

**Monday, November 28, 2022 ▫ Romans 4:9–15**

*Questions from the Scripture text: What is the apostle asking about, from v6–8, at the beginning of v9? What are the two possible conditions of people upon whom this blessedness could come? Whose blessedness does v9 propose as a test case? What way did faith become righteousness? What question does v10 now ask about this accounting/imputation? And what is the answer—what was Abraham's condition, when he was counted as righteous? What was circumcision, then, rather than a justifying work (v11)? What did this sign seal unto him? Whose father is he? How many of them? When did they believe? What is also imputed to them, as it was to their father? Whose father is he in v12? What are they "of"? But in what footsteps do they walk? When had Abraham walked in these footsteps? About what does v13 now ask? What was this promise about? To whom (and Whom!) had this promise been made? What had not been given when this promise was made? Through what righteousness, then, could this promise be made and secured? Who are not necessarily heirs, then? What would have been made void if the law changed this? What would have been made of no effect? Though the law did not give blessedness or righteousness or inheritance, what does it actually bring about (v15)? What does the law make it possible for sin to do?*

**Who are the heirs of God and descendants of Abraham?** Romans 4:9–15 looks forward to the devotional in this week's midweek meeting. In these seven verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **Abraham's true descendants are those whose faith is accounted as righteousness apart from works.**

**Circumcision not necessary to blessedness,** v9–11b. The previous passage had recalled David's Spirit inspired words from Psalm 32: that blessedness comes by God's freely imputing righteousness to us apart from works. But for some Jews, this sounded like a problem. They thought that since blessedness is promised *to the circumcised* that somehow this meant that blessedness comes *only* to the circumcised and *even through circumcision.*

v9 directly asks the questions, "Does this blessedness come upon the circumcised only?" However important circumcision may be, as the first sacramentally circumcised man, Abraham clearly answers "no" to the question. "No, blessedness does not come upon the circumcised only."

It's a simple matter of chronology. From Genesis 15:6 to Genesis 17, Abraham was a righteous and blessed—but still uncircumcised!—man for more than a decade. When he finally receives circumcision (v11), it's clearly not a way of obtaining righteousness. He had already been accounted righteous through faith.

So circumcision enters late, as a sign of righteousness that he already had (v11a), signifying how he came to have that faith in the first place: God cutting away the dead flesh and atoning for him by blood. This sign, that taught him about his faith, was also a seal that verified the righteousness that had been accounted to him through faith (v11b).

**The true children of Abraham,** v11c–12. So, those who believe without being circumcised have a very good precedent: Abraham! He is the father of those who believe, and have righteousness imputed to them through that faith, even though they are uncircumcised (v11c). What an irony! A Jew, who is circumcised before he can believe, cannot walk in the footsteps of Abraham as fully as a Gentile can!

And the Jew who is circumcised is not a true descendant of Abraham unless he walks in the footsteps of the faith of an uncircumcised Abraham (v12)!

**Circumcision was added to the promise,** v13. Genesis 15 began with a great promise in 15:1. But Abraham didn't understand how he or his seed could have God (and God's world) as his very great reward, when he didn't have *any* offspring at all (15:2–3). This was the point at which the Lord made the marvelous promise concerning Christ in 15:4 and concerning all Christians in 15:5. It was this promise that Abraham believed. And as he rested upon Who Christ would be, this was imputed to him for righteousness (15:6). The promise was secured through the righteousness of faith before there was even a hint about circumcision.

**Circumcision could not delete the promise,** v14. Now, if the law about being circumcised decided who would receive the inheritance, what happens to faith? And what happens to the promise?

Well, if being circumcised decides that you're an heir, then suddenly the blessing is by the work of circumcision, rather than through faith in Christ. Is that possible? Can someone have Christ's righteousness imputed to him, only to have that righteousness subsequently debited from his account? Can his faith be made void? If in Genesis 17, righteousness now comes through as a wage paid for the work of circumcision, then that is exactly what has happened: faith is made void.

And if faith is made void, what has happened to the promise? The promise, then, was made of no effect. God said that He would give it, but it suddenly becomes contingent upon something else. In this case, God would be dishonest and unfaithful, altering the previous deal. What a horrible, blasphemous thought!

**Circumcision a good sign, but a fearful law,** v15. As a sign and seal, circumcision affirmed what God had promised, rather than substituting for faith. In that way, circumcision was not a work (just as faith was not a work). But what if it is viewed as a work? What if it is a legal way of obtaining righteousness and blessedness?

