

“Justification and Circumcision”

Romans - The Gospel of God

Romans 4:9-12

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Jeff: Father in heaven, we rejoice to be able to come before You. We thank You that You've revealed Yourself in Your word. And Father, we are thankful that You've revealed Yourself to us in such a wonderful and warm way. Lord, You certainly reveal Yourself to us as a righteous Judge; there is no doubt. And yet You reveal Yourself to us as the Justifier, the One who sent His only-Begotten into the world, that He might become the substitute for us, that He might bear the curse on our behalf, and that in Him we might be brought into Your presence not simply to be declared just but to be adopted into Your family. Father, we rejoice in that. And the warmth of the gospel message just permeates every page of Scripture, and we're so thankful for that. And as we come before You we come recognizing what a wonderful gospel it is, and what a wonderful Christ we have.

Father, we bow before You, asking that You will continually bless us as we work our way through the book of Romans. Father, thank You for that book because it tells us so much about You as the righteous Judge and as the Judge who declares us just and as the Judge who imputes righteousness, and so many other things that we'll learn. But Father, we thank You for inscripturating that Word, for giving it to us. And Lord, help us to recognize the privilege that we have in possessing Your word. And yet it's a despised Word by Your world. So we pray that You will teach us this Word, that we might not only possess it for our own edification, but that we might carry it out into the world and be a blessing to others, that we might disciple as we go and that we might see Your kingdom come.

Father, we are thankful for Ted, for the successful knee surgery and for how well he is getting around. We're thankful for that, and we're thankful that he is back with us. Father, we're thankful for Butch and for the good news that he received as well.

And Lord, we pray for our brother Bob and we ask that Your hand would be upon him as he undergoes a procedure today to get the port that he needs. Lord, we pray that You'll minister to him not only bodily but also in spirit.

Father, we ask that You will continually be with those that we've prayed for in the past and who have ongoing struggles. We think about Alex and we think about Don's friend and his wife. Lord, we pray for them and ask that Your hand would be upon them. Father, we ask now that You'll bless us as we study. We ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: Don?

Don Maurer: Yes?

Jeff: I saw William Lane Craig a couple times this past week.

Don: You did?

Jeff: He said to say hi.

Don: Okay. Does he still have middle knowledge?

Jeff: Yes, he does.

“Justification and Circumcision”

Don: Okay. Tell him to get rid of it.

Jeff: Okay. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: All right. We’re going to look at Romans 4 today, verses 9-12. And let me read to you those verses: 9-12.

“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.” This is the word of the Lord.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

Sig Tragard: Good job.

Ted Wood: That wasn’t good; that was great! *(Laughter)*

Jeff: That was in honor of you. I wanted to remember you. *(Laughter)*

Ted: Rome sweet home.

Don: Oh! Oh!

Jeff: All right. Well, let me tell you right up front what the text is about. I think it’s important that we at least have an understanding of what we’re getting ourselves into, or what Paul is getting us into. And one of the things that I think is important for us to keep in mind is the flow of the argument, that argument being that God reveals Himself as a righteous Judge who judges righteously. But by the time that we get to the end of chapter 3 not only is He a righteous Judge who judges righteously, but He is a righteous God who reckons or imputes or imparts righteousness to others, to those who believe in His Son. And so we saw at the end of chapter 3 that beautiful development of how God does that.

But now we’re getting into that chapter, chapter 4, where basically Paul anticipates the Jewish response. The Jewish response is going to be just as it was at the end of chapter 3. Basically they’re going to pull Abraham out of their sleeves as a trump card. “But what about Abraham?”

And so what Paul does is that he anticipates that. And he says, okay. What about Abraham? Was he an exception to all of this? And the answer is obviously no. He wasn’t an exception to all of this. That’s why he’s working us through it.

But where are we now in this phase of the argument? Well, where we are now is simply this. I want to say two things to you that will give you the argument in its entirety. Then I want us to work our way through it.

First of all what Paul wants us to understand is that *salvation is not by works*; it’s not by works. Now that’s one of those things that we think to ourselves is an easy one. It’s a given, okay? We get it; we understand that. But Paul wants to drive that home in such a way that we never, ever forget it. It’s something that he comes back to repeatedly. And he comes back to it repeatedly because he knows us. He knows the kind of people we are. And we’ll talk about that in just a minute.

