

IV

Justification Apart from Works

ROMANS 4:9–17

Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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,¹² 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.

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

GENESIS 15:1, 5–6

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”

⁵ And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ⁶ And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

READ | ROMANS 4:9–17

THINK ABOUT

In Paul's defense of the Gospel, he now turns to the patriarch of the Jewish people, Abraham. In quoting Genesis 15:6, Paul reveals that Abraham was saved through faith and not by works. The Jews had difficulty with Paul's doctrine of justification. For the Jew, Abraham's circumcision, given to him by God, at the very least would have been in addition to his belief in God for salvation. Paul argues that Abraham was declared righteous by God well before ever being circumcised. This means that circumcision was not the basis for his justification; trust and surrender to God were.

APPLY

Are we not just like the Jews? Though we may understand in our minds that we are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ, often times the way we interact with God is attempting to earn salvation. It may be that you are tempted to act a certain way in hopes that God will love you more. Or maybe, you were baptized or attend church in hopes that God will accept you. The doctrine of justification apart from works of the law is amazing. It is given by grace alone. There is nothing more you can do to earn God's love. It is given freely to everyone who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Rest in what Christ has already done for you through the cross! Abraham was saved by faith. And the only way you and I can be saved is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone!

ASK

Examine your heart. Are you trusting in Christ alone?

What kinds of actions or good works could we be tempted to trust for salvation instead of Christ?

THE BIG IDEA

As is it true that Abraham was not justified by works, it is equally accurate that Abraham was not justified by the law of circumcision. It was critical to make this point because the Jews boasted frequently about their possession of the law and their efforts to keep it.

KEY POINTS

The blessing of salvation has been extended to all people (v. 9).

Abraham was justified apart from circumcision as a sign of belief (vv. 10–12).

Abraham was justified by faith alone (vv. 13–15).

Both Jews and Gentiles are heirs of the Abrahamic covenant (vv. 16–17).

LIFE APPLICATION

Salvation is offered to all people today.

Our salvation is dependent solely upon the finished work of Christ.

Christians today share in the promise made to Abraham.

DISCUSSION

What was the purpose of circumcision in the Old Testament? Why is it no longer required?

In what ways do we share in the “faith” of the Abrahamic covenant?

What connection should exist between our belief and practice?

