

# The Sign and Seal of Justification

*Studies in Romans*

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**Bible Text:** Romans 4:9-16

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We continue with the studies in the book of Romans. We return to chapter four, Romans chapter four, and we are going to read the passage from verse nine to the end of verse 16. We will see that the verse stops in the middle of a sentence. I haven't overlooked that. Simply to say that the apostle Paul's thought patterns didn't necessarily limit themselves to modern punctuation and it is always difficult in this particular part of Romans four to know exactly where to draw a line. But I think as many other seems to do as well, verse 16 brings us through to a significant point and then verse 17 to something new.

So we will read verse nine to the end of verse 16.

You should remember that the verses immediately before speak of the blessings of those who are justified. Now the question:

Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. 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: 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. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all...<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 4:9-16.

Amen. We trust the Lord will add his blessing to the reading of this passage, a passage that, I think, even on a first reading tonight you will recognize is complex in its structure, tight in its logic and, as far as the Jews of Paul's day were concerned, absolutely devastating in its conclusions.

You will recollect that Romans chapters four and five give us the details of how Paul fills out the points about justification that he had made in chapter three from verse 21 through 31. In those verses in chapter three he gives us a list of characteristics about justification. And then in chapters four and five he takes those up one after another and he demonstrates them and he proves them.

Now in chapter four—and we have seen quite a bit of this already—he is proving from the Word of God, the Old Testament Scriptures that justification, first, is by faith, that it is without law. And yet it is witnessed by the law and the prophets and is intended for all who believe—and this is the burden of the last few verses, 29 and 30 particularly in chapter three—it is not for the Jews only.

Now in the last part of Romans four, that is the part starting at verse nine, really, through the end of the chapter, but particularly the portion we have been reading tonight, Paul is focusing his attention on this particular point, that justification is “unto all and upon all them that believe,”<sup>2</sup> that it is not limited to the Jewish nation or people. That is the while point of this latter part of Romans four. And in order to prove that, Paul has to reiterate what he has already dealt with, that justification is by faith and it is apart from the law. He must do that.

But he must do something else as well. He must address the whole subject of circumcision, the seal of the covenant given to Abraham so many years before. Now this was necessary because of how the Jews understood that sign of circumcision and the importance and significance that they attached to it. To the Jews this sign in the flesh was indispensable to acceptance with God.

You must keep that in mind. That was the Jewish thinking. It was indispensable to acceptance with God so that in effect it meant that justification was forever tied to a ritual of the Mosaic economy. And there were vast implications in that thinking. First of all, it would mean that the Mosaic economy must last throughout the world's ages. It was not temporary to them. It was permanent. And, second, it meant that Paul's entire argument that justification was by faith alone apart from law and legal ritual and legal dispensation was all together false. So he had to deal with this matter of circumcision.

Also to the Jewish mind this ritual of circumcision and making it indispensable to justification and acceptance with God meant that justification and acceptance with God were restricted to Jews only and to others who became Jews by accepting the Mosaic ritual and the sign of circumcision in particular.

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 3:22.

Now clearly this was no small matter and the apostle Paul simply had to meet it. And you will notice how he did it.

When he started off in chapter four proving that justification was by faith apart from law and the works of human merit, he appealed immediately to Abraham for very many reasons. Number one, Abraham would be the most obvious case that an objector would bring forward and, secondly, Abraham was the outstanding case in the Old Testament where God had spoken of a person being justified. And so he appeals to Abraham.

But he goes a little further and he buttresses his argument by quoting from the 32<sup>nd</sup> Psalm. And he talks about how David described the blessednesses of the man who is justified by faith alone without works, having the righteousness of justification unto life imputed freely to him. We looked at that last sabbath evening.

Now, having dealt with David talking about the great blessing of being justified, he goes right back to Abraham and he asks the question.

This blessedness of being justified, does it come only upon the circumcision? Or does it extend to the uncircumcision also? And his answer was clear and undeniable, but it was shocking to his Jewish audience. And this is what he was teaching.

Go back and read your Old Testament. It is always a good thing, as I pointed out a few sabbath evenings ago in religious controversies to go back and see what the Bible actually says. So he says, “Go back and read your Old Testament.”