“Justification and Circumcision”

But secondly, what we are to understand is how he wraps up this little section. This little section is wrapped up by telling us that we are children of Abraham—the man who was saved not by works but by faith, and that alone. But we know that we’re children of this man if we walk in a certain manner.

And so Paul is going back to what he said in chapter 3. “Does what I just said nullify the law? Absolutely not. In fact, what I said establishes the law.” And here again we find Paul saying that very thing. Abraham and all of his posterity are not saved by works. But you know that you’re a child of Abraham if you walk as the one who had faith in the promises given to him. That’s the idea.

And so that’s the argument summed up. But let me say one more thing about that. Sometimes I think that today we think to ourselves, you know, what’s all this talk about circumcision? And we feel as if that’s kind of distant, at least religiously or spiritually speaking. And the important thing about that is that it’s the driver that teaches us that all that we possess in Christ is not by works. And that’s the foil that’s being used. And yet it’s really not a foil. We’ll see that it actually has strong implications for showing us the unity of the people of God as we go through this text. So that’s the idea; that’s the sum of the argument.

So let’s walk through this for a second. And we’ve already read the text. And so what is necessary to be a child of God? We’ve already said that it’s by faith. But let me give you an illustration, and then I want you to think along with me for just a minute, and maybe not necessarily answer out loud, although you can if you’d like.

But I think I mentioned this at the end of our time last time. And that is that I was out evangelizing one evening in a town other than this one. And I belonged to what was called a conservative ministerium. There was a ministerium in town. And this ministerium in town was made up of all sorts of churches. But the conservatives in town decided that what they were going to do was to establish their own ministerium. So there were probably six or seven churches in town and we would all meet regularly once a month and pray and go through a book, and that sort of thing.

And so I was out on the street one night. I ran into this couple and their son. It was a Friday evening and you kind of had to know the area. Actually it was an interesting small and big town. There was a road that would run up this way and had a diamond like this in a circular market. And what would happen is that there was a cruise line that would go up and then around the diamond, and then out. And so if you would just hang around in the diamond you could meet all sorts of people, all kinds of people, all ages of people. And so I was there one evening and this family was in the park, and I just happened to talk to them.

And I asked them about salvation. And the father looked at the son and said, “Tell him, son.” And the son basically said that his hope rested in the fact that he had been baptized that previous week. And as I talked to them it became clear that they believed in some form of baptismal regeneration, that by the fact that the son had been baptized that he had been regenerated.

“Justification and Circumcision”

And you know, if you're like me that kind of strikes you as pretty problematic. It's the Holy Spirit who regenerates us, and baptism is a sign of what we receive in that. But baptismal water is not the instrument of regeneration. And so I was a bit troubled by that.

And so I started to talk to them a little while. And then I realized that they were from one of these conservative churches in the ministerium. And I was a bit troubled by that because here was an instance where somebody was basically saying that a work, the work of baptism, had in fact saved them.

And that's one indication or one instance of how this can happen. But there are other instances we can fall into where we can slip into this works-oriented mindset. And that's a dangerous place to be. I mean, I want you to think about it for just a minute. The minute we begin to make comparisons between ourselves and others we are in that works-oriented mindset.

Or think about it like this. When we start negotiating with God, this is something that I think we have a tendency to do, right? So we have a tendency to say something like this. “I go to the evening service on Sunday.” This is not as crass as all this, okay? But here's what we do. I'm going to do this, and I know I probably shouldn't do it. But I'm better than most people because I go to the evening service. Most people don't go to the evening service, but I do. So surely that counts for something before God,” right?

And we find ourselves rationalizing in that works-oriented mindset, as if to say, “I am pleasing to God by what I do.” And we are all guilty of that at some point in our lives. And when we do that we've slipped into that works-oriented mindset. It's hard to stay away from. And it's hard to stay away from because we're children of Adam.

Sig: But Jeff, isn't that also true of—

Jeff: The bishop had his hand up first.

