

# FAITH

## FAITH IN ONE WORD

### Romans 4

In two verses Paul gives you his theme for Romans -- his thesis statement, if you will. For those of you who had the joy of taking Freshman English and you had to summarize your main idea in a thesis statement, that's what Paul is doing here. He is telling you exactly what he is about in Romans 1:16-17. **He tells us that the gospel is the power of God.**

We immediately want to ask, "What is the gospel?" It is this message, this truth of who Jesus is and what he has done. **In summary, this good news is that there is salvation in Jesus Christ. There is forgiveness of sin. There is eternal life in Jesus. Our relationship with God is restored and everything is transformed and changed as a result. This message, the gospel, doesn't just connect us to power. It doesn't just bring us power. It is the power of God. The word of God enters our hearts and there is an explosion of life as that word is received.**

He tells us this is the power of God for salvation. In it, the righteousness of God is revealed; the way to be right with God, the way to make everything right, the way that God restores right. God is saying to us (and this becomes very clear throughout the book of Romans) that there is something very wrong with creation. There is something that's not right with our world, even the good things.

That's one of the reasons why today we just felt impressed to stop. We don't normally do this, but we decided to pray for marriages, because even the blessings of God take God's grace. Sin comes in and makes it challenging. It got really quiet all of a sudden.

I was tempted to pray for those who are married and want to be single and those who are single and want to be married, but I thought that probably wouldn't be helpful. **Even the great things of life are affected by our separation from God. The power of God is greater than that separation. And the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel.**

Here's what's interesting. You hear this and you say, "Okay, what do I do? What is my response?" Paul quotes an Old Testament prophet to say, "The just shall live by faith." Then he uses this phrase: "from faith to faith." This is what he is saying. **The Christian life, from beginning to end, is lived by**

**faith. Faith is what we do to experience, to receive the power of God. It's our response to the gospel.**

I promise you I'm not going to teach the entire book of Romans, only most of it. He puts his theme out there in two verses, and in verse 18 he begins his first major section. Do you know the topic for his first major section? It's on sin. He talks for three chapters about sin. Something has happened. We have a broken relationship with God. He identifies the brokenness, the problem, as sin. He doesn't lead us to believe that God is okay with this. In fact, he comes out of the gate with a very harsh statement in verse 18: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..."

Then he begins to teach. In fact, this section of scripture is one of the most helpful sections if you want to understand what the Bible has to teach about sin. And he does this for three chapters, concluding that all have sinned -- Jew and Gentile, religious and unreligious -- everyone has sinned. God has put a knowledge of what he desires upon our hearts. He has recorded it in the Old Testament scriptures, and we are all guilty before God of sin and our relationship with him is broken.

What is Paul doing here? Why this first section that takes us through three chapters on the topic of sin? Yes, because in order for us to understand salvation and to receive the good news, we need to know why we need it. We need to know, as we say, the bad news in order to hear the good news. So that's what Paul does in section 1: why we need this power of God.

Then at the end of chapter 3 he returns to his theme. It's just *masterful* teaching. He gives you his thesis. He gives you section 1, then he gives you a couple of paragraphs, about 10 or 11 verses, where he takes you deeper into the theme of the gospel and how God saves us, and we receive it by faith. So, theme for section 1, theme enlargement, which brings us to our text today: Romans 4.

His second major section is this: **Well, what do you do to receive this power? The answer is faith.** He spends an entire chapter teaching us why it is by faith, and why it is by faith alone. Because Paul understands that everything within us -- we are going to be tempted, whether it's at the beginning of the Christian life, the middle of the Christian life, the end of the Christian life -- we are always going to be drawn to legalism. We are always going to be drawn to live by our own works and righteousness. No matter what realm we are talking about -- whether it's career or finances or material things or family life -- whatever it may be -- we are going to see our shortcomings. We are going to see the sin

of the world, the sin that's done against us, the failure in our own lives, and we are going to be tempted to make that the avenue of power, and it will never bring power. It will bring death.

He wants to say, "No, no, no, no, no - I want you to experience God's power. I want you to live by grace, and the key to that is faith." So he teaches us for a chapter about faith in Romans 4. I'm going to give you three points. The first point is this:

### **I. We are saved by grace, not by works, verses 1-12.**

If you will allow me, I am going to read the text and make some comments as we go through it. He is teaching us now about faith.

*What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has 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 as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...*

How does Paul teach us about faith? He brings up Abraham. He will give us one entire chapter where he uses the life of Abraham to teach us about faith. Here is, I think, his logic that he wants us to get. He says, "Listen, faith is how we relate to God. But don't misunderstand. This is not just a new way to relate to God. This has always been how you relate to God.

Now that Christ has come and we have a fuller understanding, a fuller revelation, our faith is more informed, but it's not that before that point we related to God differently somehow. In fact, I'm going to go all the way back to the beginning, Genesis 12, and show you that the father of the Jewish people, the father of the Israelites, Abraham himself, was made right with God because he believed God. He quotes Genesis 15:6 here. This is really his theme throughout chapter 4. He quotes Genesis 15:6, where we are told, "Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness."

Okay now, just pause for a moment. I told you in the title that I would talk to you about faith in one word. Because I believe that this one word is a word that we don't always associate with faith. But if

you make this immediate association, it unlocks something for us. **The word is: “promise.”**

**Abraham was given certain promises and he believed those promises.**

Those promises, we are actually told here in the book of Romans and throughout the New Testament, are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And Abraham believed them. But hear this: There is a beginning moment in Abraham’s life, where in Genesis 12 God shows up and gives him seven promises. I’m not going to read them right now, but at the heart of that was: “I’m going to make you the father of a great nation. You are going to have many descendants. And all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed through you.”

So Abraham believes God, leaves *everything* that’s familiar and goes out to follow God. That’s a picture for us of what it means to begin with God. God comes to you and says, “Listen, I have given my Son for the forgiveness of your sin. Trust in him, and now follow him with all your heart.” That’s the beginning of the Christian life.

But what’s interesting is that Abraham doesn’t say then, “Okay, I started by faith, but now I’ll live by some other power.” His whole life is a life of learning to live by faith. Had Abraham known that this promise to be the father of a great nation – he wasn’t even going to have child #1 until he was 100 years old? Wow.

**Are the promises of God, as you understand them in your life, robust enough to carry you for all of life?** For all of life, and especially in the areas that matter the most to you? This is how the power of God comes to us. **All that is precious and good in this life is stolen from us because of our broken relationship with God, and we live a life by faith where that’s restored because we believe the promises of God.**

Paul begins by saying, “Listen, go back. I’ll show you. That’s how Abraham lived from the very beginning.” Here’s the litmus test. Here’s how you know if you’re living by faith or living by your own works: **What do you boast in?** He says, “If you earn it, then it’s pay, and you boast in what you’ve accomplished. But if you understand that it’s by grace, that it’s God’s gift (that’s what grace means) then your boasting is all in God. Okay? So we are halfway through his first point: **We are saved by grace and not by works.**

Verse 6:

*...just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:*

*“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,  
and whose sins are covered...*

Here he is quoting from Psalm 32. He is quoting David: “...blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.” Is this blessing, then, only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.

Okay, hold your finger right there in verse 10. Here is what I think Paul is doing. He is saying, “I’m going to give you a whole chapter convincing you that we live by faith by teaching you about Abraham. But you are going to say to me, “Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, that’s Abraham. That’s an exception. That’s just a one-off thing. Yeah, he was the most important person, maybe, in the whole Old Covenant.”

Just to combat that argument: “And, oh by the way, David lived the same way.” He gives these three verses, which seem to take us off a little bit. But what’s nice about this little digression is that it not only bolsters the argument by saying that all of God’s Old Covenant people lived by faith – Abraham, David – and if we don’t follow their example, then what are we doing?

But he helps us understand that at the heart of this grace is the message of forgiveness – forgiveness of sin. It is earth-shattering. It is transformative, because we understand: “I don’t want to do anything that cuts me off from the power of God that comes by grace.”

If you will allow me, I’ll give you a very personal illustration. Don’t worry, I won’t embarrass you. But there have been a few isolated moments in our marriage where I’ve gotten upset with my wife. I know that’s inconceivable, but it has happened, and she has been upset with me. I cannot tell you how many times I have gone to be with the Lord in my prayer time, and the Lord begins to convict me: “You need to just lay this down. Stop insisting that you’re right. Love your wife and ask her to forgive you. And I will sometimes (it hasn’t happened in a long time, dear) but sometimes I’ve said, “But God, I mean, surely you think I’m right, right?”

