Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Abraham--Justified by Grace, Part 1
Scripture: Romans 4:9-12
Code: 45-37

Let's look at our Bibles at this time. We are thrilled tonight to open the pages of Paul's great epistle to the Romans. We are in the midst of the great section on salvation, looking particularly at Romans chapter 4 verses 1 through 25, the faith of Abraham.

Now, just to introduce our thinking tonight, I want you to back up, if you will, to chapter 3 and I just want to read verses 21 to the first Dart of verse 25.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe. For there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a satisfaction through faith in His blood.

Now, that great statement which we have studied in past weeks tells us that a man or a woman is made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ not through works. Christ satisfied God. He offered to God the redemption in His blood that satisfied the demand of God's justice and when we by faith receive Christ, accepting His person and His work, God grants to us His righteousness. It says simply that when a person places genuine faith in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, righteousness is then imputed to him or put to his account.

Now, as you come to chapter 4, Paul uses Abraham as an illustration of that, He is an illustration of justification by faith. He is an illustration that men and women come into a right relationship to God through believing in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we've been learning that justification then, or God imputing to us His righteousness, God putting His righteousness to our account must be seen in two ways. First of all, it is a forensic declaration, that is a statement of God relative to judicial reality. By that I mean God says, in fact, we are legally righteous. The legal payment has been paid, the wages of sin is death, Christ died the death. If we are granted the appropriation of that death through faith then legally we are right with God, Payment has been made. That is what forensic means. It is a legal declaration. And so, we are legally pronounced just.

I heard recently that a preacher said when we are saved it is only a legal pronouncement, there's no change in us at all, it is simply that God declares us righteous, contrary to the real fact but based on the death of Jesus Christ. That is not true. There is a declaration, there is a legal statement but there

is a second aspect and theologians would call this the ontology of justification, or the reality of it and it is thisthat God not only declares us to be righteous based on the satisfying work of Christ, but in Christ Fe makes us righteous. We are made righteous. He imputes to us His own righteousness. We are created in Christ Jesus. We are regenerated. We are born again. We are given a new nature. We become possessors of the divine nature which is incorruptible and eternal.

And so, you must see then in justification by faith both of those elements. That which is declared about us that we are from now on right with God can only be declared because in fact it is true that we have been recreated in His image. That is why Hebrews 2:11 says Jesus is not ashamed to call us...what? ... brothers, because in a very real sense we bear the same family markings, the same family nature and that's a really monumental thought ... but it is the fact of the Word of God.

Now, let me see if I can illustrate to you both of these in one story. Look in your Bible to the fifteenth chapter of Luke and I want to use this as an illustration. A familiar story that our Lord told about the prodigal son. Beginning in Luke 15:11, "And He said, A certain man had two sons," it's a story by the way not about one son but about two sons, the first one gets most of the press. "The younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living and not many days after that the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; he began to be in want. He went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, sent him into the fields to feed swine." Hardly imaginable for a Jewish boy to do that.

"He would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat but no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself he said. How many of my father's hired servants havebread enough to spare and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father and I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father and when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, had compassion, ran, fell on his neck and kissed him, And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet and bring the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and be merry, for this is my son was dead and/alive again, he was lost and is found; and they began to be merry.

"Now his elder son was in the field and as he came and drew near to the house he heard music and dancing and called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother has come and thy father has killed the fatted calf because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry and would not go in. Therefore came his father out and entreated him, and he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any tire thy commandment and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I night make merry with my friends, but as soon as this thy son was come who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for

him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine, it was fitting that we should make merry and be glad for this thy brother was dead and is alive again and was lost and is found."

Now, that is one of the great, great teaching passages on the significance of true salvation and repentance. And I don't want to take the time to develop all of the thoughts here, but let me just pull one out. The father could not have the prodigal son at his table in the rags of the far country even though he had forgiven him. And there is amarvelous imagery here. When the father goes out tomeet the son, he forgives the son. But before the son can come to the father's table the father puts new clothing on him, he robes him in a new robe and puts a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. And may I suggest to you that going out to meet him and forgiving him and justifying him is the equivalent of that forensic element of redemption that we see in Romans chapter 3 and 4. But robing him in the robe to prepare him to sit at the father's table is equivalent to that onological or that reality of a changed life. And so, there must be both ... bring forth the best robe and put it on him... so that you have grace on the one hand and righteousness on the other hand meeting in the act of redemption. And it's as if the son cannot receive all the blessedness of the father's table until he is robed in the right robe.

And so, there is more than just a declaration involved there is a declaration and a reality involved. Now the other son didn't really ever recognize that he too had rags on. He never really saw his sinfulness for what it was, it was equally heinous to God, it was not the sin of riotous living, it was the sin of hypocrisy and selfrighteousness. And he never was willing to confess to his father the rags of his own selfrighteousness and so never received the robe of righteousness.

And so, we are reminded by this marvelous parable that there must be a stated fact about our made righteous with God but there also must be a reality behind that because God doesn't say things about us that aren't in fact true.