Bishop Rodgers: Baptism is done by Christ's command and in His name as a gift of God. Why is that a work?

Jeff: Baptism is done by—

Bishop: It's done by God in Christ. He's the One that commanded us to baptize. And it's His act.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: Why is that considered a work?

Jeff: Well, I'm thinking more along the lines of seeing baptism as an instrument that produces regeneration.

Bishop: That it's automatic.

Jeff: Yes, it's in an automatic sense.

Bishop: Where we control it.

Jeff: Yes. This group would never say that they are doing the *ex opera operato* kind of thing like the Roman Catholic church does—you know, working the work out of the work. But they really believe that if you apply the water of baptism, that water causes the regeneration. And so there's an instrumental cause; that is the tool by which you produce it. So that's what I have in mind.

Ron Baling: Jeff?

Jeff: Yes?

“Justification and Circumcision”

Ron: Do you think that this person wasn't an infant? He might have been inclined to believer's baptism.

Jeff: It was more than that, because I came to find out when I talked to the pastor later about this that their denomination is sort of in terms of the spectrum that there are some who actually believe that water is a regenerating instrument. And then there are others who see it not as a regenerating instrument but more in terms of believer's baptism. And this family happened to be in a church that viewed it more in a baptistic way. But this family was more old school, at least in terms of the historical view of the church.

Ron: The second question would then be a nice way of asking where did your faith come from?—whether they felt it was something they generated or a gift?

Jeff: Yeah, right. But I was thinking of the subtle ways in which we slip into this mindset, as if to say that we do something for our salvation.

Sig: But Jeff, the question that I was going to ask is this. When you first said that we make comparisons between ourselves and others, that's my family. With my brothers and sisters it's constant. And a lot of it has to do with pleasing the old man.

Jeff: Yeah.

Sig: I don't know; I imagine other families struggle with that too. But we don't necessarily believe, like you've given so many examples, that my father loves me when I happen to do my chores.

Jeff: Right.

Sig: But with my father, we didn't think he loved us unless we performed and did well.

Jeff: Yeah.

Sig: Especially with grades and athletics. And that's why I felt so not loved. You might be surprised to hear that, but I wasn't an athlete. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: But you know what? After seeing you in those Speedos—*(Laughter)*

Sig: But isn't it a cultural thing? That's a cultural thing too.

Jeff: Yeah. This is off the subject; I'm talking off the subject at this point. But I have even heard people argue that we should abandon the idea of talking about God as Father because there are so many bad fathers in the world that it actually has a negative effect on people. And you know, I think it's terrible to say that we should abandon the truth of Scripture to accommodate the hurts of people. People have to orient themselves to the truth of the Word and rightly align themselves with the concepts that are found in Scripture despite their own experiences.

Sig: That's what saved my sorry ass, when I found out that there was a Father that loved me. What That doesn't count as swearing.

Jeff: I don't see Balaam's donkey anywhere, so easy on the language there. *(Laughter)* All right. But Paul is very clear here: that we are saved by faith alone, apart from circumcision.

Now that means that entrance into the family of God is not by biological birth, okay? It is not by biological birth. Now I just want you to think about this for just a minute, because all of Romans is going to tie together. And I want you to think ahead to

“Justification and Circumcision”

something he’s going to say later. In fact I’ll show it to you now so that when we get there I can remind you of it if I remember.

Go to Romans chapter 9. And in Romans chapter 9 this is what he says, and it’s in verse 6. *“But it is not as though the word of God has failed.”*

Now what is he talking about? He’s going to enter into a discussion about ethnic Israel. And he’s going to talk about a situation that is. What’s the situation? That ethnic Israel doesn’t seem to be responding to the gospel, to the revelation of Jesus Christ. He says, *“But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel. And not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring.”*

Now what is he saying there? He’s saying the very thing that he’s saying here in this chapter: that is, who is the offspring of Abraham? If it isn’t those who are biologically from his loins, then who is it? And he’s going to answer that. We don’t have to wait until we get to Romans chapter 9 in order to have that question answered for us. But what he’s going to do is take it up in chapter 9 because it’s very important for us in understanding who the people of God are.

