



1 Corinthians 15:1-4 — *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*

The study of salvation (i.e. soteriology) is the apex of all theological studies. For the character and purposes of God culminate in God's gospel purposes and plan. Who God is and what God does is moving towards on great story — God's eternal plan to rescue and redeem His creation through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. This glorious gospel plan is the message of *first importance*.

GOD'S GOSPEL STORY: The Word of God has been rightly called God's Gospel Story. From beginning to end, God's Word is progressively unfolding God's plan to reconcile, restore, and redeem humanity and ultimately all creation. The entire Christian life should be spent studying, growing deeper, and delighting in God's glorious gospel story more and more. No instruction or class or book will exhaust God's Gospel Story. No matter how deep we dive into God's gospel story, we can go and grow deeper. May this instruction simply serve then as a primer — stirring your affections once again to go and grow deeper into God's glorious gospel story!

GOSPEL WORDS: Systematic theology is the attempt to harmonize and reconcile all that the Bible says about a given topic. When it comes to the doctrine of salvation, there is much to say for it is truly the story of the Bible. The following words/themes are essential to understanding the doctrine of salvation: ¹

1. **Grace:** God's unmerited favor (i.e. free gift) towards those who place their faith in Jesus Christ. Grace is essential to God's character. Grace is closely related to God's compassion, love, and mercy. Grace then can be defined as *God's favor toward the unworthy* or *God's benevolence on the undeserving*. In His grace, God is willing to forgive sinful humanity by faith, in spite of the fact that we deserve His just wrath on account of sin.

Romans 3:23-24 — *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

¹ The Moody Handbook of Theology by Paul Ends (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989) and www.gotquestions.org were helpful in crafting these definitions and shaping this instruction.



Ephesians 2:7-8 — *so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.*

2. **Mercy:** the gift of God's undeserved kindness and compassion that withholds from sinful humanity what they justly deserve and it is fundamental to who God is.

Exodus 34:6-7 — *The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.*

Mercy is such an exceptionally complex concept that several Hebrew and Greek words are used to express the dimensions of its meaning. Synonyms like *compassion, lovingkindness, favor, and steadfast love* often appear in Bible translations to illustrate the idea of mercy.

Ephesians 2:4-5 — *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.*

TABLE DISCUSSION: Discuss how mercy & grace are similar but different. Then discuss why they both matter?

3. **Faith:** *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* Simply put, the biblical definition of faith is *trusting in something you cannot explicitly see or prove*. Faith then is believing what the Bible says and being moved to obedient action.

Hebrews 11:1-3 — *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.*

We are to believe the promises of God and live accordingly. We are to agree with the truth of God's Word by faith, and then be transformed by it.

Romans 12:2 — *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Faith is the product of hearing the Word of God and then submitting yourself to it because you believe it to be both true and good.



Romans 10:17 — *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

4. **Forgiveness:** God removing the charges against the sinner on the basis of faith in the atoning work of Christ Jesus.

Psalms 103:8-12 — *The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*

From a soteriological perspective, it is impossible to have salvation without forgiveness. Salvation then is God delivering the sinner from the consequences of sin by forgiving their sin debt through faith.

Jeremiah 31:34 — *And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."*

5. **Repentance:** To repent & believe in Christ is to *change one's mind* about the nature of sin, your need for Christ, and to place your trust in Him alone for salvation.

Acts 26:20 — *but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.*

Repentance then is to turn away from thinking and living in the flesh, and to follow after Christ wholly by faith. ²

Acts 3:19 — *Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.*

Luke 19:8 — *And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."*

Repentance is not a work that saves but rather repentance is gift of grace that is applied by faith — meaning when the gospel is preached to you, the power of God

² Repentance and faith can be understood as two sides of the same coin. It is impossible to place your faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior without first changing your mind about your sin and about who Jesus is and what He has done. Whether it is repentance from willful rejection or repentance from ignorance or disinterest, it is a change of mind. Biblical repentance, in relation to salvation, is changing your mind from rejection of Christ to faith in Christ (www.gotquestions.org).



does a gracious work in you, and repentance is the gracious work that the gospel produces.

Acts 11:18 — *When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”*

2 Corinthians 7:10 — *For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.*

6. **Sanctification:** If you are in Christ, your position is that of being *set apart*. This *positional sanctification* means that those who place their faith in Christ are counted as holy, set apart by God. This positional sanctification is achieved through the once-for-all death of Christ.

Hebrews 10:10 — *And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

Hebrews 10:14 — *For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*

Positional sanctification changes our position as sinners deserving of God’s wrath to the position of beloved children of the Father and perfect in His eyes.

1 Peter 2:9 — *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

TABLE DISCUSSION: What happens in the Christian life when we forget about positional sanctification?

7. **Justification:** To declare someone righteous by faith in Christ. Justification is a legal declaration by God — whereby He declares the sinner to be righteous solely on the basis of faith.³

Romans 4:5-7 — *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 to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.*

Romans 5:9-11 — *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more,*

³ The gospel is fundamentally about righteousness — for being right with God requires righteousness. You will either attempt to be righteous by your own works or you will embrace your inability to be righteous by your own works. When you embrace your inability to be righteous by works, your only recourse is to cast yourself entirely upon the mercy and grace of God revealed in Christ by faith. At this moment, you are given an alien righteousness that is not the result of works but a free gift by faith.



now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

8. **Imputation:** God credits Christ's righteousness to the believer through faith. Christ's righteousness is necessary because we have no righteousness of our own that could ever satisfy God's standard. Therefore, imputed righteousness is required for sinful humanity to stand before a perfectly righteous God.

