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Romans

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, Romans 4:11

The previous verse reminded us of what Scripture proclaims - Abraham was declared righteous before he was circumcised; long before. To ensure that point couldn't be misunderstood, God waited many long years before giving him the sign of circumcision. This sign is "a seal of righteousness of the faith he had while still uncircumcised."

The sign did nothing to further justify him in God's sight. By this picture, which we derive directly from Scripture, we learn that it is God who defines the parameters and establishes the basis by which a person is declared righteous. And this is shown to be by faith; faith alone. When this faith is properly directed toward God's promises (meaning the work of the Messiah) we are counted as righteous.

Abraham was made the type or pattern of the faithful, "that he might be the father of all those who believe." There is no distinction made in us because there was none made in him. He simply believed God and received the blessedness of God. As this is the pattern, then it is available to all "though they are uncircumcised, that the righteousness might be imputed to them also."

This wondrous relationship with God is available to all - Jew and Gentile, male and female. It is open to any person of any culture, ethnicity, or race. No person is above another and no person is excluded when mere faith is exercised. This is the very heart of the gospel and is reflected in Jesus' words of John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

"Whoever" means just that. All who believe are granted the same inheritance and become Abraham's descendants; adopted into God's family.

Life application: A simple act of faith is all that is needed to change our eternal state. It doesn't matter who you are, if you have accepted Jesus as Lord, you have been declared righteous and stand justified before God. Don't let anyone steal your joy by telling you that more is needed. Your faith has healed you, O child of God.

...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. Romans 4:12

The previous verse showed that Abraham was "the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised." Today shows that likewise, Abraham is "the father of circumcision." The Greek actually leaves out a definite article before "father." He is "father of circumcision." This is an abstract term for the concrete principle similar to saying someone is "father of the modern jet airplane." However, Paul includes a caveat concerning those circumcised people. It is those who are not "only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith..."

Being circumcised but lacking faith has already been addressed and then it was supported by Paul's inclusion of David's quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures. In order to further substantiate it, Paul pulls out a word for "walk" which is only used a few times in the New Testament, stoichousin. This word finds other uses

in secular Greek writings to indicate the concept of military order. There it has the idea of keeping in rank or walking in step with a leader.

In other words, those who are of the circumcision can't claim any special participation with Abraham unless they walk in the manner of Abraham, which has been shown to be a walk of faith. Other Jewish writings designate Abraham "the head of those that are circumcised" or "the head to them that are circumcised." However, Paul calls him "father of circumcision." The difference is immense. The first indicates a relationship is contingent on circumcision, but the second indicates that true circumcision is contingent on faith.

What this means, and it is of the highest concern for those who are circumcised, is that in order to be saved the Jews must come under Abraham's covenant of faith which was while he was still uncircumcised, not the other way around. The entire concept of circumcision had been turned upside down by those who bore the sign.

Unfortunately, this is still the case in Christianity today. Far too many sects and denominations insert the law where it doesn't belong by imposing its restrictions on those who have been freed from them. The sign of the saved Christian is an internal one; it is the sealing of the Holy Spirit. Attempting to add to that can only bring in unhappy consequences and a life of walking in uncertainty.

In the same way, some believe they are saved through their denomination and that others are excluded. Or, they may believe that baptism is a saving grace comparable to the Jew's belief in the effectiveness of circumcision. However, both of these ideas are dispelled when one understands that it is faith, and faith alone, which restores us to God. We too must come under the covenant of the faith of Abraham.

Life application: Was there a time when you called on Jesus Christ as Lord by simple faith? If so, then remember that move and return to it. Live in it and revel in it. If you've been adding external requirements to it and have wondered why

your walk is a meandering one, then re-evaluate your walk. If someone is teaching you to follow certain dietary requirements, certain days of church attendance, etc., then you are only harming your walk of faith. Look to Jesus and what He already did and then glory in that.

For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Romans 4:13

The words "for the promise" are being introduced to show that what was promised to Abraham, both explicitly and implicitly, are to be offset from the notion that the law had any bearing on it at all. When taken in context of the times and the circumstances, nobody with right thinking could come to any other conclusion.

Abraham was given the promise and declared righteous in Genesis 15. From that time until the giving of the law at Mount Sinai it was a period of 430 years. This is seen in Exodus 12:40, 41. The dating in these verses is speaking of 430 years from the promise to Abraham until the exodus, not the time the amount of time the Israelites dwelt in Egypt -

"Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt."

Understanding this, we can now evaluate the word "promise." There are two English words which are used to translate it, one is *huposchesis* and the other is *epangelia*. The first one is used when a condition is involved. The second is used when the promise is an unconditional one. It is the second one, *epangelia*, that Paul uses here. Therefore, the promise involves no act to which merit could be counted, but is an act of grace alone.

Next is the thought of the promise, "that he would be heir of the world." An heir is one who inherits something, such as an estate. This is not a promise that was made specifically to Abraham. The promises to him included giving to him and his descendants the land of Canaan; making him a great nation; that in him all the nations of the earth would be blessed; that his descendants would be a multitude (as of the dust of the earth and as of the stars of the sky); and that he would be the father of many nations.

The promise that he would be "heir of the world" must be inferred from these other promises and which then would point directly to the Messiah who would issue from him. To understand this, Paul says "or to his seed through the law." The word seed is translated from one of three words in the New Testament. The one used here is the word spermati. In almost every one of its 44 uses, it is speaking specifically of descendants. Such is the case here.

Jesus, the seed of Abraham, is the One this part of the inheritance is speaking of. This is explicitly noted in Galatians 3:16-18 -

"Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ. And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise."

To sum this up for us as believers in Christ Jesus, Paul finishes with, "but through the righteousness of faith." The promise to Abraham and his seed comes only through the righteousness of faith. The law has no part in it for us. It was promised prior to the law and Jesus, who was born under the law fulfilled the law on our behalf. Therefore, by faith in Him, not deeds of the law, we are justified before God.

Life application: The Bible is a complex book, but its message is simple - have faith in God and His promises; have faith in Jesus. Our continued exploration of the word should always bear this in mind. If so, then we will never get off base as we plumb the depths of its treasures.

For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, Romans 4:14

Today's statement is so obvious and yet so powerful that it should be posted as a banner at the doorway to houses of worship around the world. "For" is used here as if to say "indeed" or "surely." It is stressing the truth of what is coming. "For if those who are of the law are heirs..."

The first thing to note is that there is no definite article before "law" in the Greek. "For if those who are of law are heirs..." Whatever law, natural or Mosaic, is hinted at. If someone who is living under law is an heir of Abraham, then the very thing that caused Abraham to be declared righteous, which is faith, "is made void and the promise made of no effect.

The promise would then be made inoperative; it could never be fulfilled. Grace which is sought for by work isn't grace. Anything beyond faith is a work and therefore grace could never be bestowed upon a person who is seeking righteousness by the law. So, if a person is an heir who is doing works of the law, then faith is made void.

The importance of this is immense because both Jews living under the law, and Christians who mandate any given aspect of the law (such as "no pork" or "be circumcised") are in essence saying that God's promise to Abraham is of no effect. They are basically hinting that the entire premise of the Bible is faulty.

God's word, which states that we are saved by grace through faith, is either true or it is false. If it is true, then attempting to obtain grace in any other way can only lead to not receiving the grace at all.

Life application: Stand on the biblical truth that grace is grace. It is unmerited favor bestowed upon us by simply believing that God has it all under control and has accomplished the work for us through Jesus. Don't add to this, lest you be found to have fallen short of His immeasurable gift.