And you will discover that Abraham was justified long before he was circumcised, while he was what the Jews later would call a Gentile. He was justified long before he was circumcised and he, many years later, received the sign of circumcision as a seal which means—and we look at this more fully in a moment—a witness or assurance or a guarantee of the righteousness that the Lord had already imputed to him by faith alone.

Now from this central argument Paul reaches three radical conclusions. And I want you to think them through with me tonight.

The first one is that circumcision plays no part in obtaining justification. The sacrament of circumcision, Paul says, plays absolutely no part in obtaining justification. The history of Abraham is emphatic on this point, verse nine through the first part of verse 11. It is clear. He lived for years as a justified man without circumcision. And circumcision added absolutely nothing to the righteousness that God had already imputed to him.

Now this is clear. There is no way around the Old Testament record. And I want us to understand it because in a little while we are going to see that this is more than history. This is ongoing theology. This is Bible teaching relevant to our day. Justification must never be made dependent upon a sacrament or an ordinance and to make it such is to

deny the very fundamental teaching of the Word of God on both justification and the meaning and significance of a sacrament.

Having said that, however, circumcision was related to Abraham's faith. We read that it was given to him for a sign. It is called the sign of the covenant. Indeed, so closely related with the covenant that at times it was even called the covenant of circumcision, not that circumcision is the substance of the covenant. It is the sign of the covenant. That is, it explained it. It signified that covenant in some way. It was a physical mark that signified the special relationship into which God had called Abraham and his seed. It was a sign.

But to Abraham it was also a seal. Now a seal is that which secures. A seal is something that authenticates the reality, in this case of the righteousness of the faith that he had while he was yet uncircumcised. A seal guaranteed the inviolability of that righteousness which had been imputed to him.

Now I want you to understand the force of this seal. And I want you to look at Romans chapter four because I am going to have to say some somewhat controversial things tonight. I want you to look at Romans chapter four and let's stick with what the Bible actually says. And you will discover that as a seal, circumcision could apply only to one who was already justified. Now keep that in mind because all of this has much more than historical significance and importance.

Everybody of all persuasions, I think, would have to agree that the Bible clearly teaches a close affinity between circumcision and Christian baptism. You can't around that. Colossians chapter two would make it so clear that it is foolish even to question the fact that in many ways in the New Testament baptism is the initiatory rite into the Church as circumcision was the initiatory rite in the Old Testament. So there is very clearly an affinity.

And this close affinity has led many, it has led almost all Presbyterians—although, as you will see in a moment, not this one—to adopt the view of what is called paedobaptism, child baptism, the baptism of covenant children. And the argument is deceptively simple. By deceptively simple I don't mean it deceives by being simple. I mean simply that it sounds so very simple and yet there is an abstruseness to it that is covered by what people take to be something so simple.

It is also deceptively persuasive and it goes something like this.

God commanded Abraham to administer the sign and seal of the covenant to his children. And none can doubt that. And the Jews started to do that and they continue to do it until this day. That command, the argument goes, was never retracted and there is not a word in the New Testament to say that it should be discontinued. Thus, without a positive command to discontinue what God commanded for centuries and millennia beforehand, the counterpart in the New Testament to the initiatory rite of circumcision should also be

administered to the children of God's people. And we are told it is in this light that we should interpret such verses as Acts chapter two.

“For the promise is unto you, and to your children.”<sup>3</sup>

And Acts chapter 16 verse 31.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”<sup>4</sup>

It is in this light we are invited to interpret the few references in the New Testament to household baptisms. And the thought is there must have been babies in the house, at least on one of those occasions or more. And I have read some writers who say that, really, statistically to take half a dozen households at random that you are going to find babies somewhere. So therefore those are not mentioned they should be included.

Now let me make it very clear. I believe in covenant theology. I think it is the key to understanding the Bible. Let me make it clear also that I rejoice in God's promise to his people regarding their children and I believe that is a promise that they should take before the Lord constantly upon their knees. And as Moses held up the rod of God, they should hold up the promise of God and get God's fulfillment of it.

But having said all that, despite my best efforts, I cannot accept what I have called the deceptively simple argument of paedobaptists and especially as they relate it to Romans four. And I am going to try and show why in the moments that follow.