In that case, the old problem of the law's being weakened through the flesh (8:3) now reappears. There is no one who does good. The law cannot make a sinner into a doer of good; it only declares the sinner to be a sinner, convicts him as a transgressor, and sentences him to the Hell that he deserves for that sin. As v15 puts it, "the law brings about wrath." Sin is already sin. But when law is added, sin becomes guiltier, because now it is also a transgression of the law. Circumcision, then, cannot make a sinner better; it only makes him guiltier!

For us, very few think that blessedness is obtained by being circumcised. But there are some who think that blessedness is obtained by being baptized. If this were the case, blessing would be coming not by what Jesus has done but by what we have done.

And even worse, we would never be able to live up to the proper way of being baptized to obtain blessedness. Baptism would become just one more thing in which we were offending God, without any hope of actual forgiveness or righteousness!

So, there are those who believe before they are baptized, and they receive the sign and the thing signified in the same order that Abraham did. And there are those who are already baptized, but in order to be Abraham's children they need to walk in more than just the sign-footsteps; they need to walk in the faith-footsteps. When they believe and have Christ imputed to them, with His righteousness, then they will truly be the offspring of Abraham.

Praise God, when faith in Jesus is imputed to us for righteousness, then Abraham truly is our father. It is thus that we walk in his footsteps. We rest only in Who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. And we receive our baptism not as a work that we do or present, but rather as a sign that God gives us of how truly and surely righteous are those who believe, being righteous with the righteousness of Christ. Praise God for what baptism signs and seals! And praise God for imputing righteousness to us from Christ, faithfully keeping His promise, just as He said He would!

What is the only way for you to be righteous before God? What sign has He given you to affirm this promise and its promised righteousness? How must you NOT think of this sign?

*Sample prayer: Lord, thank You for making us righteous with Your own righteousness in Christ. And thank You for the sign of baptism that confirms the truth and certainty of the righteousness of those who believe in Christ. Forgive us for thinking of the sign as the thing that gets us in, rather than as a gift to strengthen our faith. And make us to be glad and sure of all that You have promised in Jesus, through whom we ask it. AMEN!*

**Suggested songs: ARP32AB "What Blessedness" or TPH433 "Amazing Grace"**

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Romans 4 verses 9 through 15. These are God's words. 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.

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. That they are uncircumcised. That righteousness might be imputed to them also, and The father of circumcision. To those who are not only of the circumcision.

But who also walk in the steps of the faith. Which our father Abraham had. While still on the circumcised. So far the reading of God's inspired and inerrant worked.

So, we've been hearing the last several passages. Going back into chapter 3. In the first few passages. In chapter 4 of Romans. About what is what the nature of faith is. How does faith function? And what we've been hearing especially is that faith does not work. It's an instrument through which God counts us, righteous.

Not a work that God rewards with righteousness. Jesus is the righteousness. Jesus is the one who works. The one. Faith receives a reward. That Jesus has worked for. So it's an instrument through which we are accounting that way, that way it is. Uh, by grace that we are made righteous.

It righteousness is a gift. So faith is not a work. And then the question then becomes well what about circumcision and for us a question could also be what about baptism? Because circumcision announced to someone that he was blessed. Just as baptism, announces assures, us of the blessing of God.

Now, circumcision, assured them of the blessing of God that was By faith. Which is what this passage teaches us just as baptism. Assures us of a blessing from God of the blessing of God that is in Jesus through faith. Baptism does not assure you of the blessing that is in baptism.

And so he asks, does this blessedness, then come upon the circumcised only or upon the uncircumcised also? See if if blessing comes by circumcision, Or only to the circumcised. Then circumcision is what gets the blessing. And he answers this question, chronologically. Is circumcision necessary to blessedness. Well, you can answer that just by looking at the order in which things happened in Genesis.

Because in Genesis 15 verse 6, When Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness and we've been talking about that accounted word, or that imputed word. Uh, for several passages now In Genesis 15:6, it was still on more than a decade. Before, Abraham would be circumcised.

And so he refers back to Genesis 15:6 by saying four, we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? Well, he was circumcised or uncircumcised. And it's just a time question. He was still in circumcised in Genesis 15 verse 6, Which means? That.

He was righteous. Well, being uncircumcised. So he says and he received the sign of circumcision. This is more than a decade later. He received the sign of circumcision a seal. Of the righteousness of the faith, which he had while still. Uncircumcised. So, He didn't get righteousness in a new way, he has righteousness, that can't be taken away once.

