace of God. You know, thank God for the fact that you're saved. It's a wonderful thing that God has done for us. In other words, to put it in a slightly different way, Christians can't boast about being Christians. Okay? We can't boast about it. We have been purchased. We have been made this by God. Hearing his Word, yes. Believing, yes, but produced in us by a gracious God. You know, Paul uses a very good illustration here. It's found in verses 4 and 5 of chapter 4, and it's to do with wages. You know, the one who works. You know, the person who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but they're counted as, you know, what's due.

But the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. In other words, you know, Paul's saying, look, if salvation is by works, then God is only paying you back. Okay? It's salvation by works, all the good works that I've done, and the fact that you're saved. You're saved because you've done a lot of good works.

[17:16] There's no grace there. You've just been given what you do. You've put in the hours. You've done the good works for God, and now God's paid you back. Now, that's a wage. That's not grace.

You know, you've just earned it. You know, those who are saved then are those who have worked for it. Now you've got something to boast about. Right? Now you've got something to boast about. The trouble is, Paul says, it's not. It comes via belief. It comes via faith. It's not a wage. Salvation is not given to you because you've worked hard for it. It's given to you because you believe God.

And the faith that you need to believe God was given to you the moment God spoke to you. So no boasting. You know, don't think for a minute, you know, I've been a Christian for a long time, or I've been a Christian for this reason and that reason. How many of you, I wonder, feel better when you pray more? Isn't that a sign of boasting? You know, how many of you feel a stronger Christian if you read your Bible just that extra few minutes each day? What are you doing? You're boasting.

Why on earth should you feel better? I think the reason why you do is because you're contributing, contributing. And there's something about contributing to our faith that makes us feel better. Should it? No. Because God doesn't even care about it.

No. The thing that we should feel great about is that despite what I've done or not done, God saved me. And God has saved you. That's the thing. I can go out and be just an absolute pain in God's side the whole of next week and God won't think a single bit differently about me, depending on what he thinks about me right now.

[19 : 20] You know, salvation is not by what we do or what we don't do. It is by the grace and gift of God. I'm made right with God, not by what I contribute and not by what I don't contribute. I'm made right with God purely because God decides to do it. So we're not made right with God because we've worked for it. If we did, we could boast. No boasting, Paul says. God speaks. It produces faith. And that faith in the word of God is a result of God speaking to us. Yeah, David also is mentioned here.

One of my favorite psalms, Psalm 32, blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sins. Have you ever noticed the problem with that psalm? Well, who does the Lord count sins against if it isn't against me?

Yeah, I've read that psalm loads of times and I'm always amazed at how David knew what he knew. It is probably one of my favorite psalms for this reason. David is saying here quite clearly that the only reason why I am forgiven is because my sins are not counted against me. Okay, okay, I've got it. But who are they counted against? Because God just can't let anything go. God can't just say, well, it's all right, David, or it's all right, Daniel, or it's all right, your name.

Let's move on to the next day. We'll leave that behind. God can't sweep anything under the carpet. Everything must be dealt with. How's it going to be dealt with? Well, David understands that he looks forward to the word of God. How does David know that his sins are forgiven? He believes God.

He believes God that God will hold to the promises that he made. Remember chapter three, everything has been counted to Jesus. All the sin, all the wrongdoing has gone through a great exchange.

[21 : 35] Everything that was good and perfect and just and righteous about Jesus, God gave to you. And everything that is bad and vile and sinful about you, even all your good deeds, is put on Jesus.

Then what happens? God does not count your sin against you, but counts it against his son. That's how you're forgiven. That's how you're forgiven. But how do I know that I'm forgiven?

By believing that. By believing that. How I'm forgiven is one thing. How I know that I'm forgiven is something quite different. How I know comes down to believing the word of God.

Well, we get on to the next bit then, the second illustration that Paul uses, and it's circumcision. I think we should bring it back. No, that's a joke. You know, Paul mentioned circumcision here for a number of reasons, because the Jews, the Jews made the mistake of thinking that by going through the act of circumcision, now I'm right with God.

Yet the Church of England, not in their better moments, did exactly the same thing with infant baptism. They totally misunderstood infant baptism. In fact, I've even still got one of the books where it says, by this water you are now regenerate.

[23 : 05] Even they made the mistake of turning a sign into something that converts. The Jews did exactly the same, and that's why Paul is saying here to everybody, but of course it's going to hit home with the Jews the most, is because they've taken this circumcision and says, right, now that I'm circumcised, I'm right with God.

And Paul illustrates through Abraham saying, okay, which came first? Abraham's circumcision or Abraham's righteousness? Which came first?

And all Jews were, okay, Abraham's righteousness. Abraham believed God, he was counted being right with God, and then, and then, if you read it carefully, God at that point gave Abraham the sign of circumcision.

Why? Not because it made him right with God, not even for a moment, but because the sign, the circumcision, was a sign that he was already made right with God because he believed the word of God.

Okay, you've got it. Does that make sense? Great. Here's the tricky bit. Then Abraham goes, and along with Moses, and every other Jew, circumcises children.

[24 : 31] Are you puzzling? That's because circumcision was never to be a sign of your faith, just like baptism is never to be a sign of your faith.

Rather, it is the sign that God gives, that God saves by faith. See, the reason why children were circumcised in the Old Testament was not because God was saying to them, look, you're made right with God through this action.