What I will say is that it certainly can't be established in the case of Abraham. I mean, after all, he is the one to whom most of the books that I have read on paedobaptism appeal, the covenant with Abraham.

And I will try to show you from Romans four that it is utterly unbiblical and utterly unallowable to appeal to Abraham in this case.

First of all consider this that verses 11 and 12 of Romans four teaches that Abraham had a dual fatherhood, a two fold fatherhood. First of all he had a natural fatherhood of the circumcision or of the Jewish people, that is with regard to his earthly family. There was a family that was descended from the loins of Abraham.

Then, secondly, he has a spiritual fatherhood with regard to his fellow believers. It has nothing to do with genetics or an earthly lineage, but it is a community of faith. He is the father of all that believe. So he has a dual fatherhood.

The second thing I want you to remark is this, that though circumcision—as I will be glad to admit—has spiritual as well as natural, national significance, this is the vital point, a natural relationship with Abraham was sufficient and I am very tempted to go further and

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 2:39.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 16:31.

make that even stronger. That it was the only ground upon which at least initially children were to be circumcised. The only reason for their inclusion in this rite was their family relation to Abraham. And I find it highly significant. Abraham was circumcised. Who was the first person circumcised after Abraham? It was not Isaac. He hadn't even been born. It was 14 years before he would be born. It was Ishmael. And then after Ishmael it was Abraham's servants and their children because they were reckoned to be part of the earthly family of Abraham.

Now according to Galatians chapter four I think it would be not only a leap of faith, it would be a leap, as I was saying this morning, into the darkness to include Ishmael among the spiritual descendants of Abraham. We are told he was after the flesh. He is held up as the antithesis of a believer, the opponent of a believer. If ever a man in Scripture, at least, is described in terms that would lead us to say he is outside of the covenant of grace, that man was Ishmael. And yet by divine command Ishmael was circumcised.

Why? Because of a natural physical family relationship with Abraham. To me that is where the whole analogy of the paedobaptist argument between baptism and circumcision begins to break down and fall to the ground, because when you come to baptism, baptism has only one significance and that is spiritual. It does not have any relationship whatsoever or any significance whatsoever to a merely physical family relationship.

So the fact that the Jews were commanded to administer circumcision to their children because of a fleshly lineage does not either logically or theologically—and certainly not, as I will now proceed to show in the light of Romans four—does not give us any ground as Christians to extend the initiatory right of baptism to children.

The fact that circumcision had a deeper spiritual significance doesn't change this.

What was the spiritual significance of...?

And this is where I get to what to me is the meat of the argument. What was the spiritual significance of circumcision? I believe it is the very same spiritual significance that there is in baptism. You could give the answer in many ways. But in the language of Romans chapter four the spiritual significance of circumcision was that it was a seal of the righteousness of faith. It was a seal of justification by faith alone without works. That was the significance spiritually of circumcision.

Now I understand from other parts of Scripture, as I have indicated, that other answers may be given because there is a very rich spiritual significance in the sacramental signs of the Scriptures. I am happy to acknowledge that. It is just not within my purview and certainly not within my time limitations to explore the full biblical answer to the spiritual significance of circumcision tonight. But in terms of Romans four, it is a seal. Remember what that seal is. It is a witness. It is a token. It is a guarantee. It renders certain and inviolably certain the righteousness of faith. That is its spiritual significance.

Now I have to be honest. The Jews didn't see that, but Paul did and Paul was right.

Now watch this carefully. It was a seal to Abraham. And I want you to take Romans four. In fact, you can take your whole Bible and I want you to see this. Circumcision might have been a sign. It signified something to Israel as it signified something to the fleshly line or the children born after the flesh to Abraham, the natural descendants. But it is not a sign to Ishmael. And I will make the point according to the wording of Romans chapter four. Circumcision could not be a seal to anybody who was yet unjustified. It is a seal of that which has already been given or imputed.

You see, this inviolable authentication and guarantee, in Abraham's case we are told followed justifying faith and the whole argument here is it cannot precede it. That is the basis of Paul's argument. It follows it.

In other words, a seal, a sacramental seal is retrospective. It is never prospective.

