



## World Christian Fellowship

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### Romans 50 Justified by Grace – Abraham Romans 4:9-12

**Romans 4:9-17**, *Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. <sup>10</sup>How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. <sup>11</sup>And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, <sup>12</sup>and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. <sup>13</sup>For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup>For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no*

*effect, <sup>15</sup> because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.*

*<sup>16</sup> Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all <sup>17</sup>(as it is written, “I have made you a father of many nations”) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;*

Romans, from chapter 3 verse 21 on to chapter 8 Paul is talking about that God has provided a salvation is provided by Christ through His work as a free gift to those who believe, not by their own works.

### **Why Abraham?**

Abraham would show the eternal truth of righteousness by grace through faith since Abraham was an Old Testament character.

By using Abraham, Paul is saying this is nothing new, this is something very old.

Abraham even preceded Moses.

Abraham even preceded the identity of the nation Israel.

Abraham really belongs in the patriarchal period, the very primitive time.

He appears early in the book of Genesis.

If Paul can establish that a man in the book of Genesis was saved by grace through faith and not of works, then he has given to us a timeless truth and nothing new at all.

He is not an example of a man who earned salvation by his good works but by grace through believing.

In simple child-like trust, in complete yielded to God, he took God's word at face value, believed God. By that act of faith, he received righteousness.

Romans chapter 4 can be divided up by three ways.

1. Justification by Faith not by works (V1-8)
2. Justification by Grace not Law (9-17)
3. Justification by God's power not human effort. (18-25)

## **2. Justification by Grace**

The Jews had developed a system in which there were all kinds of personal acts, both moral and ceremonial, by which they would achieve salvation.

It's amazing how people make fetishes, how they make images, objects, formulas, and rituals that become a way in which they can earn or achieve their salvation.

People on their knees, climbing up hundreds of stairs to ascend to the pinnacle of a shrine.

How people fast for 40 days and not wearing anything on their feet walk all the way to Sabarimala!

**2 Kings 18:4**, *He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan.*

When Hezekiah came and brought a revival in Israel, one of the things that he did was smash the brazen serpent that had been lifted up in the wilderness as a point of contact for faith, people turning to God and being healed from the snake bites if they would put their trust in God and God alone.

The Jews had taken that simple symbol and turned it into a fetish they were actually believing had some kind of spiritual powers. One of the things that Hezekiah did was smash it because the Jewish people were burning incense to that bronze image.

I am sure you must have visited some shrines in your life which people do things which will earn them the salvation.

All these things prevent salvation, they do not accomplish it.

**Romans 4:5**, *“But to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.”*

The statement that God justifies the ungodly turns all works righteousness systems inside out.

God does not justify the godly but justifies the ungodly. Salvation comes to those who recognize their ungodliness.

That is the difference in the story of the prodigal son in **Luke 15** and his brother and the loving father. The one who received the robe, which could be an emblem of righteousness, was the one who recognized his wretchedness.

The older brother who had no sense of his own sinfulness received no such gift from the father because God is in the business of justifying, declaring righteous, granting righteousness, forgiveness, and salvation to the ungodly.

Abraham was saved by grace, not by law.

Salvation comes not to the Jews only because they have the law and therefore can keep the law, but salvation comes to anyone who follows the pattern of faith which is exhibited by Abraham.

In this section that God is a God of grace.

Faith meets grace.

God saves with the absolutely free favour that He chooses to give undeserving sinners.

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, for by grace are you saved through faith.

**Genesis 6:8**, *But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.*

All salvation is a work of God's grace, not man's earning, and Abraham, of course, is the excellent illustration of this great truth.

- If the greatest in the Old Testament by Jewish testimony had to deny all works, all law-keeping as a way to be right with God.
- If the greatest man in the Old Testament had to receive salvation and righteousness by faith alone through grace alone.

- If there is no salvation for Abraham by law-keeping, it is also impossible for all other men.

This is precisely what Paul is demonstrating in the story of Abraham.

### **What about religious rites?**

#### **Are not they important?**

Paul poses the questions that he then answers.

**Romans 3:1**, *What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?*

#### **Why have a ritual?**

Why have that kind of ceremony if it doesn't have any purpose?

The Jews believed that circumcision, of all the rites and all the rituals, was the most important.

They felt that circumcision was a surgical act that secured their righteousness. They believed that.

The rite of circumcision is vividly brought out in the book of Jubilees. This law of circumcision 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.