No, it was to teach the children right from the very beginning that the way a person gets right with God is by believing, just like Abraham. It is the sign and seal of what God does.

You know, a lot of people get confused over this. It's because we've divided ourselves into camps. You've got the Anglicans over here, we've got the Presbyterians over here, we've got the Baptists over here, and then, you know, when we don't want to be any of those, we're called the free, independent, evangelical church, continuing, or something.

Why does all this happen? It happens because nobody can be clear on what they're reading. But if you just sat down and paid just a little bit of attention, number one, Abraham is not made right with God through circumcision.

[25 : 50] Not even close. None of the children that were circumcised in the Old Testament were made right with God through circumcision. No, the circumcision was a sign to Abraham, to everybody else who would follow, that God saves people by faith in what he's spoken.

Abraham believed God, it says, and it was counted to him as righteousness. It's very important because, you know, some Christians can even get hung up on the fact that, you know, I'm not a good Christian because I've not been baptized yet.

You know, does Jesus command baptism? Yeah, absolutely. So go and do it. Go and be baptized. But are you, are you less of a Christian because you've not been baptized?

No, not for a moment. Not even for a second. Why? Because baptism is saying something about the way God saves.

It points to the cross, just like circumcision pointed to the cross. Baptism also. So, don't get hung up on these signs. I'm a better Christian if I pray more. I'm a better Christian if I'm a baptized one.

[27 : 05] I'm a better Christian if I read my Bible more. You know, should you be doing all of these things? Absolutely. But do they make you a better person? Not even in the slightest. You get a pastor who's, you know, basically supported financially to read his Bible.

And perhaps I shouldn't say that because that sort of puts me on the spot. You know, I absolutely love reading my Bible. You know, but, you know, am I tempted to come away thinking, wow, do you know what?

I put in four hours today. Non-stop reading. Should I feel good about myself? Well, only in the sense that I've been perhaps disciplined enough to be able to sit there, but not in the sense that this makes me better before God or God's somehow going to pay more attention to the prayers than I'm just a bit of pray.

Yet, too often, Christians get caught up, just like the Jews did, in thinking that their contribution somehow makes their relationship with God better.

And it doesn't. Not even for a moment. Okay? You get someone who never prays. Well, I mean, the difficulty is what identifies a Christian.

[28 : 26] I don't want to go down that line. We've tackled that before. But the issue is this. Don't think that what you do contributes to your identity before God and what God thinks about you.

It doesn't. God saved you through his son. We come now to Abraham briefly and then to the end. Abraham, in many ways, is an example for all of us to follow.

In other words, believe God. And upon believing God, God will count you righteous. Abraham lived by faith. He grew in his faith and he gave glory to God for everything.

But notice this. Here's the example. verses 23 and 25 of chapter 4. But the words, it was counted to him, were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also.

It will be counted to us who believe in him, who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

[29 : 37] salvation. In other words, Paul's saying, look, God saved you in exactly the same way he saved Abraham through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

How do you know that? Well, Abraham believed what he was told by God and we believe what we are told by God. Abraham's made right with God in his day and we are made right with God in our day in exactly the same way by believing what God has done for us.

Just by believing what God has spoken. Here's the exhortation then as we close. The word of God clearly says that we are justified by faith alone.

That means we do nothing. We are made right with God by God alone. The second thing it says is that the faith that we need in the word of God is produced in us by hearing the word of God.

You want somebody to have faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus? Then tell them about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It's that simple.

[30 : 48] How do I get faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus? Well, Paul says, tell them about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Tell them God's word. Why? Because God's word is the only thing that can produce faith in them.

What does that mean? It means that I can't boast. I can't boast for following God. I can't boast in praying. I can't boast in reading my Bible.

All of these come to me because of what God has done. All of these things come to you because of what God has done. No boasting. Leave it at the door.

Leave it behind. Think for a moment in terms of evangelism. I said this at the beginning. You know, how much do we want to see mended relationships?

I'm not talking about between people. Yeah, that's important. But between people and God. Tell them the word of God. You know, Christians know that they're not better than anybody else.

[31 : 53] we are better off. You know, in every single way. And that's something that Christians should know.

You know, you're not better than anybody else, granted. But you are better off than anybody else who's not saved. That's Paul's point. Understand the grace of God in your life.

So, no boasting. What we are is because what God has done for us. Well, I'm still hooked up on struggling with my faith or I'm still hooked up on the need to contribute.

Leave it alone. Abandon it. Just leave it at the door and just start reading God's word. Not as a work. Not as a work. But read it because you now know that the word of God produces the faith in you that you need.

That's where to find what God has to give you in the word of God. So, justification is by faith alone.

[32 : 59] Righteousness is by faith alone. Being made right with God is by faith alone. I struggle with that truth. Read the word of God then. I struggle with the fact that I don't need to contribute anything.

Read the word of God then. I struggle with the fact that God has done it all for me because I still get hung up daily on whether or not I'm praying enough or reading my Bible enough. Read the word of God again.

Let the word of God produce in you what you need to believe those things to be true. So, remember, how am I made right with God? I'm made right with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

How do I know that I am made right with God? By believing his word. In other words, I'll finish with it. How do I know that I am forgiven?

Answer, because God said so. Because God said so. Amen.