Now, let's return to Romans chapter 4. And that was really for you who have been here, for the rest of you you're probably saying Let me out of here, Alice, I don't have a clue what's going on. That was just a footnote to several weeks.

Now, we remember that in chapter 4 verse 5 a very great statement is made that God justifies the ungodly. God only saves the ungodly. God only saves the people, who come back and cry out "I have sinned," who realize they are in rags, who realize they have no resources. He only saves number one son, not number two in that story because the number two son never recognizedhis ungodliness. Now having established then that righteousness comes both as a declaration and as a reality, as you approach chapter 4 you come to Abraham as the classic illustration. He is a marvelous illustration of the fact that God justifies the ungodly, that God redeems men not by their works but by their faith. And this is a hard lesson for people to learn.

I'll never forget being in Mexico on one occasion and being at the Shrine of Guadeloupe and watching these people crawl for a quarter of a mile on their bare knees which by the time they were a third of the way to this tilted cathedral that is sinking gradually because most of the central part of Mexico is sinking with it, and it was lopsided and cockeyed tolook at and here they were believing that this was the edifice to which Mary herself had appeared in one of her supposed appearances and they believed they could gain some entrance into God's heaven by crawling on their knees for a quarter of a mile or more until they were bloody beyond belief, women with children and all kinds of people moving in that foray and then entering such a place to light myriad upon myriad of candles to try to help the people out of purgatory who didn't crawl far enough. It's very difficult for man to understand that he does not redeem himself by his own works.

And so, Paul belabors the point in chapter 4 by postulating an illustration from the life of Abraham. He is the classic model of salvation by grace through faith. And we suggested to you that there are three sort of emphases in the chapter. They are very overlapping and they're not clear cut. But in the first eight verses he seems to emphasize that Abraham was saved by faith not works, from verse 9 to 17 he was justified by grace not law, and then from verse 18 to 25 by divine power not human effort. And so he's really crisscrossing himself in saying the same things from different angles and widening our understanding all the while.

Now, we've already looked at the first 8 verses and we emphasized to you over the last few weeks that Abraham was justified by faith not works. And the key to that is that God justifies the ungodly and that's the only kind that He justifies because that's the only kind of people there are. Unless a man faces the ungodliness of his life he never comes to a Savior. So, God is in the business of justifying only the ungodly,

Now, as we come to verse 9, we come to the second section in the chapter in which Paul tells us that Abraham was justified by grace not law. And as I said, these are interwoven and overlapping. But verse 16 sort of keys the passage so look at it even though we won't get anywhere near it tonight. He says in verse 16, "Therefore it is of faith (that is salvation) that itmight be by grace." And you can stop at that point.

That sort of wraps up his thinking from verses 9 through 16 and 17. It is by faith that it might be by grace. God saves us to exalt His grace and that is the general thrust of this text. It's exactly what he said to the Ephesians when he said "For by grace are you saved through faith and it's not of yourselves, it is the gift of God not of works lest any man should boast."' And God has always saved people by grace. Clear back in Genesis 6:8 it says Noah found grace. Back into verse 3 of chapter 4, Abraham believed God and righteousness was put to his account, even though he was unworthy on the basis of his faith. God did that as he responded in faith. So, God is a God of great grace and He saves on the basis of His own free favor to undeserving sinners, that's what grace usfree favor to

undeserving sinners. And so we're saved that way. It's very much like Hosea and Gomer. Hosea going out to woo back his adulterous wife, finally buying her like a piece of meat in the marketplace where she was being hocked, naked as a prostitute, and forgiving her everything and taking her back to himself. It is God's great grace. It is what bothered Jonah when Jonah was sent by God to Nineveh and the whole city repented, he said,"That's why I didn't want to come, God. Because I knew you were a God of grace, and You'd forgive all those Gentiles." God is a God of grace.

So, salvation is a matter of God's grace, not a matter of men keeping certain ordinances and laws and earning righteousness.

Now, Abraham becomes for us an excellent illustration of this. You might sort of sum, it up by saying this. If the greatest man in the old dispensation (in the Jewish mind it would be Abraham) if the greatest man in the old dispensation had to deny all works, had to deny all law-keeping as a way to be right with God, and the greatest man in the old dispensation had to be saved by grace as an ungodly sinner, then justification by law-keeping must for all other lesser men be impossible. And no Jew would think himself the equal or greater to Abraham. If Abraham had to be saved as an ungodly sinner by God's free favor, then that's the way every other man must be saved as well.

And so we saw then in the first eight verses that men are not saved by their works, not at all. They're saved by faith and here we learn it's by God's grace reaching out to them. Now this concept that Abraham was not saved by works leaves a very important question in the Jewish mind. Look back at chapter 3 verse 1 and you'll see that question first introduced. "What advantage then hath the Jew?" Chanter 2, Paul condemns everybody really whether Jew or Gentile, chapter 1 he sort of wipes out the whole pagan world, chapter 2 he deals with the Jews and he says whether you have the law or don't have the law you're all in the same basic boat, And so in chapter 3 verse 1 he says what advantage then hath the Jew. And then this question, "Or what profit is there in circumcision?"