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 Lord made with Abraham, for he belongs to the children of destruction.

Circumcision as a mark of God's favour that if an Israelite has practiced idolatry, his circumcision must first be removed before he can go down to Gehenna.

If you have been circumcised and you are an idolater, you are still going to go to heaven. If you have been circumcised, the only way you could go to hell was to somehow have your circumcision altered. They believed that salvation was imparted by this act.

Their security was in the ceremony.

**Genesis 17:9-14**, *And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup>This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; <sup>11</sup>and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. <sup>12</sup>He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. <sup>13</sup>He who is born in your house and he who is*

*bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.<sup>14</sup> And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”*

One rabbi has said that no circumcised man will see hell.

It is taught circumcision saves from hell.

In the Midrash, “God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised should be sent to hell.” In the book **Akedath Jizehak**, it says Abraham sits before the gate of hell and does not allow any circumcised Israelite to enter there.

In the Jewish mind, circumcision was salvation. That rite and that act was all that was required to keep you from hell.

**Acts 15:1**, *And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”*

- If you are not circumcised, then you can't be saved.
- If you are circumcised, then you can't be lost.

In the Jewish mind circumcision was the first meritorious act of obedience to the law, which saved a man by works.

The apostle Paul believed and lived in before his conversion.

**Philippians 3:4-5**, *though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: <sup>s</sup>circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;*

Paul believed and the Jews did that circumcision was a ritual that gained salvation.

Paul warns against that belief.

**Galatians 5:2**, *Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.*

Galatia was a Gentile region. There were several churches in that region. Paul had established the gospel there and some Judaizers came.

The Judaizers said believing the gospel of Christ is not enough to get into heaven. Holding tightly to the traditional Jewish view of circumcision, they said that's not enough, you need to be circumcised or you will not make it to heaven.

Paul says if you receive circumcision on that basis, then you will find Christ is of no effect to you because you have now mingled salvation by grace with salvation by works or circumcision.

**Galatians 5:3**, *And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law.*

If you are going to go by law, you must keep the whole law.

If you break one of the laws, you have broken it all.

**Galatians 5:4**, *You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.*

The Judaizers announced that you can believe that Christ is the Messiah but that is not enough, you need circumcision.

**Galatians 6:12**, *As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.*

This was their agenda, to compel these believers to be circumcised. Paul says if you go that route, then your faith was not real faith, you did not affirm a salvation by grace alone, you have fallen from the grace principle, you have severed yourself from a true relationship to Christ.

Paul gets very direct in this passage that this kind of compelling is completely outside the bounds of what God allows.

**Galatians 5:12**, *I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!*

Galatia was near Phrygia, and a great occupation of those people was the worship of Cybele.

It was the practice of the priests and devout worshipers of Cybele to show their devotion by castration. Cybelian priests were eunuchs.

So, Paul says if you are going to preach salvation by circumcision, you might as well preach salvation by castration. It's just as pagan no different.

The matter of circumcision played a very important role in the preaching of the gospel to the Jews and to the Gentiles because Judaizers were coming behind Paul and pressing this issue.

Paul deals with this issue at a very important point because in using Abraham, he strikes a blow at their ritualistic salvation.

This also strikes a blow at all kinds of ceremonial approaches to salvation.

When Abraham was circumcised, and he was, God Himself was involved in that. It was his circumcision and anticipatory

fulfilment of the law, the Jews said, which qualified him to be the father of many nations.

It was through his circumcision, the Jews said, that Isaac was born of a holy seed. This was their current doctrine. So, they had endeavoured to say that Abraham was circumcised, and it is true he was, and therefore sets the standard for salvation. However, Paul is going to undo that doctrine and at the same time, he's going to undo all sacramental, ceremonial, ritual approaches to salvation.

Paul is going to sweep away all religious rites, even the rite of circumcision, which was commanded by God and served a function but not the function of salvation.

This is a very important subject because today there are many people who are basing their salvation from eternal hellfire on their infant baptism, on their confirmation, on their adult baptism, or on communion or some other ceremony.

In Catholicism, the ceremonies are almost endless. Their ceremonies and rites are called sacraments.

### **Do you know what a sacrament is?**

“A thing perceptible to the senses which on the ground of divine institution possesses the power both of effecting and signifying sanctity and righteousness.”

That's a Catholic definition of a sacrament.