Now all the paedobaptists that I have read who are generally good, strong orthodox Calvinists... I am not talking about the baptism regenerationist type. I am talking about people who believe the gospel. They will say that it is a seal of the righteousness that is going to be imputed. But that is my whole argument. We are supposed to be Protestants. We are supposed to be Presbyterians. We are supposed to be Bible believers. We are supposed to build our doctrine from Scripture, not inject it into Scripture. And I say again. The only language of Scripture describing a sacramental seal makes the seal retrospective. It looks back to what God has already done. It is never said to look forward to what he is going to do.

Now to me this is vitally important.

One reason I am not a paedobaptist is that in paedobaptism, despite all the arguments to the contrary, if I believe Paul and if I believe that he means what he says and says what he means, then the Holy Ghost does not give us right to invent something that is not in Romans chapter four. I believe a sacrament is a sign and a seal. But I believe that it, in paedobaptism, can never be a seal to that child.

Do you see what I am saying? If I believe then in infant baptism, what I am doing is I am excluding the major significance, spiritually, of the entire sacrament. I am leaving it out entirely. I cannot put it in because the Bible doesn't allow me to put it in.

That is one very good reason why I cannot be a paedobaptist.

You know, let me immediately say that good men can disagree with me on this. They are wrong, but they may disagree with me on this. And they may argue as... oh, I could give you a whole list of the greatest theologians in history, men whose names stand high in the estimation of Bible believers. Some of the greatest commentators the world has ever seen. Top of the list would be John Calvin. I freely admit that. They may argue for the

administration of the sign of the covenant to children. It just goes to show you that the greatest of men are blind at certain spots. But the one thing—and I would say this to every paedobaptist—do not ever have the audacity to claim that that baptismal sign that you are administering to a child is also a seal. You have no scriptural warrant to say that. And that is where I really take issue. Never go beyond the Scripture here. Do not fool yourself or anybody else that that becomes a seal because a seal in Romans four is looking back to what has already been done, never forward to what is going to be done.

And here is the importance of it. And I suppose this is one reason for my vehemence in this matter. As I say, I am a Presbyterian and I believe wholeheartedly in the scheme of covenant theology. But I want to tell you this. I see things happening when I visit Presbyterian churches not in this denomination, but I visit Presbyterian churches. And they now... they don't any longer have saints and sinners sitting in the congregation. They have covenant children to whom the seal of the covenant has already been administered. And the tendency is that those children simply have to grow up into the faith that is already there and the whole emphasis that they need to be born again, that they need to be justified by faith, that they need to be saved is being lost.

You have this as the curse that blighted what was once thought to be Christian Europe. I don't often refer to Neo Orthodox theologians, at least to refer to them positively. I don't refer to the dialectical philosophers and theologians usually in any positive light. But one thing that burned up some of these Neo Orthodox, especially in the European context was this very thing. By this whole notion that they are already justified in the covenant we have actually become Romanists. Rome teaches that justification is given in baptism. The reformed and the Lutherans... well, the Lutherans may go that far, but the reformed don't actually go to put it usually in those words, but effectively it has become the same thing. And people like Bonhoeffer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, looked at Europe and said, "We have a whole continent being damned, given up, unsaved, unchristian,"

This is the cheap grace he was talking about. They are unchristian. But they are all baptized and they are all... they have all got the seal of the covenant.

I want to tell you something. If God gives it as a seal, it is certain. Now follow me a little because I will talk about the Baptists in a wee minute. For if the paedobaptists are bad, the credos are often worse.

But follow me very carefully here. This seal, if God gives it, must come to pass. Do you realize in Presbyterianism, in fact, Dr. Barrett and Mr. Brame were away listening to a debate on this recently. Do you realize that in Presbyterianism you have a bunch that now not only wants to baptize their children, but have them eat and drink at the Lord's Table? Paedocommunion. And do you know why? Because at the bottom of it all they have this essentially Jewish and Romish doctrine that their baptism was a seal and in that seal there is the guarantee of justifying righteousness and grace.

And I am here to tell you, that seal belongs only to a person who has already exercised faith. That is the message of Romans chapter four.