Now, they introduced this because believe me, folks, this historically was the major issue with these peoplecircumcision. That was the point of their identification. And they're really asking the question, here it comes, what partvery important theological questionwhat part do religious rites and ceremonies play in salvation? Very important point. That's really the question. And so, circumcision becomes the issue then in verses 9 and following because Paul has to deal with it. It's their question. They're going to say Look, if you say you're saved by works then why did God tell us to be circumcised? I mean if you're saved by faith why did God tell us to be circumcised? What is the meaning, of circumcision. What validity does it have? What is its point if it doesn't guarantee us entrance into the covenant of God? Now you see, they believed that when a male child was circumcised that placed him into the covenant. They believed, actually believed, that men were made right with God by circumcision, by their Jewishness, that surgical act on an 8dayold male child secured that child's righteousness. In fact, in the Book of Jubilees there's a very interesting passage, that's a noncanonical or nonbiblical book but gives us good insight into their viewpoint ... historically. It

says this. "This law is for all generations forever and there is no circumcision of the time and no passing over one day out of the eight days, for it is an eternal ordinance ordained and written on the heavenly tables." In other words, you can't change it, it's the eighth day and there's no way to substitute a day for any reason, to add a day or whatever.

"And everyone that is born, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day belongs not to the children of the covenant which the Lordmade with Abraham for he belongs to the children of destruction, nor is there moreover any sign of him that he is the Lord's but he is destined to be destroyed and slain from the earth, be rooted out of the earth for he has broken the covenant of the Lord our God and now I will announce unto thee that the children of Israel will not keep true to this ordinance and they will not circumcise their sons according to all this law. For in the flesh of their circumcision they will omit this circumcision of their sons and all of them sons of Belial (or Satan) will have their sons uncircumcised as they were born and there shall be great wrath from the Lord against the children of Israel because they have forsaken 'His covenant, turned away from. His word, provoked and blasphemed according as they have not observed the ordinance of this law, for they treat their members like the Gentiles so that they may be removed and rooted out of the land. And there will be no pardon, no forgiveness for them so that there should be pardon and release from all the sin of this error forever."

In other words, if you do thisyou are in. If you don'tforever you are outside salvation. That's basically reflective of what they taught. In fact, an Israelite who practiced idolatry in his life had to have, they said, his circumcision removedhowever you do thatbefore he could enter into Gehenna so that a circumcised idolatrous Israelite was decircumcised by an act of God before he entered into hell. See, they believed that circumcision was the way into the covenant. Salvation was imparted in that act of obedience. Indicated, by the way, it's in Genesis 17:9 to 14, God said "Ye take those male children on the eighth day and you circumcise them," and they believed that in that very fact came salvation.

For example, in reading several Jewish sources I found these statements:

"Our rabbis have said that no circumcisedman will ever see hell."

Another rabbit taught "Circumcision saves from hell." In the Midrash it says, "God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised should ever be sent to hell." In Akkadoth Jizahockanother one of their areas of teachingit says that Abraham sits before the gate of hell and does not allow any circumcised Israelite to enter there.

In other words, if you're circumcisedthat's it. You're prevented from hell, you've got it made.

Now, when you come to the New Testament, this was a big issue. Look at Acts 15 for a moment, and Paul confronted this quite frequently, this circumcision issue. In Acts 15 verse 1, the Jerusalem

council convenes,the first church council, to try to solve this problem because it's a major issue. "Certain men who care down from Judea taught the brethren," in other words, they're coming down into these Christian areas, "and they said to them, Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses you cannot be saved." Now does that sun. it up for you? They believed in salvation by surgerysalvation by circumcision, And it got to be such an issue that here the early church was going around preaching salvation by grace through faith and there was a trail of what became known as Judaizers coming along and trying to impose on these people who had already come to Christ that they could never be saved unless they had been circumcised. You see, they believed that it was the first meritorious act of obedience to the law by which a man was saved in the works system.

Now, the Apostle Paul came out of that background. There was a time when he boasted in that. Philippians 3:4, "If anybody has any right to boast in the flesh I do," he says, "I was circumcised the eighth day," and then he goes on through the other things. I mean, he had his credentials. He had his circumcision. He felt for years of his life that that was a securing reality. But in the same chapter verse 2 he says this, "Beware of the concision," beware of the people going around saying you can't be saved unless you're circumcised. Judaizers, who claim to be Christians even, constantly hounded Paul and the early church trying to force Gentile Christians to be circumcised saying you can't just be saved you have to be circumcised or you can't enter God's Kingdom.

Now, Paul warns about this in Galatians chapter 5 so let's look at it for a moment. And we're going to build all of this, go back to Romans and it will all land in front of you and you'll see where I'm going. Galatians chapter 5. And in verse 1 we have one of the great statements in the New Testament, you're familiar with it, I trust you'll know now a little more of where it's coming from and where its context is. It says, and I'll read you the proper rendering, I think NAS has it best here, New American Standard, "For freedom Christ has set us free, therefore stand fast and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." In other words, you've been liberated in Christ; don't go back to the legal system.