But now he’s saying that the Abrahamic family is not by birth, something he is going to say later. It’s by faith.

Now when he says that it’s by faith, there’s something very important there that I think that we need to catch. And I think this is something that Paul was pressing into the Jewish people, and that is this. Abraham is more than an example. He is a recipient of this very promise that we are promised. In other words, Abraham is the very first person to be the kind of people that we are today—the kind of people that embrace this by faith. That’s what he’s saying.

Now I want you to see that because Paul is going to say this very thing in Galatians chapter 3. Go to Galatians 3 for a minute. In Galatians 3 he says this. And I want to start in verse 5.

“Does He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” Now there’s the question right there. That’s the question that he’s been dealing with in Romans chapter 4. *“Just as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”* And in our text he’s going to quote that text.

“Know then that it is those of faith that are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith,”—that’s us,—*“preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying,”* (and he quotes Genesis 12 here), *“in you shall all the nations be blessed. So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”* And some translations even have *“Abraham the believer.”*

Now do you see what he’s doing there? What he’s doing is, he’s picking up on the very thing that he’s teaching us here. In other words these things are taught over and over again in the Scriptures: that yes, righteousness was counted to Abraham by faith, and therefore he is more than an example. He’s the recipient of this very thing. And that means that he is our father by virtue of the promise and the faith he believed. So what Paul does here in Romans chapter 4 is that he takes us back to Genesis. When he takes us

“Justification and Circumcision”

back to Genesis we run headlong into Genesis chapter 15. That’s the text that becomes the crucial text.

When you think about this text and how many times this text appears in the New Testament, it’s staggering. We don’t typically get all that’s involved in that text. We know about the animals being slaughtered and divided up and the path being there that Abraham is to walk through. He doesn’t walk through it; God in fact walks through it on his behalf and says to Abram, “I’m going to secure your blessedness,” and that sort of thing. What we find is, that’s the text that Paul is always taking us back to because it’s so crucial. And so he does here; just as he did in Galatians, so he does here.

Now the question is this. Is it the case that this promise made to Abraham is to the circumcised, or to the uncircumcised? Is it the case that this promise that’s made to Abraham is only for the Jew? Is that what is being said here?

Now again we sometimes feel very distant about this because of circumcision and the Jewish people and all this sort of thing. But this is very up close and personal because it’s about us. In other words Paul is here saying, “I want you guys to understand that there was room made in the covenant for you Gentiles.” So even though this is about Jews and about Abraham and about circumcision, it’s really about us and the argument for our conclusion into this full covenant.

So let’s ask. How is it then that this promise is not just for the circumcised, but it’s for the uncircumcised? How is that? And the answer is that it was for Abraham when he was yet uncircumcised. In other words it was for Abraham when he was very much—think about it this way!—a Gentile. Okay?

Now what happens is, this righteousness, or the righteousness of God, is reckoned to him. Now this is one of the things that I think is really important that we need to think about. And we’ve thought about this a little bit before. But I think it comes up here again with some power and force to it.

How is it? How was that righteousness reckoned to him? Before he was circumcised or after he was circumcised? If it was after he was circumcised then Abraham has something to boast about.

Now let me just pause here for a minute because I think this becomes really important. Obviously we can answer this and say, no. Abraham has nothing to boast about. But if we’re really being honest with ourselves, isn’t it the case that sometimes we feel as if we have something to boast about before God?—because of our behavior, because of something we’ve done, because of something we’ve given? Does this make any kind of sense?

Ted: Absolutely.

Jeff: Yes. I mean—

Ted: It’s a default. It’s the default position of all of us.

Jeff: It is. It is because we’re children of Adam.

Ted: If not to gain salvation, it’s to be sure that we have salvation.

Jeff: Yeah. I mean, if you think about it,— Go ahead.

Paul Sedlock: I wanted to ask this even before you got to that point. Even sometimes we’re thinking, oh, I have faith; it’s the work of myself, right?

“Justification and Circumcision”

Jeff: Yes. When we get to the—

Paul: My faith is better than your faith.