A thing that possesses the power to sanctify and make righteous. It is a thing that grants righteousness.

**Roman Catholic theology:**

“The sacraments confer grace immediately without the mediation of faith.”

“All the sacraments of the New Testament confer sanctifying grace on the receivers.”

“Sacramental rites confer regeneration, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life.”

“For the dispensing of this grace, it is necessary that the minister accomplish the sacramental sign in the proper manner.”

“Neither orthodox belief nor moral worthiness is necessary for the validity of the sacrament on the part of the recipient.”

“Baptism confers the grace of justification.”

“Council of Trent, the section on the decree of original sin, if anyone denies that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is conferred in infant baptism, the guilt of original sin is forgiven, or even asserts that the whole of that which has the true and proper nature of sin is not taken away, let him be damned” “anathema.” Damnation is pronounced on anyone who denies that grace, salvation grace, forgiveness of sin is not conferred in infant baptism.

“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 in our spirit, hope in Jesus.”

“According to holy writ, baptism has the power both of eradicating sin and effecting inner sanctification.”

“This is reference to the material which is true and natural water.”

“Baptism effects the forgiveness of all punishments of sin, both the eternal and the temporal.”

“Baptism is necessary for all men, without exception, for salvation.”

**What about confirmation?**

**What does that do to the baptized person?**

Confirmation, which usually comes along at around 12 or 13 years of age.

Confirmation increases sanctifying grace.

A baptized person can achieve eternal salvation, even without confirmation.

**What about the eucharist?**

**What about the mass?**

**What about that sacrament?**

The chief benefit of the eucharist is the intrinsic union of the recipient with Christ.

As food for the soul, the mass preserves and increases the supernatural life of the soul. It purges of venial sins and the temporal punishments due to sin and increases the life of grace.

So, when Paul deals with the issue of circumcision and the inability of any religious rite or ceremony to justify, he sweeps all of this away.

Paul reminds us that if you are putting any hope in any of those things, you have made Christ of no effect. You have negated grace and you have brought yourself under salvation by law and, therefore, you are bound to keep the whole law or perish.

When David saw how God forgives the sins of the Israelites and has mercy upon them, he began to pronounce them blessed and to glorify them in saying, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven."

So, they narrowed it down that that salvation blessedness of which David spoke in Psalm 32, which is quoted here, was only with reference to Israel and because only Israel was circumcised.

So, the Jews put so much stock in this circumcision.

**How is Paul going to deal with this?**

**V 9,** *Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.*

**Genesis 15:6,** *And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.*

We all agree on that. Here is how the Jews viewed that: Abraham was declared righteous because he was circumcised. In other words, he earned it by his circumcision.

**V 10,** *How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.*

Was Abraham declared righteous by God after he was circumcised or before he was circumcised?  
Before he was circumcised.

A little chronology here.

Abraham was 99 years of age when he was circumcised.

**Genesis 17:24,** *Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.*

On that same day, Ishmael, his illegitimate son, was circumcised. He was 13 years of age.

When God made the covenant with Abraham, it was in **Genesis 15:6**, *“His faith was counted to him as righteousness.”*

Between the moment when his faith was counted as righteousness and the time of his circumcision, it was probably at least 14 years.

So, the blessing of forgiveness and the granting of righteousness was given to Abraham who was an uncircumcised Gentile when he received it.

There were yet no Jews.

He was an uncircumcised Gentile from a people of idolaters. Circumcision had nothing to do with his righteousness!

Abraham was inside the covenant, he was even given the covenant, and he was uncircumcised.

Ishmael was circumcised and was permanently outside the covenant.

No rite, no religious ceremony confers any righteousness on anyone ever. It didn't on Abraham, it doesn't on anyone else.

Salvation comes by faith to which God responds by crediting righteousness to the account of the one who believed.

How vital this is to sweep away all forms of ritual salvation. Whether it's infant baptism, by which some people say one is saved.

Roman Catholic and Judaizing view of ritual salvation, cancels grace, makes Christ of no effect.

*V 11, And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,*

### **Why?**

It is a sign!

It is a symbol.

It points to something else.

Sign points to something else.

The sign indicates the direction you should go to get there. The sign is a symbol, it points to something else. It points to another reality.

Circumcision was a sign, it pointed to something else.

We could say it was a sign of God's physical people, Israel.

There was a certain reason for that physical operation. In

Jewish history, through the centuries, according to medical reports, the lowest rate of cervical cancer among women existed among the Jewish people because of circumcision. They were less likely to be infected than other women.