What do you mean, Paul? Verse 2, "I Paul say unto you that if you be ... what? ... circumcised," you see, that was the mark of the legal system. If you do that, you know what will happen? First, "Christ shall profit you... what?...nothing." Listen, if you can be saved by circumcision then what good is Christ, right? If you can be saved by surgery you don't need Him. Verse 3, "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law." Okay, here's a second result.

Result number one, if you go get circumcised and you believe you're saved by circumcision, by that works system; you've nullified the work of Christ. Number two, here's what else you've done, you've put yourself under the law and if you're going to justify yourself by the law, how much of it do you have to keep? All of it. So, you've just become a debtor to the whole law.

Verse 4, "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of youare justified by the law and ye are fallen from grace." Now what does he mean by that? You have fallen away from the grace principle of salvation. You have acquiesced to a law principle, to a works righteousness standard and you've fallen away from the grace principle. And you've also forfeited true righteousness.

The sum of it comes in verse 6, "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision but ... what? ... faith." You see the point? It doesn't matter whether you're circumcised or uncircumcised**;** faith is the issueworking by law. That is working from the heart. And he says to them in verse 7, you were doing fine, who messed you up? Who confused you with this? And of course it was the Judaizers.

And he has a word for them, by the way, in verse 12. "I would that they were even cut off who trouble you." Now that's pretty forceful, isn't it? Those people who want to get out the knife and circumcise you, I would that they were cut off. You say, what is he saying? Very interesting. Galatia was near the city of Phrygia, the area rather of Phrygia, Galatia was an area, Phrygia was an area, and the dominant worship was the worship of Cybele, Cybele. It was the practice of the priests of Cybele to castrate themselves. They were all eunuchs because of their selfimmolation, their castration. So Paul says If you're going to be pagan why don't you be a pagan all the way, don't just circumcise, go ahead and castrate yourself. I mean, if you're going to be pagan you might as well go the whole route. If salvation is by works, that's a pagan perspective, go the whole route.

Look at the end of chapter 6 verse 12, "As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised." It's just those who want to show off their selfrighteousness, show off spiritually. By the way, they also want to avoid persecution. It says at the end of verse 12, "These wouldbe Christians don't want to get 'persecuted by their Jewish friends so they do this to avoid suffering persecution for the cross of Christ."

And verse 13, "Neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law but desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh." It sort of covers up their true sinfulness.

So, you can see from what Paul said in Philippians, what Paul said in Galatians and back now to Romans chapter 4, that this circumcision was a major issue...major significance. Paul must deal with it. And he uses Abraham as his weapon because at that point he is striking a real blow at the ceremonial salvationists. In fact, do you know what the Jew said? The Jew said that when Abraham was circumcised God Himself did it. And Abraham's circumcision then becomes the model for every other Jew. They went back to Abraham as their salvation by circumcision source...because of Genesis 17, this is to be done and Abraham was circumcised.

But Paul turns this thing on them and uses it as a way to prove the very opposite to be the case. Now you say John, what relevance does all this have for us? I mean, all this circumcision, that's strictly a

medical thing today, you just...it's fairly normal to do that today, but I mean, this doesn't have...we don't do that anymore, we're notIsrael, what is the relevance of this?

Listen very carefully. Many people today are basing their salvation from eternal hellfire on some infant baptism, or some confirmation or some adult baptism or some communion involvement or some religious rite and ceremony. There are many people who call themselves Christians in our society who even would call themselves evangelical, who actually believe that their children are secured eternally for the covenant by infant baptism. And many are hoping in their religious rites and though they be not circumcision they be basically the same perspective. They parallel. Now let me give you a classic illustration.

The worst example of this is the Roman Catholic Church. And they are the source of all of this kind of thing in our contemporary kind of theology. Now within the Roman Catholic Church, and I ... all of this information I'm going to give you comes from Ludwig Ott's Catholic Dogma Book, it doesn't come from some Christian manual on Roman Catholicism, it comes from their own theology, which I have read through the years with great interest, Fundamentals of' Catholic Dogma by Ludwig Ott. And in it he basically crystallizes and categorizes Thomas Aquinas who is the basic theologian behind Catholicism.

They have within the Catholic Church things that are called "sacraments" Have you heard about sacraments? All right. A sacrament can be defined this way: A sacrament is a thing perceptible to the senses, that it is something tangible, something visible, something you can touch and feel, something you can sense, something real, not something effemora...or ethereal, but something perceptible to the senses, which on the ground of divine institution, because God has so stated it, possesses the power of effecting and signifying sanctity and righteousness.

You know what that's saying? Sacraments are perceptible things which grant righteousness. They impart righteousness. They impart grace. They make people holy. Now whenever you hear about the Catholic sacraments, that's what they're talking about, talking about some kind of thing perceptible to the senses which imparts righteousness and holiness to a person.

For example, let me just read you a series of quotes. "The sacraments confer grace immediately on a person without the mediation of faith." In other words, if you have a sacrament administered to you, you are immediately receiving grace, righteousness whether you have faith or not.