Sig: Well we knew that, Paul. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: So we would say, based on Ephesians 2:8, that faith is a gift from God, right? So this past weekend the place I went to was the Evangelical Theological Society. But what meets in tandem was—Was that a groan?

Ted: Yes.

Jeff: What meets in tandem with that is the Evangelical Philosophical Society. And I decided to go to a paper from the Evangelical Philosophical Society. And there was a philosopher, which is always a problem, right, Bishop? A philosopher who allows his philosophy to dictate his belief is always in trouble. So—

Don: William Lane Craig?

Jeff: Okay, so I wasn't going to mention any names. *(Laughter)* But he delivered a great paper. And the paper that he gave was a paper on faith. And actually it was a great paper. It was the question and answer period that came up afterward that I was troubled by.

But what he said was this. He said that faith is very personal because faith actually talks about believing in a person. And so you actually get the idea of *pistis* with prepositions like believe *in* or believe into, or believe on. So it's *es*, it's *en*, or it's *epi*. Those kinds of personal beliefs rest on the Person of Jesus Christ in some way.

But there is also propositional faith, where I must believe in certain things in order to say that I believe on the Person of Jesus Christ. So for instance I think it's Romans 10:9-10.

Transcriber's Note: Romans 10:9-10, NKJV. *“That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”*

Jeff: I must believe that God raised Christ from the dead. That's a proposition about the Person of Christ that I must believe. And so saving faith entails both a personal aspect and a propositional aspect. I must believe into Jesus and I must believe certain things about Jesus.

Well after it was all said and done, somebody was asking a question. And he was really dealing with a philosopher. I won't go into the argument. But basically this is the very weak aspect of faith, and this is the very strong aspect of faith. And somebody asked the question: Can you vacillate in and out of faith along the way, as your faith strengthens?

And his answer to that was yes. You can move in and out of faith. In other words, you can be in possession of faith in a very weak state, or you can actually abandon that faith altogether, really and truly, not just seemingly. Really and truly you can abandon that faith. And that's where I have problems with this more Arminian view of faith, and so on, because if we believe that the faith that Abraham received and the faith that I received is a gift, my faith may weaken or it may strengthen. But I never actually depart from the faith if I possess faith—that kind of thing. Yes?

“Justification and Circumcision”

David Miller: I had a man tell me that his faith was strong. But I pointed out to him that even a weak faith in the right Person is better than a strong faith in the wrong Person.

Jeff: Yes, that’s exactly it, because even when my faith is the weakest it’s still in the Person of Christ who is always strong on my behalf. So you’re right; that’s a dead on the money way to think about it. Anything else?

Ted: That’s why I find this distinction about believe in or believe on very helpful.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely.

Ted: Because we have a family member who we led in a Bible study there, and very new in exploring the faith.

Jeff: Yeah.

Ted: And he asked me, “Do you ever doubt?” And I said, “Yes, all the time.”

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: And he was surprised at that answer. He thought that when you became a Christian that you never doubt.

Jeff: I’ve heard that too.

Ted: But that doubt is existential. That’s how I’m feeling at the moment, which is basically irrelevant. It’s like when they take me into the PT and they press down on my knee. They say, “Does it hurt?”

Yes. But that’s irrelevant. I mean, it’s got to hurt push to get the legs going.

Jeff: Yeah, right.

Ted: So I function very much in the existential. Once you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and the propositional, once you leave that and deny that you’re out of the faith. But believing on, weak or strong, that is not especially relevant. As I said to him, it’s not so much whether I doubt or not, but what God is doing in me that counts.

Jeff: Yeah. Yes, Bishop?

Bishop: I was just going to say that I don’t think faith really looks at itself very much; it looks at Christ. If I look at my faith I think, good grief! It’s pretty bad stuff.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bishop: But my trust is not in my faith; my trust is in Christ who has evoked the faith.

Jeff: Yes. There is a story that I absolutely love that illustrates that point. Dabney is the name of the theologian. He writes a friend of his who tells him that he’s a little concerned about dying. And he’s on his deathbed.

His friend writes him back and says, “Bob, if you were walking through the woods and came across a bridge, would you spend time asking yourself, “Do I trust enough in bridges to walk across that bridge?” Or would you go and inspect that bridge and find it trustworthy and so cross it? He says, “Spend your time looking at Christ rather than looking at yourself.”