Someone believes in. Jesus Christ, they are righteous in a way that can never be taken away from them. He's gonna say at the beginning of chapter 8, there is therefore now, no condemnation. For those who are in Christ Jesus. And then a little later in chapter 8 those whom he justified.

He also glorified Everyone who gets to be in Christ Jesus through faith, everyone for whom. There is no more condemnation everyone who has made right with God through Jesus alone. Will surely be glorified. And so the righteousness that you have in, Jesus cannot be taken away. So circumcision doesn't add righteousness, what does it add?

It adds a sign. It adds a seal. It is. A symbol from God, that displays some things. For instance, that God is our father and that he cuts away from us. The heart of flesh. Or the heart of stone to give us a heart of flesh and that he had tunes for us by blood.

That is spilled. And and the Uh, which is displayed by the bloody ritual. It's a symbol that God gives that shows some things about how God saves in order to assure us. That God, who gave the sign and God. Who does those things that are shown in the sign does surely say?

Everyone who believes in the Lord. Jesus. He does surely save everyone who makes righteous. Through faith, who is accounted righteous or imputed has our faith righteousness, imputed to him. Through faith. And so he says and he received the sign of the circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised.

So actually it's a Gentile. Who has never Never been circumcised and then he believes who's actually doing things in the same order that Abraham himself, did it. Abraham had not been circumcised, and then he believed and he was accounted righteous. So, there is a way in which At least as far as following the pattern of Abraham's life.

Gentile believers in. Jesus are actually closer. Uh, copies of Abraham. Then Jewish believers in Jesus. Because the Jewish believers in Jesus didn't do it in the same order. They received the sign first and then they believed, The Gentiles. Believed first. And then they received the sign. Except for the sign has changed and some of these Gentiles now are baptized first and so they have the sign and then the thing signified, Um, order to But of course Abraham isn't just the father of believing Gentiles.

He's also the father of Jews If the Jews. Believe. And so you get that in verse 12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of The circumcision. But who also walk in the steps, the footsteps. Of the faith. Which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

So just having circumcision, doesn't Doesn't make a Jew or an Israelite. A spiritual descendant of Abraham. What really makes you the spiritual descendant of

Abraham is walking in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham, believing in the Lord Jesus. Which is something we just heard from verse 11. A Gentile can do because Abraham.

Was for all practical purposes to well to use. The. We're in a little anachronistically, anachronistically. Abraham was a Gentile. When he believed. So, the way that circumcision relates to the promise, is that it affirms the promise? And this is important because if it didn't affirm the promise, if circumcision was a work that was kept for blessedness.

Then it would delete the promise or deny the promise and suddenly God who had promised God who had declared Abraham, right? Just and made promises. Concerning that righteousness and what he would receive for on account of the righteousness that had been imputed to him. God who had promised all those things would be unfaithful.

If when adding circumcision circumcision became necessary in order to obtain the promise, then he would be changing the terms of the deal. He would not be keeping the promise. And that's what he goes on to talk about in verses 13 through 15 for the promise that he would be the heir of the world.

Was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law. Remember. Godhead promised that Um, To Abraham that he would be his shield and his exceedingly, great reward. That's how Genesis 15. Uh, starts out. And then God brings Uh, the promise of the seed into that when Abraham says, how can I be sure that I will inherit?

And God promises him that one from his own body. Would be his heir. Not meaning, just Isaac but especially Jesus. And so he had made these marvelous promises concerning Christ and concerning. God himself being the reward that we receive through faith in Jesus Christ. The wonderful news of the gospel.

And, And that was what? Abraham? Had believed concerning Jesus, and concerning what Jesus would gain for him concerning the fact that Jesus would solve the death problem. Uh, because Abraham Um, was old and he was going to die. Believed all those things about Jesus names, counted righteous. And what verse 13 is saying.

That the promise. Did not. Uh, come through the law. It was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law. Genesis 15. You God didn't say, If you. Uh, if you will submit to circumcision, Then you'll receive me as your shield and you're exceedingly, great reward. No. Abraham believed God.

And that was accounted to him for righteousness. And Jesus was the one who had earned for Abraham. That God would be or Jesus is the one who would earn for Abraham that God would be his shield and his exceedingly, great reward. So the promise did not come through the law.

But Through the righteousness of faith. That's what has secured. God, as our shield. God, as a reward. The righteousness of Jesus has secured that. Which we receive through faith. Now, if adding circumcision more than a decade later in chapter 17 changes that then what does that do to the promise and what does that do to faith?