It also says, "All the sacraments of the new covenant confer sanctifying grace on the receivers. Sacramental rites' confer regeneration, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit and eternal life." Now do you know why the Catholics take Mass? Do you know why they want Extreme Unction? Do you know why they want Penance and confession? Do you know why they want Baptism of infants? Because it

imparts regeneration, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit and eternal life whether there's a mediation of faith or not.

"For the dispensing of this grace," further quoting from Ott, "it is necessary that the administer accomplish the sacramental sign in the proper manner." In other words, the issue is not the heart of the individual, the issue is the method of the sacrament. 'Further, "Neither orthodox belief or moral worthiness is necessary for the validity of the sacrament on the part of the recipient." In other words, you get righteous whether you care or not.

Now, let's talk about the sacraments., The first one would be Baptism, "Baptism confers the grace of justification." How are you justified in the Roman Catholic Church? By being baptized. When are you baptized? As an infant, so you are justified in your infancy. The Council of Trent issued a decree on original sin and this is what it says. "If anyone denies that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ which is conferred in Baptism, the guilt of original sin is forgiven or evena search that the whole of that which has the true and proper nature of sin is not taken away, let him be anathema, " end quote.

In other words, if you deny that infant Baptism takes away the guilt of original sin, you're cursed.

Further, in the Barnivous Letter, again reflecting Catholic theology, it says, "We descend into the water full of sins and filth and we arise from it bearing fruit as we have in our hearts the fear of God and our spirit hope in Jesus."

Another statement. "According to Holy Writ, Baptism has the power both of eradicating sin and effecting inner sanctification." And when they say "Baptism" they mean H2 0. There's a whole section in this theology on the fact that the material for Baptism has to be the true and natural water. And they sanctify it but it's H20.

Further, it says, "Baptism affects the forgiveness of all punishment of sin both of the eternal and the temporal. Baptism is necessary for all men without exception for salvation."

Now, they have another sacrament called "Confirmation." Infant Baptism happens early, then at the age of 12 or whatever they have Confirmation. And they believe that Confirmation is the time through that sacrament that the Holy Spirit is imparted in fullness to the person. Confirmation increases sanctifying grace. "A baptized person can achieve eternal salvation" notice the word achieve, "even without Confirmation." And then there's a parenthesis, it says "Some rites are more potent than others." But they believe that you can be saved and never having had Confirmation, never having had the impartation of the fullness of the Spirit.

There's another one**,** the Eucharist, or the Mass. The sacrament of giving out the bread and the cup and so forth. And it says in the book, "The chief benefit of the Eucharist is the intrinsic union of the

recipient with Christ." That's why when you go to a Catholic country in another Dart of the world you don't say to people, "Have you received Christ?" Every Catholic person you ever say that to is going to say ... what? ... yes. Because every time they go and take the Mass they receive Christ. You can't ask them that question. You have to ask them, "If you die and go to heaven..." If somebody asked you the question "What right have you to enter into My eternal heaven? What's your answer?" You can't ask them if they've received Christ cause they believe in the Mass and receiving the Eucharist they are entering into intrinsic union with Christ. It says, "As food for the soul it preserves and increases the supernatural life of the soul, it purges of venial sins and temporal punishments due to sin and increases the life of grace and it is necessary for salvation."

And then you can study Penance, which is another one of the sacraments. You can study Holy Orders. You can study Marriage. You can study Extreme Unction. And all of them basically say the same thing. They are saying that by ceremonies and rituals and certain rites duly prescribed and carried out in the proper described method according to tradition, you impart to someone redemption, salvation, righteousness, grace and holiness. And that is no different than what we hear and what we see in studying the Jewish view of circumcision. And that's where that perspective connects up with what we're learning here.

So, Paul is dealing with a bigger picture than at first we might understand. And he's dealing with the issue that religious rites and ceremonies do not justify. And when saying that he talks to our time. He shows that this is the religion of human achievement and it negates grace. It utterly negates grace.

Now, let's see how. Let's enter into verse 9. "Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only or upon the uncircumcision also? For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness." Now you remember what blessedness he's talking about? The blessedness of verses 6 to 8, "Blessed is the man to whom God imputes righteousness. Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."

Now who is this blessedness for? If God's going to forgive and God's going to impute righteousness, if God's going to give righteousness to folks and not make them pay for their sin, who are the folks that are going to get this? "Cometh this blessedness then on the circumcision only?" And what would the Jews answer be? What would it be? Yes ... yes. The Jew has to say yes. No uncircumcised person could ever claim a share of God's covenant. Do you know that even the proselytes who got circumcised when they attached themselves to Israel, even after they were circumcised could never say "Our father," they always had to say "Your father Abraham?" So if we grant, the end of verse 9, that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness, if God blesses those who like Abraham believe, is this applicable to everybody or is it applicable only to those that are circumcised?

In other words, he saysand it's a marvelous argumenthe says, "If you concede that Abraham was justified by faith," and you can't concede anything else because of the first eight verses, but if you

concede that, let's say you say Okay, he was justified, allright, he was justified by faith, "Cometh then this justification to the circumcision or to the uncircumcision," and the Jew is still going to say Well, even if I concede that he was saved by faith it could only be if he was circumcised. No uncircumcised person could ever ever enter into God's covenant.