Bishop: Yes.

Jeff: And that’s an excellent way to think about it, because the more time we spend thinking about it, it’s like you said. The more time we spend thinking about the One I rest in and upon, the better off I’ll be. If we continue to look at ourselves our faith will always be weak.

“Justification and Circumcision”

So if it was a matter of after, then there's the matter of boasting. But if before then he has no boast, because it's given to him before he does anything.

So what is circumcision? That's what we have to ask. And this is the important thing. Circumcision is a sign and seal—how catch this!—of the righteousness he had by faith. In other words, it's a sign of the righteousness that he possessed by his faith.

Now the reason that I'm making a big deal out of this is because this is what I said to you. The righteousness is not his faith. But it's something that he possessed by his faith. And so now all of a sudden what we find is a little clearer statement. Paul is opening this up with a little more clarity.

Whose righteousness did he possess? Not his own righteousness. If it were his own righteousness, for instance, then it would be “I'm going to look at you and see your faith and give you righteousness that you already possess—that righteousness being your faith, because that's what you deserve for showing your faith.”

No, that's not it at all. Faith becomes an instrument by which I receive the righteousness of Christ that's reckoned to my account. That's the idea. So it's a sign and a seal of righteousness.

Now let's stop here for a minute. Yes; go ahead.

Bryan Whittington: Before you move on,--

Jeff: Yes?

Bryan: 2 Timothy 2:11.

Jeff: Okay.

Bryan: *“The saying is trustworthy, for:*

If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him.

If we endure, we will also reign with Him.

If we deny Him, He also will deny us.

If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”

Jeff: Yes.

Bryan: So the words are a little bit curious between 12 and 13 where it says that if we deny Him, He will deny us, and “*if we are faithless He remains faithful.*” I don't know how to pull those together. I manage to listen and not do. It's His work. So even if you're showing weak faith, He's still faithful; it's never us.

Jeff: Yes; it's never us. And I think that the idea is that if we think about when we're faithless, I think you could think either of sort of the big picture of Israel who is an expression of that faithlessness. And yet He says in Romans 11 that “I didn't abandon them.” You know what I mean? And Paul says, “He didn't abandon us; I'm living proof that He didn't abandon us. I'm a Jew and I'm saved.”

Bryan: The way I look at it, faithlessness is every time I sin. That's my faithlessness, and that's where we have such a peace. And I find that I'm blessed. Yes, I was faithless, but He is faithful.

Jeff: Yes, as long as you think about faithless as having less faith, and not no faith.

Bryan: We're never out of faith.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bryan: That's impossible.

“Justification and Circumcision”

Jeff: Yeah. So first I want us to catch the sign and the seal image for a second. When you think about a sign you think, for instance, about a sign that says “Virginia Beach 90 miles.” You don’t stop at the sign. But the sign indicates something beyond itself. And so when we think about circumcision we think about a sign that points beyond itself.

But we also think about something that authenticates, that is, a seal. The seal of the king stamped in the letter authenticates the fact that it’s a letter from the king. So there’s an authentication that the circumcision brings to the promise. And so I just want you to think about those things for just a minute.

Think about it like this. And I think this brings those two together. Think about a man who calls his son into his office one day. The man is rich. He says to his son, “Son, I’ve decided to leave all that I have to you. And what I’m going to do is, I’m going to give you a part of the treasure now; it’s a ring. And that ring is going to be a sign of the greater treasure that’s yours, though the ring is part of the treasure. And therefore it authenticates my promise to give you this treasure.” And so the ring becomes a sign and a seal. It signifies something greater and it authenticates the promise of the father that this portion of the treasure indicates that there is more to come.

And that’s what circumcision does. Circumcision is a sign that points beyond itself, and it authenticates that which is promised.

The question that we have to ask ourselves is what does circumcision point to, and what promise does it authenticate? And I think that if we look at this not simply as Jewish people but as Christian people, then we realize something.

Let’s say this. Here’s the individual. And we ask ourselves about the sign and the seal over here of circumcision. What does this point to? Does it point to this man? Well, it happens to this man.