It was a way in which God could preserve His people. God did therefore, a mark of their identity. It was a sign of God's care and protection for them.

But it was a sign of something else more important even than that. It was a spiritual sign.

It was a spiritual sign of the fact that they infected each other with sin, and they needed a cleansing on the spiritual level.

It was a sign of being Jewish and the preservation of the people, but it was a sign of being a sinner.

God chose the procreative organ for that sign because that's where sin was passed from person to person, generation to generation to generation. That's why there are so many times when the prophets say, "Circumcise your hearts."

Circumcise your hearts.

**Deuteronomy 30:6**, *And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your*

*God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*

**Jeremiah 4:4**, *Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so that no one can quench it, Because of the evil of your doings.”*

**Jeremiah 9:24-26**, *But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the Lord. <sup>25</sup>“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “that I will punish all who are circumcised with the uncircumcised— <sup>26</sup>Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all who are in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.”*

**Psalms 51:6**, *Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.*

It was a sign that they needed a deeper cleansing, a spiritual cleansing. In this sense, it's like baptism.

**Does baptism save?**

No, it's a sign.

It's a sign that points to the sinner's need to be identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection by faith.

The Lord's Table is a sign.

**Does the Lord's Table save you?**

**Does taking the bread and the cup save you?**

No.

But does it point to the cross where the Saviour died to provide salvation. It's a sign that points to Calvary.

Baptism is a sign that points to the need for death, burial, resurrection, union with Christ by faith.

Circumcision was a sign. It was a sign of a physical people that were being preserved by God, but it was a sign of the fact that every person is a sinner, passing that sin on, generation after generation after generation, and we need a deep soul circumcision, a heart circumcision. Circumcise your hearts. When we come to baptism, we demonstrate the Lord's resurrection.

When we come to communion, we demonstrate the Lord's death until He comes.

When we look at circumcision, it was a demonstration of the need for a deep heart surgery.

It was not just a sign.

**V 11**, *And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,*

### **What does this mean?**

For Abraham God had him circumcised.

This is where circumcision began to authenticate his faith. In Abraham's case, God was saying his faith is real, he has received salvation, he has been forgiven, righteousness has been imputed to him, and I mark him to authenticate it.

As a sign, it was a necessary picture, pointing to the desperate need of every sinner to have heart surgery.

As a seal, it was evidence that God had provided for him forgiveness and salvation.

It was a sign to all, it was a seal to Abraham that his faith was real and that he might be the father of all who believe, without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them.

Righteousness can be credited to anybody who believes!  
It was credited to Abraham at least 14 years.

But righteousness was credited to him before he was circumcised, apart from any ritual of any kind, and it came to him nonetheless from God so that in the future it could be a sign to point to the need of circumcision of the heart. But in his case, in particular, it was a seal, it was evidence. God marked him as a man who had been granted righteousness.

We have a kind of circumcision in the sense that it is a seal.

**Philippians 3:3**, *“We are the circumcision who worship in the Spirit of God.”*

**What’s our seal?**

**Ephesians 1:14**, *who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.*

The Holy Spirit is given to us as the guarantee of our inheritance.

The Passover, later, became a ritual. Passover didn’t save anybody, but it signified that God had the power to save. It signified that God would save those who obeyed Him, that He would save through the blood of the Lamb.

Circumcision did not save but it signified that God would save.

He would circumcise the heart and grant righteousness as He did with Abraham.

The Lord's Table doesn't save but it declares that God will save, by His work on the cross, all who repent and believe.

Baptism does not save, but it declares that He will save the one who puts his trust in Christ and therefore joins into Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

It is faith, then, not ritual, that saves.

It is faith, not ritual, that makes people right with God.

It started with Abraham in the sense that he is the father.

**V 11**, *And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,*

He is the father of all believers.

**Father in what sense?**

Commonness of essence,

commonness of nature,  
commonness of disposition,  
commonness of character,  
He came by faith, and we all come by faith.

So, we share the faith of Abraham, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, whether you are a Jew or a Gentile.

That's neither here nor there. But faith is everything, and Abraham is the model of salvation by faith apart from any ritual.

**V 12**, *and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.*

**How about that?**

An uncircumcised Gentile is the father of circumcised Jewish believers, spiritually.

They find their connection to him because of a common faith. There are no rituals that save, only faith, only grace.