Now, this is typical of the Roman Catholic Church today. In fact, it's typical of even many Protestant churches. Some of you coming from a Lutheran background, or even a Christian church background, or even a Baptist background may have felt that salvation was identified with some baptism or confirmation or whatever.

So, Paul is confronting an ungodly and unbiblical hybrid and his approach is masterful. It's masterful. Fe asks the key question in verse 9, now watch how he answers this in verse 10, this gets fascinating. We're talking about Abraham so he says, All right, if we say faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness, how was it then reckoned? When his faith was reckoned for righteousness, Genesis 15:6, he believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness, when it was done, was he in circumcision or in uncircumcision? Boy, that is the question, right? Because if Abraham was uncircumcised when God imputed righteousness to him, then guess what? You don't have to be circumcised to receive imputed righteousness, right? You don't have to be circumcised to be forgiven. So he asks a very simple question Was he circumcised when righteousness was granted to him? Or was he uncircumcised? And he answers it in verse 10, "Not in circumcision but in uncircumcision."

Want some good news, folks? Abraham was uncircumcised when he was justified. That's tantamount to saying he was unbaptized. Tie was unceremonialized. He was unsanforized. He was unanalyzed. And you say, "Well, how do you know that?" Chronology proves it. Listen very carefully. You know how old Abraham was when he was circumcised? Ninetynine ... it's a painful thought, isn't it? I just noticed some of you scratching your heads on that. On the same day that Abraham was circumcised, according to Genesis 17:25, Ishmael was also circumcised. And it tells us that Ishmael on that day was 13 years old. When God made His covenant with Abraham, and Abraham believed in Genesis 15, Ishmael had not yet been born. So at best, Abraham was not circumcised for 14 years after his being stated as righteous. That's an important point.

Between the moment God said of that man he believes Me, he is righteous, until the time he was circumcised there was at least 14 years. So may I submit to you that the blessing of forgiveness and the blessing of righteousness were granted to an uncircumcised Gentile with an idolatrous background. And he wasn't even circumcised for 14 years. You say, "Why did God permit him to wait so long?" I think so that Paul could say this right here ... and end the chaos and the confusion. Circumcision had nothing to do with it. Abraham was made righteous inside the covenant before he was circumcised. Ishmael was circumcised and never was in the covenant. So the circumcision is not even an issue in terms of covenant relationship, in terms of righteousness. And may I extrapolate

from that and say no religious rite and no religious ceremony confers any righteousness on anybody ever. It is only grace dia through the instrumentality of faith which receives.

You say, "Well that'sthat's great, that's clear," I hope. But if you're like me you have an immediate question Why then have ... what? ... circumcision? What's it for? That's the same question I asked. And then as I read verse 11 that's the same question Paul answered. Why then have it? "He received the sign of circumcision; a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised." Now stop there for a minute.

Paul really answers that question. If circumcision doesn't confer righteousness, why did God make such an issue out of it? Why did He say in Genesis 17 you have to do this and it's a binding law? Why? Because it is a sign and a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised. Now think with me right here, those of you who have been asleep it's time to wake up because we need to think clearly about this. There's so many things. My mind is filled with alternative ways to share this with you, let's follow it very closely. Circumcision is not a reality it is a sign, right? There's a difference between a sign and a substance. If you drive to Los Angeles and you see a sign that says "Los Angeles" and an arrow, you don't crawl on the sign and say "We're here!" The sign reflects another reality, it points you to something. It symbolizes something. It directs you to something. It is not to be confused with the something to which it points. A sign is a symbol of something else, it points to something else. Circumcision was a sign of something.

Now what was it? First of all, it was the mark of God's physical people. It was a racial identification. There's no question about that. It was, in fact, a racial identification. It was a way that a person can be identified in those days as a child of Abraham, as a Jew. And that was a wonderful identification to make ... and no one would begrudge the Jew that. In fact, in the sixteenth chapter of Acts, when Paul, you'll remember, found Timothy. Timothy at this point, no doubt at least in his teen years, Paul had him...what?...circumcised because it would give him access in his mission to the Jews. Why? Because they would accept him as identified with them racially. And so it had that ... that mark of God's physical people.

Secondly, it is a mark of God's covenant. It's no question that it's amark of God's covenant. In the Old Testament the Jewish people were circumcised not only to identify the fact that God was separating them as a people but also to point to the fact that God was their God. And I'm not going to take the time to point it out but if you read the fifth chapter of Joshua, the Lord says: "Make sharp knives and circumcise the children of Israel the second time. And Joshua made sharp knives and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins," it's called, and this is the reason why? "All the people who came out of Egypt that were males, even all the men of war died in the wilderness and so forth, now all the people that came out were circumcised and they were circumcised so that God would mark them in a sense as His people to whom He would fulfill His promise." So there is a simply racial concept and then there is the sign that they are the covenant people.

