

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS

Message #16

Romans 4:9-12

Romans 4 is a powerful enemy of any person who believes he may be saved by his works.

The key word that destroys a works system is the word *logizomai* (λογίζομαι), which is repeated eleven times in this chapter (4:3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24). It is a word which is translated into English by the word “credit” or “reckoned” or “counted.” This verb is one that means to legally charge something or credit something to one’s account or to judicially calculate something to someone. **What this means to our salvation is that righteousness that saves us from our sin is a righteousness that God must judicially credit or reckon or calculate to our person. It is not about what we must do; it is about what He must do.** It is not our own righteousness that saves us, it is His imputed or calculated righteousness that saves us and, therefore, it cannot be a righteousness we earn or gain by our works.

This point gets very muddled and fuzzy when it comes to religious rites and ordinances. Somehow people lose their theological wits and begin to think some religious work can really help save them, and in our day many rely on the religious rite of water baptism.

The issue of connecting religious rites to salvation is not new. During Paul’s day he faced the same thing. The religious rite or religious ritual that Paul kept facing was not baptism, it was circumcision. People were claiming that a person needed to be circumcised in order to really be right with God. In fact, Paul actually brought up this very issue concerning himself to prove he could not ever be right with God by being circumcised (Philippians 3:4-8). He calculated it as rubbish compared to the righteousness of God given to Him by faith in Christ.

Furthermore, at the end of Paul’s first missionary journey, there were people in Antioch of Syria and in Jerusalem who clearly believed that one needed to be circumcised in order to be right with God (Acts 15:1-5).

Now, circumcision was a major issue with the Jews:

- 1) If you were an uncircumcised Jew you were not considered to be a Jew even if you had Jewish parents.
- 2) If you were an uncircumcised Gentile, you were not even permitted entrance into the synagogue.

To most religious people in Paul’s day, if you were not circumcised you were really lacking and not fit for God or for man. Just like many believe the same thing about water baptism today.

BEING IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD HAS NEVER BEEN BY OBSERVING RELIGIOUS RITES; IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN BY A GOD-CALCULATED RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT IS GIVEN TO ONE WHO BELIEVES ON JESUS CHRIST.

There has never been and there will never be a religious rite that can make any person right with God. We will never get to heaven by being circumcised.

We will never get to heaven by being baptized in water - whether in this church or in Salt Lake City or in the Jordan River. There is only one way to get into a right relationship with God and that is by faith in Jesus Christ.

The main thesis of these verses is that Abraham was not justified by the rite of circumcision, but by a credited righteousness that God gave Him by faith in Jesus Christ.

In the book of Romans there are three legitimate ways one may interpret circumcision:

- 1) Circumcision may be interpreted symbolically - representing a believer versus an unbeliever.
Romans 2:28-29
- 2) Circumcision may be interpreted nationally - representing a Jew versus a Gentile.
Romans 3:30
- 3) Circumcision may be interpreted literally - referring to the literal, physical, religious rite of circumcision in which the foreskin of the male is removed. **Romans 4:10**

QUESTION #1 – When was Abraham circumcised in regard to him being calculated by God as being righteous? **4:9-10**

The clear answer that Paul gives to this question is this - **Abraham was not circumcised before his calculated justification (4:10a); he was circumcised after his calculated justification (4:10b).**

Now in **verse 9**, Paul begins by asking a question. Is the blessing that David talked about in the previous verses - having your sins forgiven and having God judicially calculate you as righteous, given through circumcision? Does one have to be circumcised to be justified ?

The plural “we say” (v. 9) not only includes Paul and his companions, but all Jews (**4:1**). Even most of the Jews admitted that Abraham was justified by faith. The question is when was Abraham justified - before or after his circumcision?

In **Genesis 15:6**, it is clearly stated that Abraham is declared righteous. It is not known for sure precisely how old Abraham was when this happened. We know that when Hagar bore Ishmael, Abraham was 86 (Genesis 16:16), which occurs after he was declared righteous in Genesis 15:6. We may safely assume that Abraham was somewhere around 85 years old when he believed God and it was counted as righteousness.

Now we learn from **Genesis 17:24**, that when Abraham was circumcised he was 99 years old. What this means is that from the birth of Ishmael until Abraham’s circumcision, 13 years have passed. **Since Abraham was declared righteous before the birth of Ishmael, what we may conclude is that his circumcision had nothing to do with his salvation.**

QUESTION #2 – What was Abraham’s circumcision? 4:11a-b

There are two terms or nouns that help us understand something about Abraham’s circumcision:

Term #1 - Abraham’s circumcision was a sign. 4:11a

A sign was a distinguishing mark (i.e. II Thessalonians 3:17). In Old Testament times this was a distinguishing mark that one was an Israelite.

Term #2 - Abraham’s circumcision was a seal. 4:11b

A seal always is some distinguished mark of identity. If someone wanted to mark something as his, he put his seal on it.

Now the main discussion concerning Abraham’s circumcision is found in **Genesis 17**.

From this discussion we learn the following:

- 1) It was a covenant between God and Abraham. 17:7a, 9
- 2) It was a covenant between God and Abraham’s descendants - Jews and non-Jew servants. 17:7a, 9, 12-14
- 3) It was a covenant that pertained to every male Jew. 17:10
- 4) It was a covenant involving the male reproductive organ. 17:11
- 5) It was a covenant designed to bring a specific seed into the world. 17:7, Galatians 3:16

If we consider all of these facts, we may conclude that **Abraham’s circumcision was an identifying mark that would demonstrate that Abraham had believed that God would bring the Messiah through his lineage of people. This mark physically signaled that He would come through the reproductive process of the Jewish people.**

Now the question comes, should a male be circumcised today?

- 1) There may be some medical reasons.
- 2) There are no theological reasons.

To stress that one must be circumcised to be right with God is to deny the finished work of Jesus Christ and the truth of the Gospel (Galatians 2:3-5).

QUESTION #3 – Why was Abraham circumcised? 4:11b, 12

Reason #1 - So that he could show to the uncircumcised Gentile that he was right with God before circumcision. 4:11c

Abraham was justified by faith while uncircumcised. This shows any person that they can be right with God simply by faith.

Reason #2 - So that he could show to the circumcised Jew that he was right with God before circumcision, by faith. **4:12**

Abraham is living proof for every Jew that circumcision will not save you. Circumcision relates Abraham to the Jew. Faith relates Abraham to God.

There is only one way to be right with God and that is by faith in Jesus Christ. Faith with no circumcision, faith with no water baptism is what saves a sinner. If you will place your faith in Jesus Christ, you shall be saved.

Let's go back to Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and Jewish elders regarding the issue of religious rites. Let us begin reading at Acts 15:1. Look carefully at verse 11 - how are we saved? We are saved through the grace of God by believing on Jesus Christ.

Salvation is not by our circumcision or baptism or confession or confirmation. Salvation is by God's judicial calculation. When you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as the only One who can save you from your sins, you are calculated by God as saved forever.

As Augustus Toplady said, we are not saved by our tears or zeal; God alone must save: "In my hand no price I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling. Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee."