

Chapter Thirty-three  
Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans  
**Abraham Was Justified Apart From His Circumcision**

“<sup>9</sup> *Cometh* this blessedness {justification by faith} then upon the circumcision *only*, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. <sup>10</sup> How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. <sup>11</sup> And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had yet* being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: <sup>12</sup> And the father of circumcision 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” (Romans 4:9-12).

The questions of Romans 4:9-10 intend to make specific reference to a religious “work” (ritual), which proves justification to be the result of faith and not religious “works.” The questions refer us back to what has already been said in Romans 4:1-8, especially 4:6-8 and the three blessings king David refers to:

1. Blessed is the man to whom God imputes righteous without having to do anything for it (4:6)
2. Blessed is the man “whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered” (4:7)
3. “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (4:8)

Were these three blessings of God intended only for those who had been ritually circumcised? The answer is obviously and emphatically, No! These three blessings were given to Abraham *before* he was circumcised (4:10 and 12). Therefore Abraham was justified (received the imputation of God righteousness) before he was circumcised. The penalty of Abraham’s sins was removed through his faith in God’s promise, not by observing some religious ritual. Again, this follows the context back to Romans 3:28-30.

“<sup>28</sup> Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. <sup>29</sup> *Is he* the God of the Jews only? *is he* not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: <sup>30</sup> Seeing *it is* one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith” (Romans 3:28-30).

The idea of these two phrases (“by” and “through”) are best understood by the fact that by the covenant promise of God to Abraham, Jews were brought into a relationship with God as a nation although they may not have been saved individually (Romans 9:6-7). Each individual Jew still needed to be saved “by” the door of personal faith in the promised “seed” typified in Isaac; that “seed” was Christ (Galatians 3:16). On the other hand, the Gentiles stood completely outside of this covenant relationship of God with the nation of Israel. Therefore, the Gentiles needed to enter into a relationship “through” the door of personal faith in Christ.

“<sup>11</sup> Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; <sup>12</sup> That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; <sup>15</sup> Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; <sup>16</sup> And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: <sup>17</sup> And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Ephesians 2:11-18).

## The “sign” of circumcision” (Romans 4:11)

Circumcision was an outward, physical means to identify a man as a Jew. We cannot understand the whole idea of circumcision apart from the historical context of its origin. The nation of Israel was surrounded by polytheistic nations steeped in the sexual perversions of the fertility rituals of paganism. Much of this pagan ritualism involved sodomy and sexual licentiousness. No male Jew could involve himself in any of these practices without being immediately recognized as a Jew and associated with the God of Israel. Therefore circumcision was a sign of identification.

The word “sign” is from the Greek word *semeion* (say-mi'-on) referring to a mark or token by which a person or a thing is distinguished from others and is known. The significance of the “sign” was to distinguish the Jews as a people, separated from sin and unto holiness, through which the Messiah would be born into the human race. By his circumcision, each Jew was constantly reminded that the promised redeemer would come through the loins of Abraham. Circumcision constantly reminded the Jew that he was separated from the world for a distinct purpose.

## Circumcision as a “seal of righteousness” for the Jew (Romans 4:11)

Circumcision was subsequent to the Abrahamic Covenant and was instituted 14 years after Abraham was already justified by faith. Abraham received the external “sign of circumcision” as a “seal” of the righteousness imputed to him 14 years previous.

“<sup>17</sup> And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. <sup>18</sup> In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates” (Genesis 15:17-18).

“<sup>10</sup> This *is* my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. <sup>12</sup> And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which *is* not of thy seed. <sup>13</sup> He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup> And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant” (Genesis 17:10-14).

“Seal” is from the Greek word *sphragis* (sfrag-ece') and refers to that by which anything is confirmed, proven, or authenticated as by a token or proof. Circumcision was like writing the Name of God on those circumcised as a brand of His possession. Circumcision was an external testimony to the righteousness that comes by faith. Circumcision was an external testimony that anyone could be justified by faith.

“That he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:” (Romans 4:11b).

Circumcision was an external seal identifying the individual with the *nation* of Israel as a covenant people. It had nothing to do with salvation. The intent of Romans 4:11 is to correct the misnomer propagated by legalistic Jews who would pervert the gospel by incorporating the necessity of circumcision into a person’s salvation (if this is true, could women be saved or was salvation just for men?).

These Jews said the Gentile must come to salvation through the Jews’ circumcision. Paul says the opposite. The circumcised Jew must come to salvation through the simple faith of the Gentiles (like Abraham, he was not a Jew or circumcised when he was justified by faith).

