

Oct. 31, 2021

Abraham is my Father

Romans 4:9-13

If you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's children, and heirs according to promise.

LTS: Luke 19:1-10

Today is Reformation Sunday and normally, on Reformation Sunday people like to hear about the Reformation. We love to rehearse how Martin Luther stood singlehandedly against the most powerful leaders in the western world and prevailed with the words, "Here I stand! I can do no other." We love to hear the heroic tales of men and women who risked, and in many cases, lost, their lives in service to our heavenly King and His Gospel.

The reason you are not Catholic today is because the reformers did everything in their power to protest the Roman Catholic works-based man-centered view of how sinners may be made right with God. It was, in fact, their organized and relentless Protest of such false teaching that earned them the enduring name: Protestant.

At the heart of their Protest was the rediscovery of the doctrine of Justification by faith alone – the very doctrine that Paul preached and repeatedly pointed to in nearly all of his 13 letters.

Historically speaking, the five hundred years leading up to Oct. 31, 1517 have always been known as the Dark Ages. Why were they Dark? Because the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ had been lost and covered over by a works-based religion that kept people enslaved to a system that could offer no greater hope than an undetermined period of time (perhaps hundreds or thousands of years) paying the penalty of one's own sins in the flames of purgatory.

The reformers had a Latin saying that encapsulated what was happening in their time as the true Gospel began to sweep across the western world. The saying was,

Post Tenebras Lux
After Darkness... Light!

When the young Catholic priest, Martin Luther nailed his 95 doctrinal and practical concerns to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany, it started a heated conversation that literally changed the world.

But if we want to understand the origin and core of reformation teaching, you have to go back in time

- from the 16th century AD,
- past the days of Paul in the 1st Century AD,
- past the days of Isaiah in the 8th Century B.C.;
- past time of Moses in the 13th Century B.C.;
- all the way back to 19th Century B.C. (roughly 1,000 years before Homer) where we finally arrive at the appropriate time to meet up with a man called Abraham.

The story of this man's encounter and continued relationship with God reveals the origin of the Gospel as the only ground of true hope for sinners, who must all, at God's appointed time, appear before the judgement seat of Christ.

So, when you read Paul's letter to the Romans, you are reading an epistle that is not merely a polemic against his Jewish opponent's objections, but a passionate plea for all people everywhere to fly to Christ and receive by faith the righteousness God freely imputes to all who believe.

Last time we met, Paul taught us that the justification God offers in Christ is apart from the law. Today, Paul teaches us that Justification is apart from Circumcision.

Now if you understand what circumcision entailed for all Jewish boys, it may sound strange or weird to think that it needs to be said that salvation (or Justification) is apart from circumcision. But that's O.K. My job is to help you understand what Paul is saying and then to show how it applies to your life. And frankly, its relevance to your life is both precious and profound.

Now, I have offered in the bulletin three hooks to hand our thoughts on, but I will refrain from stating them unto we approach each on in the text. And speaking of the text, why don't we stand and read it together.

Read Rom. 4:9-13

Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.¹⁰

How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,¹² and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised... 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.

He who has ears, let him hear.

In this passage, Paul intends to teach us three things about Abraham that the Jews in Paul's day needed to wrestle with if they were to discover and embrace God's saving righteousness. The first of these three truths is that...

I. Abraham was Justified before Circumcision:

1. Notice with me (9) that Paul begins with the question, "Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised?"

2. Now, we need to look back at the context to see what Paul is thinking about. In the previous verses (v. 6-8) Paul quotes David as an O.T. example of a significant historical figure in Israel who believed that the righteousness God requires comes to a sinner apart from works. Watch what he says (6-8):

...just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: ⁷
"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered; ⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not COUNT his sin."

3. Paul is reminding his Jewish brethren that while all people are sinners, some people's sin is not counted against them. God blesses them with forgiveness and the gift of righteousness.

4. Now, you will remember from last week that the word "Count" is an important word. It's a bookkeeping or banking term used in ancient

business document for crediting payment to one's account.¹ Sometimes it's translated in Reckoned or Imputed.

5. So when David says that the blessed man is one whose record of sin is not recorded on his heavenly ledger sheet. And the reason it is not counted against him is because his debt has been paid. This is the blessing Paul is referencing. It is a blessing that Abraham received by faith, and it is the blessing David received by faith.

6. So here (9) Paul asks, "is that blessing only for the circumcised? That is, is it only available to Jews, or is it available to Gentiles as well?" For we say that that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.

- That is, we Jews understand that in Genesis 15 God counted Abraham's faith as righteous.
- To be precise... Gen. 15:6 clearly says, "And Abraham believed the Lord, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

7. Now the next question Paul asks is critical to his argument. He asks (10), "How then was it counted to him. And by that he means, When was it accounted to him "before or after he had been circumcised?"