Of course, as I said, the credobaptists, of whom I am one, they often give up the very substance of the sacrament. I don't have time to follow this through, but you will notice in verse 11 Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised."<sup>5</sup> He received it. That is not language you hear in most Baptist churches. It is not language you hear of most people who believe what I believe regarding baptism. To them baptism is a service that they render to God, simply an act of obedience.

Among the people I grew up with in Northern Ireland it used to be said crudely when they were asking people had they yet been baptized some of them actually said, "Have you been done yet?"

That is practically blasphemous.

Baptism is not, as circumcision is not, a service that we render to God essentially. It was only that in a very secondary fashion. It is a gift of God to be received. And how do you receive the gifts of God? You receive them by personal faith.

This is where I say that many Baptists and credobaptists such as I, many are guilty of evacuating what is full of spiritual meat and meaning. We bring it down to almost a non event. The whole idea that this is a gift of God and baptism is not simply something that I do because it is the next step along the line. Oh, it is a step of obedience to God. But it is something that recognizes this is a gift of God to be received as I receive Christ by faith. And in receiving it by faith it is a divine guarantee. It is something that appeals and is one of the very few things in the New Testament revelation that actually appeals to the senses, something, you may say, physical that has this deep spiritual significance and that bears witness forever to heaven, earth and hell of the guarantee that God gives, the righteousness of Christ imputed.

So the very first thing Paul shows, this circumcision, we may say this baptism, plays no part in obtaining justification. The whole notion of baptismal regeneration and baptismal justification, baptismal salvation is an invention of the devil. It plays no part in it whatsoever. But it does come along as a seal, a gift from God.

His second deduction from all that was just as radical. Not only did circumcision play no part in justification, but therefore justification can't be limited to the circumcision or to the Jews, but it extends to all believers.

As I have quoted from Romans three, "unto all and upon all them that believe."<sup>6</sup>

And so at the end of verse 11 and into verse 12 the apostle says that Abraham, "might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: And the father of circumcision to them who are not of

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 4:11.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 3:22.

the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham.”<sup>7</sup>

Now this is crucial to Paul’s case. You see, the Jews admitted and they even looked forward to the ingathering of the Gentiles. They weren’t always true to their missionary mandate, but nonetheless it is not Scriptural to believe that the Jews were so isolated within themselves that they had no interest in the nations of the world. You remember what the Lord Jesus said to the Pharisees of his day.

I would to God that he would be able to say it on a higher level of you and of me who are Christians. But he looked at the Pharisees and he said, “You compass heaven and earth to make one convert, to make a proselyte.”

Let’s stop there for a minute. What have you done recently to see anybody saved? You can hardly get Christians to come to a prayer meeting. I can’t complain about the people in this church. They have got used to this longwinded Irishman. But in most churches the same people who spent three, four, five, six, seven or eight hours watching basketball or football on Saturday suddenly gripe and groan if the worship of God goes more than 60 minutes.

Jesus looked at the Pharisees and said, “You compass heaven and earth to make one convert.”

Oh, they had an interest in the ingathering of the Gentiles, but here is how they looked at it. Bringing in the Gentiles was bringing them into the sphere and the status of the circumcised. In other words, they became Jewish. And Paul’s answer to this was very clear. Abraham was justified without circumcision and his spiritual children must be justified without it also.

And then he goes even further. Even those who are Jews in the natural family of Abraham are justified not on account of by the instrumentality of their circumcision, but by the same faith that he exercised. That is what he is saying in verse 12.

Do you know there is a positive side to it all? And he said, “Listen, all believers, Jews and Gentiles, all believers are the children of Abraham.”

Galatians 3:7 says, “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.”<sup>8</sup>

As Paul tells us here, he is their father. Now that is a beautiful term.

Now did you ever stop? You see, I have to confess, these are words that are so simple. We never stop to ask what they mean. You could understand what it meant that he was the father of the circumcision. He was the father of the Jewish people. They had a natural

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<sup>7</sup> Romans 4:11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 3:7.

lineage from him. We can understand that fatherhood. But did you ever stop to ask yourself what does it mean that he is the father of all that believe, that he is our father? What does that mean?