For if those who are of the law are heirs. Faith is made void. So suddenly it's knocked. Faith. That is the only instrument through which we are made righteous and come into, blessedness. If it's through the law that you become an heir of Abraham, in other words, Abraham has a blessedness.

How did Abraham get the blessedness? Not by what he did but by what Jesus would do that, Abraham had hoped him Well. An error or someone who inherits receives the blessing that their father is But if you get that by seeing circumcised, like Abraham was circumcised, Then how do you receive the blessedness?

Is it through faith in Jesus Christ? No, it's through this new work called circumcision. Well, suddenly The promises considered concerning his offspring are no longer promising promises and faith is no longer the way it happens. And so he says, if circumcision is how to get blessedness, if the sign is how to get blessedness.

Than faith is. Is canceled, and the promise is made of no effect. So God would become unfaithful. Uh, to his promise, he would have gone back on his word. This is because the law brings about wrath. Further, where there is no law, there is no transgression. So if it changes from, You receive righteousness in Jesus alone and you receive blessing because of how well Jesus has done to you receive righteousness by receiving the sign.

Because you got the sign, then it turned circumcision into work. And if circumcision is a work, then you have to do it perfectly. And no circumcision was ever applied perfectly and certainly no one whoever received circumcision other than Christ. Had ever. Been perfect when he was circumcised. If circumcision is a work then.

It's then when we try to get blessing by circumcision, we only deserve breath. The law cannot justify a man because it's leaking through the flesh. It can tell us what God's requires. It can tell us what would be righteous and what would be worthy. But it can't make us able to do.

It is required and it can't make us worthy. And that applies to being circumcised. We're being baptized just as much as it applies to any other sort of work. So circumcision is not a work. This is baptism is not a work. And, Abraham is the father of those who Not having yet.

Been baptized come to faith in Jesus Christ. They receive the righteousness that is through faith and they come into the blessing even before they receive the sign. And then, of course, they received the sign and they're added to the church. But he's also the father of those who being in the church, having been baptized received the sign first But only.

If they come to the same faith, In the same Christ, if they walk in the faith footsteps of Abraham, Otherwise, they will have the sign which assures faith. But there will not have the thing signified. Because they will not have the faith. By which? The righteousness is through which the righteousness is imputed.

And the righteousness, by which The blessedness is obtained. So, How does the sign? Relate to the things signified. The sign for us, baptism. For the juice circumcision. Is a sign of blessedness that comes to us. Only on account of Jesus's righteousness. The sign does not get the blessedness. But when we believe in Jesus Christ, The sign assures us.

That we really and truly do have in Jesus Christ. Both his righteousness. Which is counted for us when we believe in him. And the blessedness that he deserves. By his righteousness. What is your baptism? Do for you. It is a symbol given to you from God. That shows you lots of wonderful things.

That Jesus washes you clean with his blood. But he's the one who gave you his spirit so that you would be spiritually alive and believe in him. The certainty that you who have been baptized into his name, in a naming ceremony are part of his family and joined to him and can never be separated from him ever.

It's a symbol. That shows you teach as you all those things. But it's a symbol that comes to you as a seal of authenticity from him. Because the one who gave you the symbol? As the one who has secured all those things for you, and the one who has worked that faith in you, So, if you don't have faith, This the symbol doesn't do anything for you.

But if you have that faith, it assures you Teaches you and it assures you Let's ask that the Lord would bless us both his word and Our baptisms. Her father, we thank you for this portion of your word. We thank you for this afternoon and Um, This time. In your word together as a family.

We thank you for saving centers entirely throughout Christ has done. We thank you for your spirit who gives us faith in Jesus. We thank you for baptism. Uh, which shows us? So much about how you save us. Uh, we thank you. For giving it to us as a seal, that assures us.

That all of this is true. Because you, who gave us the sign are the one. It has given us Christ and has given us the faith in him. Lord, we pray that you would strengthen our hearts and courage, our hearts To be certain that you are the one who Have begun working in us.

And, We pray that. Uh, you would continue to increase our faith and increase the fruit of it. That it might be more and more evident. We pray, Lord that you would help us when we come To hear this portion of your word preached in the prayer meeting. Helped me to preach it.

I pray and help us all to hear with faith. That Christ would be glorified. Even by the work that he does in us. Then, And by the proclaiming and hearing. Of his goodness and his righteousness. We ask it in his name. Amen.