8. Paul's concern has to do with the chronological progression of the Genesis narrative of Abraham's being declared righteous. Was it before he was circumcised or after? Answer (10) Not after but Before he was circumcised! In fact, God did not command Abraham to be circumcised until 14 years after God declared him righteous by faith.

¹ Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ro 4:3.

9. You see, if the Jews are arguing that you have to be circumcised before God will declare you righteous, they have a really big problem, because God declared Abraham righteous nearly a decade and a half before he was circumcised.

10. Now, don't miss this...

Abraham was justified by God as an uncircumcised man.

And since he was justified as an uncircumcised man, that means he was *justified by God as a Gentile!* God declared Abraham righteous when he was Gentile!

11. So don't say that God only justifies those who are circumcised. The record of Abraham is unambiguous and clear. Abraham was declared righteous as an uncircumcised man.

12. All of this allows Paul to claim Abraham as the **father** of ALL believers, circumcised and uncircumcised.² Jew and Gentile.

- A. If you are tracking with me so far, then you have probably begun thinking about how this will impact the churches Paul had planted.
- B. There would naturally be some serious growing pains in the church as new Jewish Christians would need to stop belittling and disenfranchising their Gentile brothers and sisters in the Lord.
- C. They would have to worship differently. They would have to learn to eat differently. They would have to think about the law and the traditions differently. In fact, when we get to Rom.10, Paul will address the fact that in Christ the lines of division are

² Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans. The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Mich. 1996), 267

- torn down, so that there is no distinction between Jew & Gentile
- D. Then (chap. 12) he will exhort them all to love one another with brotherly affection. And outdo one another in honor.”
- E. And it is all grounded in the fact that Abraham was an uncircumcised Gentile when God justified him by grace alone, through faith alone.

13. So the first truth about Abraham relative to the doctrine of Justification by faith alone is that Abraham was justified Before circumcision.

14. The second truth about Abraham is...

II. Abraham Received Circumcision as a Sign and Seal.

1. Notice what Paul writes next. He says (11),

He [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

2. The question we should ask here is, What was the purpose of circumcision? The fact is, God eventually commanded Abraham to get circumcised; he and every male in his family. Later, Moses would do the same and every Jewish male after him, was likewise circumcised on the 8th day after birth. Even Jesus was circumcised. But why? What was the point?

3. Here (11) Paul explains that God intended it to be A sign that seals God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants. Moses made this clear in Gen. 17:11 where God tells Abraham that circumcision was a sign of

the covenant between Me and you.” In that covenant God promised to be Israel’s God in a uniquely personal way, and Abraham’s descendants would be His specially chosen people. Circumcision was the Sign, or the permanent Mark on the physical body of every Jewish male that sealed them as God’s chosen people. Therefore, every son of Abraham was to be circumcised. It was the sign that they were descendants of Abraham - the people of God.

4. So, circumcision was a Sign. But it was a sign that served as a seal. A sign marks or identifies something, but a Seal guarantees something.³ So Paul writes (11) “He received circumcision as... a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was uncircumcised.”

5. Therefore, in addition to the fact that circumcision was to be the official mark identifying the Jews as God’s special people, it was at the same time a guarantee that the righteousness that Abraham received by faith apart from any work was available to all who would believe.

6. So, every time a Jewish baby boy reached the age of 8 days, circumcision was performed and God’s people who witness it were supposed to remember that God justified Abraham by faith long before circumcision was prescribed by God.

7. The idea of a sign or seal may seem a bit unusual in our culture, but its really not. Consider this: We would all think it strange if we attended a wedding that didn’t include the giving of rings. Of course, the Bible doesn’t require rings to be given when a couple marries, but what I want you to see is that the gift of rings at a wedding is actually a precious sign & seal (as it were) of the covenant of marriage between a man and wife.

³ John MacArthur, *Romans 1-8: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, (Chicago Ill. Moody Press, 1991),252

8. In fact, when I officiate weddings, we normally establish a special place during the ceremony for the couple to exchange the rings. And here what that part of the ceremony sounds like:

9. The ring is a time-honored symbol of marriage.

- It is without beginning and without end.
- It is made of value that will not tarnish and will last for a lifetime.
- It stands as a symbol that can be worn knowing that the relationship is true and lasting.

Then, as the groom places the ring on the brides finger, he says...

This ring I give you,
In token and pledge,
Of my abiding love and constant faith.
With this ring,
I thee wed.

10. The purpose of circumcision was similar to the purpose of wedding rings. It was designed and given by God as a sign & seal of God's covenant with His people.