I think Charles Hodge puts his finger on the very heart of it when he says that the term expresses community of nature or character. He says that it speaks of one who is the head or founder of a class of men whose character or course is determined by the relationship with him. He is the Father of all who believe.

In the Old Testament kings were called the fathers of their people. Priests and prophets, you remember the king said to the prophet Elisha, "My father, my father."<sup>9</sup> Elisha said the same thing when he was seeing Elijah taken from him. Kings and priests and prophets were called the fathers of their people. Abraham is the father of the faithful because in the Scripture he is the prototype of all believers. In fact he is, par excellence, the believer in Scripture. He is the great man of faith.

Who is he? He is the one with whom God reenacted the covenant of grace to embrace all believers both Jews and Gentiles. And we are his children.

Do you see what that means? We have this community. We stand with Abraham under grace. We stand with Abraham blessed with all the spiritual blessings that the Lord promised to him, especially the blessing of the imputed righteousness of Christ. That is the blessing of Abraham. We stand with him in the family of God.

Now says Paul that doesn't come to you by circumcision. That doesn't come to you by baptism. That doesn't come to you by any rite or ritual or anything of the Mosaic economy even if it is dressed up in Christian garb. That comes to you by faith in Jesus Christ. But it does come. And this is his whole point. It does come.

This is not a hit and miss exercise. Justification is not only offered to believers, it is not only extended to believers, notice again the wording that I have kept quoting from Romans chapter three. It is not only unto, but it is upon all them that believe. In other words it doesn't only extend as an offer or a promise, it is actually conferred on every believer. That is the message. Jew or Gentile, every believer is as certainly justified as Abraham was, stands in the very same standing of grace accepted by God, invested with all of the blessings of the covenant of grace.

And that leads to Paul's final great deduction and it is this that God's promise to Abraham was a promise of free grace and, therefore, it could not be fulfilled through the law, but through faith alone.

You see, the argument that Paul gives here in verses 13 through 15 is that by its very nature God's covenant with Abraham could not be fulfilled through the law or through the legal dispensation. The legal dispensation, by its very nature, contrary to what the Jews thought, was temporary.

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Kings 2:13:14.

Remember I said to them it would last forever. No, no. Paul says it is temporary. By the nature of the covenant and by the nature of the Mosaic economy we reach this conclusion if one is permanent, the other is impermanent. Now everybody accepted was permanent is the promise to Abraham, the promise of the gospel.

Paul actually calls it the gospel when he is writing to the Galatians. He said that the Scripture preached the gospel before unto Abraham, so exactly the gospel. And if that gospel promise of grace is permanent, then it cannot come through the law and the law, therefore, the legal dispensation, circumcision, all that goes with it, it was only temporary.

Now in verse 14 you will see that Paul therefore has to reiterate the points that he made in verses four and five and I am not going to preach them again.

What he is saying, look, if it is of grace, it can't be by works. If it is of grace you can't earn it, you can't pay for it, you can't merit it. If it is of grace it is a free gift. And a free gift is not received by working for it. It is received by faith.

So he reiterates the argument of verses four and five.

But then he goes further and he is saying, "If you hold to law, you destroy faith and the whole idea of a promise."

What is that promise?

The big subject that I am only going to scrape over tonight, but the promise was this. Do you know the emphasis, do you mark the emphasis on the seed, Abraham's seed? Well, there is a two fold reference there. There is the reference to the seed, the offspring and there is the reference to the Seed with a capital S, to Christ. Galatians tells us specifically that seed was Christ.

Now listen carefully. Here is the promise. In his seed, his offspring, Abraham would possess every land. We haven't seen that come to pass yet. But we will.

Not only so, but in his Seed which is Christ the blessings of justifying grace will reach to every tribe and nation. And this is where we reach the great climax of the plan of salvation for the nations of the world. When you read in Revelation chapter seven of this great company which no man can number, and where are they from? Of every tribe, every tongue, every kindred, every nation under heaven.

But, says Paul, these children of Abraham can enter into these blessings of Abraham only and precisely as he entered, namely by faith without works apart from law or any merit of their own.

So this is the reiteration of the argument from verses four and five. And now he adds another line, verse 15 of Romans four.

“The law worketh wrath.”<sup>10</sup>

Why can the promise not be fulfilled though the law? He says, “Because the law works wrath.”