But when we look at the New Testament we find something peculiar. We find something in Colossians chapter 2 that’s really fascinating. We find that in Colossians 2 that it says this in verse 11. *“And also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.”*

Now here’s what I want you to think about. What does this circumcision that we experience because it says that we experience it, what does it point to? It points to the circumcision of Christ. So it doesn’t point to this man’s circumcision. It points to Christ’s circumcision.

So what is Christ’s circumcision but the cross? In other words, circumcision points to the circumcision of Christ, which is the cross.

But then he goes on to say that *“we were buried with Him in baptism”* and raised with Him in baptism. That’s what Colossians 2:10 and 11 says. All of a sudden now we find that there is a compatibility between the sign of the Old Testament circumcision and a sign of the New Testament—baptism.

And what does baptism point to? Does it point to me as a person any more than circumcision pointed to me? And the answer is no. Circumcision points to Christ. It points to His baptism, His being raised from the dead. And certainly it includes me by virtue of possessing the sign.

“Justification and Circumcision”

But I want you to think about it like this with the example that we gave of the rich man and the treasure and the ring. The riches are right here. The sign of these riches is the ring that the man possesses.

In circumcision, being in the Old Testament, or baptism being in the New Testament, the ring doesn't point to me. When I begin to think that the ring points to me and to my faith I've got a real problem. What does the ring point to? The ring points to the treasure that is in Christ. And that's the idea here, whether it be circumcision or baptism. Does that make sense to you?

Brave Man: Yes.

Jeff: Okay; all right. So that's the sign and the seal aspect. So what he's saying is that this points to something greater. So here righteousness is not faith. But he received the righteousness by faith.

And the point is that he received it while uncircumcised, before he had done anything by way of works. That's crucial.

So what's the purpose of all this? Well, the purpose of all this is that he becomes the father of all who believe, the father of all who exercise faith. If you go back to Romans chapter 4 again, *“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.”*

Here is the great thing about it. When you think about it, Abraham receives the ring, and so receives all the treasure that is signified and sealed in the ring. Here we're told that he received that ring before he'd done anything for that ring. And he received it by faith so that we would receive it the same way. That's the beautiful thing about it.

Here's the beautiful thing about it. I think that in some ways we might say all right. We all understand that we're saved not by works but by faith. And so quit laboring it. Why are you laboring this so much?

And the answer is that a long time ago I listened to Sinclair Ferguson. He had a lecture and he was asked to speak to students at a college campus. And after two lectures he was brought in by the group that asked him to speak to them. And they upbraided him and said to him, “We've listened to you now for two lectures. And you haven't once told us to do anything.” *(Laughter)* And they said, “When are you going to tell us what we need to do?”

And his point in illustrating that was to say that we get the gospel so mixed up that we always want to know what we're supposed to do. What am I supposed to do? Okay, we get it. What are we supposed to do?

And the fact of the matter is that most of the time we dismiss it. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah; God has done this for me. Sure, I get it. We dismiss that without understanding it. And we just want to run to what we have to do. And when we run to what we do we are in violation of this text and don't even realize it, because when we patiently say what it is that God has done on our behalf, then we'll eventually get it.

And this is what Ferguson told them. He said, “When I get to telling you what you need to do you will be so overwhelmed with what you have to do that you ought to feel

“Justification and Circumcision”

crushed under the weight of it. And the only thing that will save you from being crushed under the weight of it is what He has done for you.” That’s the only place to stand.

Ron: Yes. The rich man says, “What must I do?” Jesus said, “Sell everything.”

Jeff: Yeah, right.

Ron: That knocked him under. “I’ve already done that!”, you know? Remember that?

Jeff: “What do I have to do to inherit eternal life?”

“Keep the commandments.”

“Well, I’ve already done all that.”

“Let me apply them for you.” That sort of thing. So without being circumcised he was counted righteous. And the circumcised too; listen to this. *“Who are not merely circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith of our father Abraham.”*

There’s the point right there. And that is that now he’s getting to the point where he is saying, yes. There are things that we do as a result. And the things that we do as a result come from what God has done for us. So we need to walk in the footsteps of Abraham and so believe.

