

## Romans: Verse-by-Verse

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Romans 4:9-12

### Student Notes:

Last Time: Paul's demonstration of a righteousness that was imputed or accounted before the Law of Moses – in the persons of Abraham and David.

Moving forward: Paul's argument about righteousness being given autocratically by God – even to those who least deserve to receive it.

- **Following the Argument:**

Paul's first question was this: "Was Abraham was justified by works or by faith?" That was the subject of verses 1-3.

His second question was whether what David called "this blessedness" – what Paul calls Justification is now available only for the circumcised or to all people.

- **A Question that Prompts a Supplemental One:**

Under what circumstances -- or better yet – time frame was Abraham justified.

Verse 10: "Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before?"

**The larger point:** "Did Abraham, as the Rabbis taught, submit to circumcision first, thereby achieving righteousness? Or was Abraham already righteous when he was circumcised? What is the correct order of events?"

**If it was at circumcision** – then that act itself is the source of the Jews' righteousness: Righteousness comes by the Law and by circumcision.

Paul's quick response: "It was not after, but before!"

- **The Real Timeline:**

Genesis 15: God's imputation or reckoning of Abraham's righteousness. Genesis 17: Abraham's circumcision.

These two events are separated by 14 chronological years. They were not the same event.

- **The Overarching Point:**

Abraham received justification first, and received the seal of covenant and righteousness 14 years later. Verse 11: "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised."

Circumcision was a mark representing – at least in Abraham's case – the fact that God already considered him righteous. All future generations would bear that mark to authenticate them as the Justified people of God.

**Abraham received two distinct gifts of God:** First, he received justification by faith while he was still uncircumcised. Second, he received circumcision as a visible sign and seal of that justification which God had already given him.

- **A New Testament Parallel: Baptism.**

Throughout the New Testament one pattern consistently emerges – that of believers being baptized after being justified by faith. Day of Pentecost: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." -- Acts 2:38

Repentance is the gate to justification by faith. Baptism serves as an outward sign or seal of our justification. But we have to have the order right and we must clearly distinguish between the sign (baptism) and the thing it signifies (justification).

Charles Hodge: “What answers well as a sign, is a miserable substitute for the thing signified”. (Baptism cannot be a substitute for salvation”.)

### **The Double Purpose for Abraham’s Justification by Faith, Followed by Circumcision: See verses 11-12**

1. That Abraham could be the “father” of those of all who believe but have not been circumcised: Circumcision is no more necessary to the justification of the Gentiles than it was to his own justification.

2. Jews who walk by faith in addition to their covenant mark – can also have Abraham as their father.

Paul destroys the Gentile pride. He says, “No, Abraham is the ‘Father’ of both groups – the uncircumcised Gentile Christians and the Messianic Jewish Christians. Both had the same “Father of Faith”.

Here, and in many other passages, Paul insists that circumcision could not be allowed to be a point of division among Christians.

- **The Rabbis:** “Abraham was the dividing point in the history of all humans.”
- **Paul:** “Instead of being the “dividing point”, Abraham is point of unity between Jews and non-Jew; He is the “Father” of both.

**John Stott: “Where circumcision divides, faith unites”.**