Circumcision had become a sacramental religious ritual (like infant baptism of Christianity) through which a person enters a life of faith. For the apostate Jew, it was a life of faith, not an act of faith, which procured salvation. For the apostate Jew (like the legalist Christian), salvation was something earned through a lifetime of religious works, rituals (beginning with circumcision) and good deeds. This perversion of faith sought to enter Christianity at its very beginnings (Acts 15:1-35).

**Within 300 years after the beginning of the Church Age, the ritual of water baptism had replaced circumcision as the initiatory ritual by which an individual was introduced into Christianity and a life of faith by which he earned salvation.** Paul addresses this issue as early as 64 A. D. in his epistle to the Colossians.

<sup>9</sup>For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. <sup>10</sup> And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: <sup>11</sup> In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: <sup>12</sup> Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. <sup>13</sup> And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; <sup>14</sup> Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; <sup>15</sup> *And* having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:9-15).

**There are three aspects of our positional completeness in Christ.**

**1.** The first aspect is our salvation is complete immediately when we place faith in the finished work of Christ (Col. 2:11-12). **The believer has been spiritually circumcised in Christ.** The influence of Judaism introduced the heresy that circumcision was necessary to complete salvation. They believed in a *surgical salvation*.

What is this true spiritual circumcision Paul speaks of? It is the cutting away of the sin nature’s power over our will. Spiritual circumcision is a spiritual surgery that only the work of the Cross could accomplish. Spiritual circumcision is the complete removal of the condemnation of the sin nature through the payment of the penalty (judgment) of sin and the satisfaction of God’ justice (propitiation). Once a person puts trust in the finished work of Christ “there is now no condemnation” from God whatsoever ever again (Romans 8:1).

**2. Buried with him in baptism.** What is true spiritual baptism? This is not water baptism. If Paul is dealing with a spiritual reality in circumcision, you can be sure He is dealing with the spiritual reality of baptism. Paul was combating traditionalistic ritualism. To make this baptism mean water is to contradict the whole argument he is presenting. Yet a baptism of some sort is accomplished by Christ in our salvation. What baptism is it? It is the baptism of the Holy Spirit!

This is the placement of each individual believer into the “body of Christ” (I Cor. 12:13). The word baptism means *placed into* or *immersed*. Water baptism is a picture of what takes place spiritually in our salvation (Romans 6:3-5). The baptism with the Holy Spirit means that what ever has happened to Christ actually has happened to us positionally.

“Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12). The instant you put your faith in the “finished” work of Christ, you were buried with Him in the sepulcher of Joseph of Arimathea 2000 years ago. Your faith positionally takes you back in time and hangs you on the Cross with Jesus. Your faith positionally puts you in the grave where you belong and He doesn’t.

**3. Through faith you are positionally resurrected with Jesus.** When Christ arose, you positionally arose with Him. Water baptism is a subsequent act to salvation and a physical, outward means to testify to an already accomplished inward reality. Like circumcision, it has nothing to do with salvation.

Chapter Thirty-three  
Studies in the Epistle of Paul to the Romans  
**Abraham Was Justified Apart From His Circumcision**

1. What is the purpose of the questions of Romans 4:9-10? Base your answer on the context of the three blessings of Romans 4:6-8. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Read Romans 3:28-30. Discuss why it is important to maintain the context of these verses when answering the questions of Romans 4:9-10. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Read Ephesians 2:11-18 and once again explain what Paul means in Romans 3:30 when he says, "Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith." \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Explain what Paul means by the "sign" of circumcision and its purpose regarding the nation of Israel. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Read Genesis 15:17-18 and Genesis 17:10-14. Discuss the significance in understanding that 14 years separates these two events and the significance of that to understanding what Paul means when he says Abraham's circumcision was a "seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised (Romans 4:11). \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Discuss the meaning of the word "seal" from the Greek word *sphragis* (sfrag-ece') in the context of Romans 4:11. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What misnomer is Paul seeking to correct regarding the heresy the Jews were trying to impose upon the Gentiles and what is the opposite truth he is teaching them? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Discuss the replacement of the heretical teaching regarding circumcision with the later development of the heretical teaching regarding ritual (water) baptism. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Read Colossians 2:-15. Discuss the three aspects of a believer's salvational completeness relating to his spiritual baptism into the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13) and how ritual (water) baptism relates to these already accomplished realities through the simple act of faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - A. Spiritual circumcision (positionally in Christ) \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. Spiritual baptism (positionally in Christ) \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. Spiritual resurrection (positionally in Christ) \_\_\_\_\_