In other words, it brings men naturally under condemnation. How do you know you are a sinner? Because God has a law. And that law shows you are a transgressor. If there were no law there would be no such thing as sin. If there were no law you couldn't have any standard to transgress. If there are no standards then anything goes. But God has a standard. He has a law. And that law not only marks what is wrong, it condemns it. It not only condemns it, but it visits punishment upon it.

“The law worketh wrath.”<sup>11</sup>

Wherefore, verse 16, it...

Now what does it mean? I am not trying to be a Bill Clinton and parse two or three letter words. But what does it mean? What does it refer to? It is either the inheritance promised or the righteousness of faith that God imputes. But it, the righteousness or the inheritance, is of or literally it is out of faith. Only if it is of faith can it be by grace. Only if it is of faith—and watch this carefully—can the promise be sure to all.

Now here we come to something. Legalism can never produce assurance. Did you ever notice that? In every garb of Legalism, it is the enemy of assurance. People who are trying to work their way to heaven can never be sure they have worked enough. People who are trying to weep their way to heaven can never be sure they have wept enough. Legalism can never render you certain. You may hope. But there is always that thread that my hope is misplaced.

There is no assurance in Legalism. The only thing that can give assurance is grace received through faith.

So tonight I want you to take seriously what Paul is saying and shun every attempt to return us to a dogma of justification by works, justification by law or, indeed, justification by sacrament. And I am not talking now about our preferred view of paedobaptism or credo baptism. In either case do not suspend justification on a sacrament.

I finish with Paul's argument on the same subject in Galatians chapter five.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Romans 4:15.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

And he is talking about the legal yoke.

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.<sup>13</sup>

That is where Paul's argument brings it. You can be a Jew and go to hell. You can be a paedobaptist and be damned. You can be baptized and no matter what the minister said over you about seals and signs, you can still go to hell. You can be a Baptist. You can be baptized by immersion or by tri-immersion and perish in hell. You can work your fingers to the bone in an effort to merit God's salvation and perish eternally.

The only thing that matters is that you are a believer by justifying faith in Jesus Christ. That is the only thing.

I said tonight I would have controversial ground to cover. And I say that again with this addition. There are things upon which people may differ and yet be saved. That is one reason why this church gives people their conscience on this subject of baptism. But on this matter of the necessity and absolute centrality of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone and receiving by faith the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to fit us for heaven, on that there is no room for debate or dissention.

I trust tonight that you will ensure that you are among the children of Abraham, justified by faith alone in Christ.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Let's all pray.

In just a moment the meeting will be over. I trust the Lord will bless his Word to all our hearts. At the end of the day the apostle focuses our attention upon the substance of a promise which is Christ, upon a righteousness outside of ourselves. It is Christ's righteousness and upon the fact that it is received by faith with the assurance that all who believe are definitely and forever justified.

That is what he brings us. Make sure tonight that that is where you are.

Are you saved? Are you among the spiritual children of Abraham? Have you received the righteousness which is unto life as he did by faith alone? Make sure you have. For it is the only way to heaven.

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<sup>12</sup> Galatians 5:1.

<sup>13</sup> Galatians 5:2-6.

If we can help you in the things of God, Dr. Barrett, Mr. Brame and I are here as your servants for Christ's sake. Make sure tonight you are among the seed of Abraham, the justified by faith.

*Father in heaven, we thank thee for the promise, for the covenant of grace. We thank thee, Lord, that the very substance of the covenant is Christ and his righteous obedience for his people even unto death. We thank thee, our God, that he is the all sufficient Savior and his righteousness is an all sufficient righteousness. Lord, we ask in Jesus' precious name tonight that thou wilt indeed, as was prayed at the very beginning, give us sight to see the light. Grant that none of the folks here tonight will leave this meeting blinded to the beauty of Christ, hardened against the gospel or depending on anything but the merits of Christ for their acceptance with God.*

*Bless they Word, oh Lord, we pray. Keep thy hand upon us all tonight and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us. We pray that thy grace and mercy and peace will be the abiding portion of all thy blood bought people both tonight and evermore. We ask in Jesus' precious name. Amen.*