

I. Introduction

For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." (Romans 4:3)

A. Why all the talk about Abraham and circumcision?

1. Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham, a reminder of both divine judgment and mercy.
2. Circumcision became of ultimate importance to the Jews as the identifier of their belonging to God through Abraham, but the identification had replaced the internal reality which it represented.
3. When we take identifiers or signs and elevate them above our heart's loyalty to Jesus, we have a form of godliness that is devoid of any real power or intimacy. It becomes idolatry that takes away focus on Jesus, the genuine article, the original that these identifiers or signs are supposed to point toward.
4. *It is important to God that we understand clearly what He is most interested in, what He wants from us.

B. The goal of Christianity is for people to develop an intimate relationship with God and become like Him. The goal of the Church is to help Jesus' followers grow in that foundation of faith—not primarily to grow in a particular morality or set of behaviors. Those are important, but they must be products of a heart surrendered to Jesus.

II. God's promises by work or by faith?

A. By faith

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. (Romans 4:9-12)

1. Is God's promise and blessing dependent on or engaged through obedience to the command of circumcision?
2. When did God count Abraham righteous?
 - a. God pronounces Abraham righteous in Genesis 15:5-6
And He brought him outside and said, "Look toward Heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then He said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the Lord, and He counted it to him as righteousness. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete. (Genesis 15:5-6)

b. Abraham is circumcised in Genesis 17:9-14

And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall My covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant." (Genesis 17:9-14)

- c. Scholarly and rabbinical tradition places 14 to 29 years between Genesis 15:6 and 17:9.
 - d. *Abraham was declared righteous by faith at least 14 years before he participated in a work or a sign.
3. Justification by faith is not new but was God's plan from the beginning to create a family of Jews and Gentiles who are marked by faith like Abraham. Circumcision was an obedience and a sign of their surrender.

B. Two paths for humanity

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. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. (Romans 4:13-15)

1. Inheritance of the world

- a. There is a result expected when we have true, genuine faith which is obedience. and said, "By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of Heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the Earth be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." (Genesis 22:16-18)
- b. *God's commitment to give Abraham the inheritance of the world is dependent on God's own righteousness given to Abraham through Jesus, lived out in Abraham by faith alone.
- c. The Law has nothing to do with Abraham's righteousness because it didn't exist at that time. That came centuries later! Additionally, no one can fully obey the Law.
- d. *Obedience is not the **basis** of Abraham's confidence; it is the **fruit** of his confidence. Fruit does not make the tree good; the tree makes the fruit good.

2. Inheritance of God's wrath (Romans 4:15)

- a. Apart from God's righteousness, the destination is God's wrath.
- b. What the Law does
 - 1) Speaks in detail what God demands
 - 2) The Law does not make something sin; it just makes us aware of exactly who the sin is against.

c. "No Law, no transgression"

- 1) So does this mean that if there is not a specific command, then you can't violate it and therefore it is not sin? So maybe people are better off just not ever knowing??

- 2) Example: Murder

Definition of murder, Title 18 US code 1111

Murder is the unlawful killing of a human being with malice aforethought. Every murder perpetrated by poison, lying in wait, or any other kind of willful, deliberate, malicious, and premeditated killing; or committed in the perpetration of, or attempt to perpetrate, any arson, escape, murder, kidnapping, treason, espionage, sabotage, aggravated sexual abuse or sexual abuse, child abuse, burglary, or robbery; or perpetrated as part of a pattern or practice of assault or torture against a child or children; or perpetrated from a premeditated design unlawfully and maliciously to effect the death of any human being other than him who is killed, is murder in the first degree.

- a) *So, murder, within the laws of the U.S. brings the wrath of the government because it is a transgression of the law.
- b) *But even without the law, murder is still wrong, evil, inappropriate—sin. Either way, the murderer has no excuse.

d. The Law clearly identifies that we need salvation!

III. Significance of this

A. Justification by faith alone

1. Undercuts anyone's ability to boast and drives us toward humility
2. Keeps works and obedience in their proper places
 - a. Romans 1:5 = God-honoring-and-exalting obedience comes from faith *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,*
 - b. They are signs and seals that my faith is genuine.
3. Opens the door for all to be the children of Abraham

B. Missionary doctrine: justification by faith alone reveals God's heart for the nations, both Jews and all other ethnic groups in the world.

1. The Jewish faith was not an easy "go and tell" because it had so many obstacles (i.e. circumcision). It was primarily a "come and see" religion for the surrounding nations. ****But now, in the fullness of Christ, all nations are meant by God to be included in the promises made to Abraham - because Abraham was also saved on faith alone. We are to go and tell.**
2. Therefore
 - a. Justification by faith alone must be at the heart of our message.
 - b. Every kind of person is included in the Gospel because faith is the most universally accessible act of the human heart for every people and tribe and tongue and nation.
 - c. Faith has no connection to education, personality, culture, ritual, strength, or wealth.
 - d. Faith is when we turn away from all those things and depend entirely on the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.