You may feel awkward with the transparency of this, but let’s get real. The divorce rate is almost at 60%. If you don’t learn how to fight for your marriage, it’s not going to go well, probably. There are some couples where it’s just easy. I don’t know why that seems unfair to me. That didn’t come out

right. It's been easy for me, dear. I don't even... Here is the truth that always motivates me: "Well, Brian, do you want to live by my power or yours? Do you want my mercy, or do you want what you deserve?"

Unforgiveness – "I'm not going to let my forgiveness flow in you in abundance if you refuse to forgive another, and that starts with the relationship that is most important to you." That's a powerful motivator, right? God gives grace to the humble. He resists the proud. "Suddenly she seems very right to me, Lord." Right? There is a battle for us constantly to learn to live by grace, rather than by our own works.

Now, in verse 9 he brings up the subject of circumcision. He is talking here about Jewish versus Gentile. Is it only for God's chosen, the Gentiles, that we experience this? Look where he takes us in verse 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. 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, 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.*

Did you get all that? There's a lot about circumcision and uncircumcision. It's a very simple argument that he's making. He says Abraham was counted right with God by faith before he was ever circumcised. It wasn't the circumcision. It wasn't his religious works that made him right with God. It was that he received it as a gift.

So, **the circumcision is a sign of the gift, just as in the New Covenant baptism is a sign of the gift.** We are not saved by baptism. There are some people that teach that. There are some churches that have taught that. It's a false teaching. It's clearly not true in scripture. And as much as we want to be gracious towards those who disagree, I just want to come out strong and say, "Nope. Not true."

I was with 28 leaders Thursday and Friday over in Naples for a Church United retreat. We had about 16 churches represented and we were all gathering together. Navin, one of our elders, went over with me. We had an amazing time praying together, working with Church United, one of our ministry partners. We were believing God to just save all of Broward County, asking God to unite the Church,

---

## Faith – Faith In One Word

Romans 4 | Sunday, April 22, 2018 | By Brian Brookins



to help us work together, to do a transformative work in South Florida. We believe that the Church has to come together to do that. This is a glorious time.

But you know, there were some people there that just don't get baptism right. And I would like to sort them out and show my Presbyterian brothers: "What are you thinking?" Right? I could talk about Tom Hendricks, who is a very, very dear friend to me, and he baptizes infants. Here, we do it the biblical way.

Guys, I'm just teasing. If you don't know me, stay with me for a minute. And if you're Presbyterian, I love you. I'm so glad you're here. Let me explain. It never comes up except when we are kidding one another, because we understand that we are saved by faith. We don't quite agree on how the sign that confirms that is to be practiced. Is it before? I won't take you into the argument right now, but we don't completely agree.

Now, I'm okay with that. I'm more okay with that than the person over here that says: "I'm not baptized because baptism doesn't save me, so I'm just not baptized because it's not what saves me." The troubling part about that is even though it doesn't, there's a walk of faith where God tells me to do it. I have to find the most biblical way that I understand to do that, and do it because I'm living by faith. That's an expression of trust.

Now, hear me. It doesn't save me, clearly, but I'm more concerned for the person who is indifferent to whatever God tells them. I would say, "Wow has faith really taken hold of your heart?" Are you with me? Do you understand what I'm saying? No doubt, there are people here -- you trust in Jesus but you've never done that. Don't hear condemnation in this. Just say, "Okay, I'm going to do it. I'm going to act. I'm going to trust."

I say this reluctantly, only because I don't want to bring confusion on the subject, but we'll have people come and join the church who say, "You know what? I practiced covenant baptism. I was part of a church where I was baptized in infancy. We didn't believe that the act saved us." They'll give me an explanation of it and they'll say, "I still believe that." Then I'll say, "Listen, welcome to our church. I'm not going to make you be re-baptized and jump through a hoop when it really wouldn't be an act of faith for you, but I'm going to trust you not to go around and undermine what we teach." They'll say, "Yes. Absolutely. We won't." And I'll say, "The only thing I can tell you is I won't be much help if you have babies or grandbabies that you want to be baptized. I'll call a Presbyterian friend and ask them to do it for you, but I probably won't do that."