Isaiah 61:10 — *I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

2 Corinthians 5:21 — *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Romans 5:19-20 — *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

Philippians 3:9 — *and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—*

Just as sin was imputed to all people when Adam sinned, so in Christ His righteousness is imputed to all who believe.⁴ This idea of imputation is found throughout the entire redemptive story. Even before God's Messiah bursts onto the scene, God was establishing the practice of imputation in the sacrificial system.

Leviticus 16:20-22 — *And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.*

TABLE DISCUSSION: What is lost when we don't understand the significance of imputation in God's gospel story?

⁴ Notice how the imputation of Adam's sin to all people led to the continuation of sin in all people. Similarly, the imputation of Christ's righteousness to all who believe leads to the continued practice of righteousness by faith.



9. **Adoption:** The word adoption means “placing as a son” and describes the rights and privileges as well as the new position of the believer in Christ. In adoption the believer is:

Released from slavery into freedom and sonship in Christ:

Romans 8:15 — *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”*

Released from bondage under the law into a new status as a son:

Galatians 4:5 — *to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*

Enjoy a new relationship wherein they may address God as *Abba* — *Father*:

Galatians 4:6 — *And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!*

THE BOOK OF ROMANS: It has been said that Romans is the greatest soteriology ever written — after all Paul wrote it *for the obedience of the faith of all the nations*.

Romans 1:5 — *through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.*

Romans 16:26 — *but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith.*

In other words, Paul wrote Romans — under the power & illumination of the Holy Spirit — so that God’s gospel would produce repentance and faith among all peoples. After all, *the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16)*. The goal of Romans then is to proclaim God’s glorious gospel story so that more and more might come to *the obedience of faith!* If you want to understand God’s gospel story, continually bathe yourself in Romans. It is shallow enough for a baby to wade into and deep enough for the greatest minds to drown in.

To highlight how these gospel themes work together — we will look at a few key movements from Romans 3-5.

1. Humanity’s Problem: All Are Under Sin — Romans 3:1-20

A. All People, Regardless of Race, are Enslaved to Sin

Romans 3:9-12 — *What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one*



seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.

B. The Law of God Simply Reveals the Sinfulness of Man

Romans 3:19-20 — *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

CONCLUSION: All people are guilty on account of their own sinfulness, helpless to become right with God through works of the Law, and held accountable before God.

2. God's Solution: Justification by Grace through Faith — Romans 3:21-31

A. There is a Righteousness that Comes apart from the Law

Romans 3:21 — *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—*

B. There is a Righteousness that is By Faith

Romans 3:22 — *the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:*

C. Righteousness is a Free Gift by Grace

Romans 3:24 — *and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

D. Christ's Wrath Satisfying Payment is Received by Faith

Romans 3:25-26 — *whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

Not only is God just, but God justifies all who place their faith in Christ Jesus. In that moment — Christ's propitiatory sacrifice is applied to all who receive Him by faith.

E. Since Justification is by Faith — No One can Boast

Romans 3:27-28 — *Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*



CONCLUSION: Being declared righteous is a gift of God that is received by faith. God is the only One who is able to do this — for He is the only One that is truly Just and therefore the only One who is able to be the justifier of all who place their faith in Christ.

3. God's Example: Abraham was Justified by Faith — Romans 4

A. Abraham was Justified by Faith NOT Works

Romans 4:1-5 — *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.*

B. Faith Came Before Circumcision Not After

Romans 4:9-12 — *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 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.*

C. God's Gospel Promises Rest on Grace through Faith

Romans 4:13 — *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.*

Romans 4:16 — *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,*

Romans 4:20-22 — *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. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."*



CONCLUSION: Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, was justified by faith before any act of obedience to the Law. He is then the ultimate example of righteousness that is by grace through faith apart from the Law.

4. Gospel Promises: the Eternal Benefits of Being Right with God by Faith — Romans 5:1-11

A. Justification by Faith Produces Peace with God

Romans 5:1 — *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

B. God's Unmerited Favor (i.e. His Grace) is Now Your Reality

Romans 5:2 — *Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

C. Experiencing & Applying God's Love by Faith

Romans 5:6-8 — *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

D. Being Delivered from the Wrath of God

Romans 5:9 — *Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*

E. Experiencing Reconciliation with God by Faith in Christ

Romans 5:10-11 — *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

CONCLUSION: Justification results in every gospel benefit, for once a sinner goes from positionally unrighteous to positionally righteous — they are now able to know the peace, love, grace, and reconciliation that the gospel promises.

5. The Story: the First Adam to the Last Adam — Romans 5:12-21

A. Sin & Death Came through the First Adam

Romans 5:12 — *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.*

B. God's Free Gift of Grace Came through the Second Adam



Romans 5:15 — *But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.*

C. Jesus Christ brings an Abundance of Grace & the Free Gift of Righteousness

Romans 5:17 — *For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*

D. Imputed Sin & Imputed Righteousness Shape the Gospel Story

Romans 5:18-19 — *Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

E. The Law Magnifies the Sinfulness of Sin

Romans 5:20a — *Now the law came in to increase the trespass*

F. The Sinfulness of Sin Magnifies the Infinite Grace of God

Romans 5:20b-21 — *but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

CONCLUSION: God's gospel story is not random. From the first Adam to the last Adam, God was unfolding His glorious plan to rescue and restore all people through the free gift of righteousness that is received by faith.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

#1: From your homework, how did Romans 5:6-11 help you understand and appreciate the gospel more?

#2: What Gospel Theme (i.e. Grace, Mercy, Faith, Forgiveness, Repentance, Sanctification, Justification, Imputation, Adoption) should you spend more time meditating on and why?

#3: How have you grown in your understanding of the gospel as a Christian? What has changed about your comprehension of the gospel since you first believed?