But there's even more than that. They mark a spiritual sign and that's what this verse tells us. Circumcision is a spiritual sign. Of what? It is a seal of the righteousness of Abraham's uncircumcised faith. Every time you see circumcision, you should be reminded that God justified Abraham by faith. You say, "How does that remind you of that?" Very simple. Everytime you see circumcision occur, let it be a symbol to you that what is occurring on the outside is exactly what God wants to do...where? ... inside. He wants to cut away the sinful covering. He wants to purge. What is the point of circumcision? Yes, it has a racial identification. Yes, it has a covenantal identification. But far more than that Paul says i has as its purpose to be a sealand by the way, a sign and a seal have a shade of difference, it's not only a sign, it's a seal. A sign points to something, a seal guarantees it. When they put a seal and stamped it, that was a guarantee, that was the authentication, that was the promise that God would fulfill what He said.

And so, circumcision, then, is saying that God wants to circumcise the inside just like you see on the outside. And every time you circumcise a male child, be reminded that that's exactly what God wants to do in the inside is cut away the foreskin of your hearts. And every circumcision is a seal and a guarantee that God will do that for the ready heart.

So, circumcision was laid down by God as the mark borne by every Jewish male to remind them and all the succeeding generations that God desired and was ready to circumcise their hearts.

Now, I want to show you some passages very briefly, and then we'll kind of wind down. But in Deuteronomy chapter 30, and these are very important to bring our thinking to full understanding. You see, they knew this. You say, "Well, wait a minute, John. I mean, all this stuff about symbolism of the circumcision and the fact that it didn't really save, it was only a sign of what God wanted to do to the heart, how they going to figure that out? How they going to know that if Paul has to tell them?"

They knew it from the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 30 verse 6: "And the Lord thy God," listen to this, "will circumcise thine heart and the heart of thy seed to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul that thou mayest live."

In other words, God always wanted to do that. God always wanted to circumcise the heart. God always wanted to cut away the skin that crowded the heart with sin. God always wanted to purge. And they would have read it in their own Pentateuch. For that was always God's plan and every circumcised child was to be a reminder of that.

It is exactly what the psalmist David said when he said: "Behold, thou desirest truth in the...what? ... Psalm 51:6 ... in the inward Darts." In the inward parts...in the hidden part. I believe it's also in the heart of Jeremiah. Chapter 4 verse 3: "For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground and sow not among thorns." And then he says this, "Circumcise

yourselves to the Lord and take away the foreskin of your heart, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem." That's Jeremiah 44. And then in Jeremiah 9:24, "But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understand end knoweth me, that I am the Lord who exerciseth lovingkindness, justice and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord. Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will punish all who are circumcised with the uncircumcised."

Ho, ho. You can't imagine what kind of reaction the people would give to the prophet's words there. To think that as a circumcised Jew you'd be punished with the uncircumcised Gentile. But He says I'll do it. I'll punish them with Egypt and Judah and Edom and Amam and Moab all mixed up in punishment and all that are in the utmost corners that dwell in the wilderness, for all these nations are uncircumcised, listen to this, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in the heart. That's Pretty clean, isn't it?

You say, "Should they have known that?" Of course. Of course. Every child was a living testimony that the heart needed to be circumcised.

Now, we see this today. When we take communion, we come to the Lord's Table, does that save us? Umm, well, you know what it does? It shows forth the Lord's what? Death. What does it show? It doesn't save us, but it shows that God wants to and is ready to save us, right? And it shows and demonstrates that we must be saved. When we take the bread and the cup we are symbolizing Christ's redemptive act and we are proclaiming the fact that men need to be saved and if you think that by taking the cup and the bread you are being saved, then you have done exactly what the Jews did with circumcision, And if you treat baptism, you have done the same thing, if you treat it in the same way. What does baptism proclaim? When you put a person down into the water and they come out of the water, what is that demonstrating? The union with the death of Christ and His resurrection. That is not saving that person, that is demonstrating the reality that that person must be saved and is an outward demonstration of an inward reality. And communion is an outward demonstration of an inward salvation. As our baptism proclaims our union with Christ and His death and resurrection, as our communion proclaims our participation in His death on our behalf so they become signs of a reality. And so was circumcision a sign that God was eager to purge the heart through faith and impute His righteousness by grace. And tragically the Jews had abandoned the reality and they were left only with a disconnected and isolated symbol that meant nothing.

Now, bounce quickly back to Romans 2:25 and notice, if you'll remember how Paul summed this up. For circumcision profits if you keep the law. I mean, if you're going to go that route, you got to keep the whole law. You're going to start with being circumcised and get in there by works, keep the whole law. But if you break the law, your circumcision is made uncircumcision instantly; it doesn't mean a thing, not a thing.

Verse 28, "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh but he is a Jew who is one inwardly and circumcision is that of the heart." This isn't anything new, this is Jeremiah. This is Moses. It's the heart God's after. Israel made the mistake that people are stillmaking in taking ... they took Isaac as their salvation model rather than Abraham. And I thinkmany what we could call today "baptismal regenerationists" or even "pedobaptism," baptism of infants, goes back to the model of Isaac and makes the same mistake the Jews made rather than the model of Abraham who received righteousness apart from baptism.