But that entails so much more. Why? Because not only did Genesis 15 tell us that God walked through the halves and promised to secure his blessedness. But in Genesis 17 God appeared to Abram and said, *“Walk before Me and be blameless.”* And so there’s a sense in which what we do comes after what He has done on our behalf.

Well, next time we’ll finish up chapter 4. Any questions this time before we end? Yes?

Mike Davis: There’s a sign that I see in people’s yards that says, “Believe.”

Jeff: Yeah.

Mike: Do we believe in nothing, or do we have something to believe in?

Jeff: Yeah. I mean, that’s the point, right?

Mike: I always look at those signs and I say, believe in what?

Jeff: Yeah. This is the word for faith. So there are all these prepositions: believe in, believe into, believe on. And so it’s not just believe. But it’s believe into Christ.

And then this is the thing that I think is so great. So in this talk this guy is purely a philosopher. This is why I like William Lane Craig. This philosopher stand up and says, “Bill, I’ve written some of the texts that you’re interacting with. And I want to know why it is that you keep talking about propositional faith. It’s believing in Jesus Christ. Why are you talking about those things that I must believe?”

And William Lane Craig looked at him and said, “Because the Bible says that.” I mean, it was just a matter-of-fact kind of thing. But Craig in his presentation was making the point that philosophers don’t often look at the Bible when they argue their philosophies. And he was showing examples in this literature of all these guys who basically proof-texted their philosophical arguments.

And here was a guy who had written one of these books. And it was kind of interesting to watch Craig sort of deal with them. It was sort of a matter-of-fact kind of way with regard to the Bible. “Well look, this is what the Bible says about this. This is why you’re wrong about this.” And you could just see the guy being put in this kind of position where he either needed to defend his argument or basically say, “Okay; I guess I overlooked that.” It was just great!

“Justification and Circumcision”

Bishop: It’s kind of hard to put your faith in an oblong blur.

Jeff: Yeah, that’s right.

Bishop: It doesn’t have any content. What are you putting your faith in?

Jeff: Yes, that’s right.

Bishop: You end up putting your faith in what happens to you.

Jeff: Yeah. And this is something that we all know, right? If I’m not married and I see this woman walk in, all of a sudden I feel toward her in a certain way. Ah, that woman is going to be my wife! But I know nothing about her. We would say that you’re a very unwise person. *(Laughter)* She may be very attractive. But if you have not accumulated any propositional knowledge about her yet,--

Bishop: You’re in trouble.

Jeff: You are in trouble. *(Laughter)* She may be the most attractive person in the world. But if she’s an atheist and you’re a Christian, that’s propositional knowledge that will sever that tie, right?

Ted: Well, you could marry her and work on her and just work on her and hope that some day she’ll come around. *(Laughter)*

Don: In violation of 2 Corinthians 6.

Jeff: See, he was joking. *(Laughter)* It’s just a poor taste joke, okay? *(Laughter)* And the reason it’s in poor taste is because it’s so believable; people believe it..

Bishop: All the time. Yes?

David: The problem is that it doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you have faith.

Bishop: Eisenhower.

Sig: It’s like the sign in his yard.

Ted: And what you get in the rest of Christianity if “people of faith.”

Jeff: Yes.

Ted: My daughter was part of that cadre. “Oh, they’re people of faith.” And I want to say, “Faith in what?” And I don’t say that because I’m building on the relationship. There are a lot of people who are people of faith. That does nothing for me at all.

Jeff: Yeah, that’s right.

Ted: The world says that’s sufficient.

Jeff: And this is the kind of stuff we’re talking about that is crucial. This makes us discerning people when we can talk like this. Keep that in mind. We’re taking for granted stuff that not everybody takes for granted. You’re seeing that in terms of science and the way people talk, and so on. So keep that in mind.

Let’s pray. Father, thank You for this day, for the faith that You’ve given us in Jesus Christ. And Father, we ask now that You’ll continue to bless to our understanding the propositional knowledge that will fill out that relationship more and more. Father, we ask now that You’ll bless us as we go throughout the day. We ask it in Christ’s name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. *(Applause)*