11. We should note. However, that circumcision was NOT the only sign we find in the bible. "Whenever God entered a saving relationship with his people, He always added" a sign and seal.⁴

- For Noah, the sign of the rainbow also sealed the promise that he would never again destroy the world by flood.
- For Abraham, the sign of circumcision also sealed the promise that at the judgment he (and all who believe) will be found right with God.
- For Moses the sign of the Sabbath Day sealed God's promise of a future and permanent Sabbath Rest in the presence of the Savior.

⁴ Sinclair Ferguson, *Justification Signed and Sealed*, audio sermon, 2009

- For Jesus' disciples, the sign of Baptism also sealed the promise that death is overcome by resurrection unto eternal life.
- and the Lord's supper is a sign that seals the promise that Jesus' death on the cross was payment in full for all your sins so that we can enjoy fellowship with God forever.

12. Ultimately, all of these signs / seals point to one precious thing: the unmerited grace of God. None of them ever point to works of righteousness or human effort to earn God's favor. So, every time we gather to witness Baptism or participate in the Lord's Supper, and every time we see a Rainbow in the sky, in our heart we should be saying, something like,

- this is to remind me of God's grace.
- O Father, thank you for your grace.
- I confess that I don't deserve it, but I praise & worship you and thank you for it. This very moment, no matter how I feel, you are pouring upon me the riches of your grace.
- I am alive by Your grace
- I am justified by Your grace
- All my sin is washed away by your grace
- Help me to appropriate your grace to whatever I need right now.
- Thank you for your superabounding, never ending, lavish, satisfying grace.

13. So Paul has taught us that...

- Abraham was Justified Apart from Circumcision.
- He received circumcision as a sign and seal.
- Finally,

III. Abraham is the Father of all who believe.

Read 11-13. {pick up in the middle of v. 11}

...The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,¹² and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.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.

1. We have learned God's design for circumcision, and now Paul tells us God's purpose for circumcision. Specifically, why did God establish that circumcision be instituted long after Abraham was justified by faith? Paul's answer is here.

2. Paul says, "The purpose was to make him [Abraham] the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted (imputed, or reckoned) to them as well."

3. Racially speaking, Abraham is the father of the Jews. But spiritually he is the father of all who believe without being circumcised. In other words, Abraham is the Father of all Gentiles who believe even though they have NOT been circumcised. In other words, he is the father of all Gentiles who are justified by faith apart from the rite or work of circumcision.

4. At the same time, Abraham was circumcised long after he was justified by faith so that (12) he would be the father of all 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.

5. You see, the Jews idolized Abraham is the father of their nation. It was to him that God established the sign & seal of circumcision. And somewhere a long the way, the rabis began equating the rite of circumcision with salvation – just as many today equate the rite of infant baptism with salvation. But that was never God’s intent.

6. Anyone can perform the sign and seal. Any thief, charlatan or murderer can play with religion to deceive himself into thinking he/she is in good standing with God. But God has never been impressed by religious displays. And he despises religious sacerdotalism that is disconnected to the heart.

7. The Lord made this clear all the way back in Deut. 10:15 when Moses said to God’s people, The LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. ¹⁶ Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

8. Again in Deut. 30:6, Moses declares,

...the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. No one who plays with religion or who has built their relationship with God in externals trappings, ceremonies and achievements is justified in His sight.

9. Paul knew this. And that's why he said back in Rom. 2:28

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

10. Isn't it time you gave up on religion. Isn't it time you fly to Christ alone, believing in His righteous life and atoning sacrifice on your behalf for your salvation? Isn't it time to become a child of Abraham through faith? Let today be that day. Do it now. You have heard the Lord's gracious invitation. Do not harden your heart.

11. And if you are confident today that by the blood and righteousness of Jesus, you have become a Child of Abraham by faith, then you are justified by faith because of God's matchless grace. So you can leave this building with great joy.

12. AS you look around this congregation, there are people who have come from many different backgrounds and ethnicities. Let's have a little fund with that. Before you leave, tap someone on the shoulder and say to them, "**Abraham is my father.**"

13. I can imagine in the church of Rome after reading this part of Paul's letter that some of the Jewish brethren may have called out from where they sat, "Abraham is my father. Then some of the Gentiles responded by crying out with joy, "Abraham is my father. And then the women cried out, "Abraham is my father. And the children cried out, "Abraham is my father. Why, because Abraham is the father of all who are justified by faith in Jesus.

14. So if you are a follower of Jesus from any ethnicity, find thee people on your way out, tape them on the shoulder and say to them, “Abraham is my father.”

If you belong to Christ, you are Abraham’s children, and heirs according to promise.