Now some today and this is really a very major thrustsome today have equated infant baptism with circumcision. That's a rather ridiculous equation because it perpetuates sacramentalism, because it can't relate at all in the case of girls, because baptism never replaced circumcision in the early church since the Jews did both and it's. a carry over, I believe, primarily from Roman Catholicism which is sacramentalism gone to its ultimate extreme.

So, Abraham's circumcision was nothing more than an outward symbol of a righteousness that he had received by faith. And that symbol was perpetuated in the generations to follow. So, to transport some kind of infant baptism out of that and make it redeeming, or covenantal is to pick up the same error an perpetuate it. That's not what the Scripture teaches. You can't make a saving act out of a symbol. You can't make a saving act out of baptism. You can't make a saving act out of communion. You can't make a saving act out of circumcision. It's only a symbol.

You look at the Old Testament. Let me give you an interesting little parallel, I just thought of this. The Passover, when they kept the Passover meal did that save them? Did it? No. What did it tell them? It told them they had a God who would save, right?Who was a God who delivered. It didn't save them to keel.) the Passover but it told them that God was a God who would save. Circumcision didn't savethem either. But it reminded them that God was a God who would save.

The Passover was collective. They all celebrated it together. Circumcision was very individual. Now I see a marvelous parallel there. In the church, we too have two great remembrances. They had the Passover and circumcision. We have communion. That's collective. Baptism, that's individual. And so we have collectively a testimony that God will save. We have individually a testimony that God will save ... just as they did. The Passover sees the saving act as the Lord's Table sees the saving act. Circumcision saw the cleansing of the individual; baptism sees the cleansing of the individual. Marvelous parallels.

Now, we conclude our discussion by looking rather rapidly at the end of verse 11. Now, follow closely. When all of this is said and done, it occurs (watch verse 11 in the middle of the verse) in order "'That Abraham might be the father of all them that ... what?...believe though they he not circumcised that righteousness might be imputed unto them also."

So, Abraham is not just the father of the Jews. He is the father of all nonJews who have made ... rather who have been made righteous by faith. Abraham is the father of all who believe. Even those, it says, who are not circumcised. The concept of father has to do here with the leader of a certain class of people. Since uncircumcised believers are justified the same way Abraham was**,** he's their father. We all have the same salvation Abraham had. Isn't that great? So, we all go back to Abraham as our model.

Now, at this point the Jews might be feeling a little badly so he adds verse 12. By the way, "Fe's also the father of circumcision, but to them who are not of the circumcision only but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham which he had being yet uncircumcised. "

Now do you see the point? Abraham's the father of everybody who believes. Verse 11 in the end says he's the father of those who believe beinguncircumcised, and then in verse 12 he says, in effect, I don't want you to think I'm prejudice, it's okay to be circumcised, it's a wonderful thing, it's a marvelous symbol, it's a great reminder, and he is the father not only of the uncircumcised who believe, but he's the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only.

You want to know something? A circumcised Jew who doesn't believe God and receive righteousness Abraham's way, can't claim Abraham as his father. That's why Jesus said, when the Jew said Abraham is our father, He said You're of your father ... whom? ... the devil. And so he's not prejudice against the Jews, he said No, he's your father, too, that is if you... I love this ... walk in the steps of the faith of Abraham. Oh, that's a beautiful concept. It's the Greek term to march in single file. If you step in his footprints, if you come the way he came ... I think you understand.

We are saved by grace through...what? ... faith. These symbols are only symbols and signs. You say, "Well, can I get to heaven if I haven't been baptized?" Yes. You say, "Then I don't have to be baptized!" No. "Why?" Because baptism is an act of ... you say it...obedience and if you have confessed Jesus as Lord you will ... what?...obey Him and it becomes the point of your testimony. But if for some reason that has not occurred, that is not how you're saved, that is only a sign that you are. And that's what Paul is teaching us.

So, Abraham is the father of everybody by faith. Well, Philippians 3:3 comes to mind and I'll close. Got to read you this, We looked at this verse in our study on worship, but I remind you of it. "For we are the circumcision, we are the circumcision." What do you mean we are the circumcision? Well, we have our mark and our mark is not an external mark, beware of those (he says in verse 2) "Our mark is this, we worship

God in the Spirit, we rejoice in Christ Jesus and we have...what?... no confidence in the ... what? ... in the flesh." You see, that... we're not interested in fleshly activity. Our confidence is in the Spirit, in

Christ, in the inside.

I trust that that's your hope tonight.

Father, thank You for our fellowship. Oh, what a great evening we've had, what a great day. Our hearts have been thrilled and blessed and warmed and challenged and excited. And even taking a little extra time tonight to open this great truth to our hearts has been so rich. May we ever and always have that unending, almost insatiable hunger and thirst for your precious Word, Thank You for the clarity with which the Spirit is our teacher. And, Lord, if there are some here who are hoping in the flesh and in ceremony and in ritual, God, we pray that those hopes will be dashed to pieces and they will embrace by faith that grace offered to them in Christ Jesus and receive a righteousness not of their own that they could never earn which is given freely to those who believe for Christ's sake, Amen.

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