

"Abraham's Circumcision"

Romans 4:9-12

INTRO:

We in twentieth-first century western society have a hard time understanding why something like circumcision was so important to the issue of salvation. Or why Paul would take so much time dealing with it. While to us it may seem insignificant, to the Jewish people of Paul's day circumcision was of utmost importance. Circumcision admitted a man to membership in the people of God. To the Jew, circumcision was the seal of his place before God. One Jewish writer wrote: "*Great is circumcision, for despite all the religious duties which Abraham our father fulfilled, he was not called 'perfect' until he was circumcised.*" Another Jewish writer wrote: "*No Israelite man who is circumcised will go down to [hell].*"

This is why Paul has to take time to deal with this issue at length here in **Romans 4:9-12**. The question that underlies all of this discussion is: "Is faith alone enough for God to save us? Or do we have to be circumcised and become Jewish to be saved?" Paul answers this question by asking and answering two questions in this passage.

- I. WHEN WAS ABRAHAM JUSTIFIED? (Verses 9-10)**
- II. WHY DID GOD GIVE CIRCUMCISION? (Verses 11-12)**

I. When Was Abraham Justified? (Verses 9-10)

Romans 4:9–10 “Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.”

A. Paul demonstrated Abraham, the patriarch of the Jewish people was declared righteous not through any work that he did, but rather because he simply believed.

1. Then, from David in **Psalm 32**, he illustrated that even David, King of Israel, had his sins forgiven and righteousness imputed to him on the basis of faith alone and not because of any works that he did.
2. All of this brings to the forefront a very important question, If God justifies by faith alone, why did He give the rite of circumcision? What is it good for? Paul tackled this question head on by, asking another very important question. "Is the blessing of being declared righteous only for those who are circumcised or is it for the uncircumcised too?"

B. The Jews were probably saying in their heads, "Wait a minute, Abraham was circumcised and David was also a Jew, therefore justification must be for Jewish people who have received circumcision." Lest we lose sight of the thread of the argument, Paul repeated his central assertion by quoting the end of **Genesis 15:6.** "*Abraham believed God and God accounted his faith as righteousness.*"

1. This quote anchors for us the time frame of Abraham's justification. It was well before Isaac was born. Ishmael, who was a teenager when Isaac was born, was not yet conceived. It was years before the giving of the right of circumcision in **Genesis 17.** We know that according to **Genesis 16:16** Abraham was 86 years old when Ishmael was born, and he was 99 when he was circumcised.

2. Now comes the devastating point. How was Abraham justified? Was he in circumcision or uncircumcision? Was Abraham circumcised when God declared him righteous? The answer is he was not circumcised! In fact, Abraham had been justified at least 14 years before he was circumcised.

3. Can you hear the gasp from the Jewish believers? Do we understand what Paul just established by simply laying down the time line? Abraham for all intents and purposes, was a gentile when he was justified!

C. This meant two things. First, circumcision had absolutely nothing to do with Abraham's justification. Contrary to all that they had been taught all these years, circumcision could not save them. Circumcision could not deliver them from the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness. Second, Gentiles, the uncircumcised, could be justified without first being circumcised. In fact, God never required circumcision as a part of salvation.

II. Why Did God Give Circumcision? (Verses 11-12)

Romans 4:11-12 "*And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.*"

A. If God never intended circumcision to be a part of eternal salvation, why did God give it at all? This is obviously the next question that the Apostle Paul must answer.

B. While circumcision contributed in no way to the exercise of faith, nor to the justification which was Abraham's through faith, it does have a relationship to faith.

v.11 “*And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised.*”

There are two words that Paul uses to describe what circumcision was to Abraham.

1. It was a “*sign.*” A sign is given to point to the reality, existence, or truth of something. In the Old Testament it was common for prophets to give a sign to authenticate a prophecy.

Isaiah 7:14 “*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.*”

Another example comes from the lips of an angel in

Luke 2:11-12. “*For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.*”

Because of their lack of faith, the Jewish people turned sign-seeking into a science. Jesus, Himself, said in

Matthew 16:4 “*A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*”

Circumcision was given to be a sign pointing to the genuineness and reality of Abraham's faith.

2. Second, it was also a “*seal.*” A seal authenticates, confirms, and guarantees the genuineness of that which is sealed. This is not entirely different from the sign.

C. An important question always arises here. Some teach that as circumcision was the seal of the old covenant, baptism is the seal of the new covenant. Let me briefly answer this in two parts.

1. First, there is no verse in Scripture that remotely teaches this idea. It is a doctrine built on a faulty premise.

2. Second, the Bible does tell us what the seal of the new covenant is.

Ephesians 1:13-14 “*In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*”

The Holy Spirit indwelling us is the seal of the New Covenant.

D. Paul summarizes the implications of this in the rest of **verses 11-12**. All of this is so Abraham can be both the father of the believing Jews and the believing Gentiles.

What are we trusting for our salvation? We must recognize our standing with God is not on the basis of works of righteousness we have done. We are saved only through His mercy and grace given to us by faith.

We need to recognize the ordinances cannot save us nor can they merit anything. We cannot make God a debtor. We are always a debtor to grace.

Hymn #405 *My Faith Has Found a Resting Place*