I'm trying to illustrate for you that these things matter, but they don't save us. Where it probably hits home more for us is we may not be tempted to think baptism saves us or circumcision saves us, but we will think: "Other spiritual disciplines in my life are the only way that God accepts me and that I get power with God." They are important, but power comes by God's grace and not by our works. We have to move on. Let's go to point II.

## **II. We are saved by faith in the promises of God, verses 13-21.**

This gets to the heart and to the essence of what Paul wants to say. The word "promise" appears five times in this section and I want to move through it very quickly.

*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. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 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 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. 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 waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*

There are two big ideas in this section – one is that Abraham believed God and he was right with God. It wasn't because he obeyed God's law, because no matter how well we obey the law of God, we still transgress. We still break some of God's law, and that makes us guilty before God. So the only way to be right with God is to receive by grace the gift of forgiveness that comes because of what Christ has done.

But then he does something that is really helpful and all of this message leads to this point. As we progress now to the end of this chapter, this is so helpful for us to get the right concept of the Christian life. Abraham began with God, living by faith. But he found himself at 100 with no child, and he still believed the promise of God, that he was the father of a great nation. And Sara was 90 and barren. It was this faith, this confidence in the power of God that carried Abraham through. **We must learn to live by the power of God from start to finish.**

I was meeting with a pastor just recently. He was a young man, asking me a little bit about raising children and about marriage. Surprisingly to me, I now find myself viewed as an old man in the county and young pastors will come. I'll say, "Actually I'm in very good shape; I'm quite young," but it doesn't seem to translate. So he was talking to me and sharing some very personal things. I said, "Listen, I'm going to tell you something and the challenge with telling you this is that you're going to be tempted not to believe it. But I'm going to tell you: **By far, by far, by far, the most important thing I've ever done as a husband or parent is pray and believe the promises of God.** Until you get that, you will feel this powerlessness that says, "My kids are beyond my control. My wife is beyond my control. And this is the most important thing to me." This is my first ministry always. No matter what we do in life, if we're married, if we have children -- the power comes from connecting to God in prayer and believing his promises.

We understand that as our children go out into the world, we've lost any opportunity to significantly control their environment. I mean, my oldest is home for the weekend. He's 26 tomorrow. I'm pretty sure he doesn't want me controlling his life. But you know what? **I have power in his life as his dad. I believe the promises of God.**

I remember the day before we sent him off to kindergarten. We only sent him off to school two years, then he was just too smart for any school and we homeschooled him. I remember that night. I stayed up all night in prayer. It was the most fearful thing in the world for me to send my son off to people I didn't know. I can't explain this, but God met me with his presence in that night. The promises of God rolled over my heart and the Lord gave me assurance: "He's fine. He'll be fine. He's mine."

This is not an advertisement for any form of homeschooling, private schooling, or public schooling. Those are important decisions, but there is no one path for all of us. I'm just telling you, whatever it

---

## Faith – Faith In One Word

Romans 4 | Sunday, April 22, 2018 | By Brian Brookins



is, we connect this ultimate promise that we are right with God to all of the promises of God, because they are fulfilled in Christ -- no matter what we are believing God for.

I'll speak to the singles. If you're young and single, you might be right here. Right? Everything that you long for, all your dreams, your aspirations, your career, your education, your choices – you know, we get to these moments and it feels like all of life is front-loaded on this next decision. **Believe the promises of God.** The reason that seems so difficult is because sin messes it up – sin in me, sin against me, sin around me. “I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God unto salvation. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed.”

We just get bare bones honest before God. “God, this is what I want. This is what I long for. This is what I'm dreaming for. I trust you with it. I believe that you are going to sift through and sanctify my desires, because whether what I fear is in me or around me or done to me, you are greater than all of it. I believe you for your power and I'm learning to live by the promises of God. Amen? Would you bow your heads?”

I want to close out the service by inviting you to respond. I'm going to ask our deacons to go over to this wall here on the left. We have a little prayer space over here, on my left, all the way down the auditorium. They are going to be there just to be available to pray with anyone who needs to pray this morning.