

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 4: 9-10

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. We will continue reading Romans chapter 4. Today we will read verses 9 to 10.

Paul, as a Jew, became the apostle to the Gentiles. He was fully aware that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew and then to the Gentile, which is the order of salvation ordained by God. Therefore, during his three missionary journeys, he visited many cities, always going first to the local synagogue, hoping to preach the gospel to the Jews before turning to the Gentiles. In the churches he served, there were often both Jewish and Gentile saints. When he wrote the Book of Romans, he knew that while the Roman church consisted mostly of Gentile saints, there were also a significant number of Jewish saints.

From the perspective of truth, once a person is saved by grace through faith in Jesus, they become a New Testament saint, and there is no longer any distinction between Jew and Gentile. This truth is very clear to saints today, and it is precisely the effect produced by Paul's prison epistles. In particular, Ephesians and Colossians repeatedly emphasize that there is no distinction. For example, Colossians 3:10-11 says, "and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all." This truth is very clear today, but in the early church, it was not yet so evident.

After Pentecost, the first church established was the church in Jerusalem, which was predominantly Jewish. When many priests joined the church, they mixed Old Testament ritual laws with New Testament truth, especially regarding circumcision. Acts 15:1-2 records, "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.’ Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them.” These disputes about circumcision were resolved at the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, and a letter was sent to the Gentile churches stating that circumcision was not required. However, some Jewish saints, particularly zealous for ritual laws, continued to disturb the churches Paul established among the Gentiles.

When Paul wrote Romans, he was preparing to conclude his third missionary journey and was about to set out for Jerusalem. He hoped to discuss these matters again with James and the elders in Jerusalem. Against this backdrop, when Paul addressed the truth of justification by faith, he specifically included a section related to circumcision. Paul, a meticulous thinker with clear logic, knew that to thoroughly resolve the issue of circumcision, he needed to start with the faith journey of Abraham, the father of faith, particularly focusing on the timeline. When did God justify Abraham by faith, and when did God establish the covenant of circumcision with him? Let us follow Paul’s reasoning and read verse 9.

Verse 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.”

Paul knew the Roman church included both Jewish and Gentile saints. Jews took pride in circumcision as a physical mark proving they were God’s chosen people. Some Jews even overstepped, believing that the blessing of justification by faith was only for the circumcised, requiring Gentile saints to be circumcised as well. Paul addresses this issue here—does this blessedness, referring to the blessing of justification by faith mentioned earlier, which is unrelated to works, pertain only to the circumcised? Is it not also for the uncircumcised? Paul deliberately uses “circumcised” and “uncircumcised” instead of “Jew” and “Gentile” to emphasize that circumcision, as an act, is unnecessary.

For we have been saying that Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Paul first answers this question purely from the perspective of truth. If you truly believe and are justified by faith, this blessing is unrelated to works, so whether circumcised or uncircumcised, can't both be justified by God through faith? This should be very clear.

Dear brothers and sisters, when we come before the truth, it should be absolute. We believe what God says, without considering traditions, customs, habits, or culture. If we add these human factors, the truth becomes diluted. For this, we truly thank Paul. He was absolute about the truth, even contending strongly with the Jerusalem church. Especially during his final visit to Jerusalem, he was immediately arrested and later transferred to a Roman prison, spending over four years in confinement. God allowed Paul to be bound in chains, unable to work, preach, or establish churches freely, giving him ample time for reflection. When he wrote his prison epistles from Rome, his truth was so radiant and clear, enabling the church for nearly 2,000 years to stand on pure, absolute truth.

Paul indeed kept the faith he was entrusted with, becoming an apostle of faith and passing the truth to us. I hope we can learn from Paul's faithfulness, uncompromisingly facing the truth, setting aside the entanglements of tradition, culture, customs, and habits, and viewing it solely from the truth of justification by faith. Naturally, it is unrelated to works, making circumcision irrelevant.

Paul first explains the unnecessary of circumcision from the perspective of truth, but he takes a further step to silence those who advocate for ritual laws.

Verse 10: "How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised."

Abraham is the father of faith for both Jews and Gentiles, and his faith journey is a common example for us all, an experience we should all have. Paul returns to the sequence of Abraham's faith journey, where justification by faith and circumcision are significant milestones. Paul asks a crucial question: When was Abraham's faith

accounted for righteousness? Was it before or after circumcision? Jews, familiar with Abraham's story, should immediately know the answer. Of course, God declared Abraham righteous by faith before he was circumcised. Thus, circumcision is not a prerequisite for justification by faith—this is very clear.

Some newer believers among us may not be familiar with the Genesis account of Abraham, so we'll take a moment to outline Abraham's faith journey according to the timeline of God's appearances to him. We've already covered the first five times God appeared to Abraham, and each appearance, with its accompanying words, helped Abraham's faith grow. The fifth appearance brought about justification by faith.

Moreover, God made a covenant with Abraham, the content of which prefigured Jesus Christ offering Himself as a burnt offering, sin offering, and peace offering. These three sacrificial animals were cut in two, symbolizing Christ's body broken for us on the cross, completing redemption. The turtledove and young pigeon, left uncut, prefigure Christ in resurrection, supplying love and faith to the saints. Thus, Abraham's justification by faith prefigures New Testament saints receiving Jesus Christ's salvation and being justified by God through faith.

The event of Abraham's justification by faith is recorded in Genesis 15. Following the Genesis text, we examine Abraham's faith journey. After being justified by faith, was everything smooth sailing for Abram? Reflecting on our own faith journeys, I believe most saints would say no. Abram was no different, which is why he is our father of faith. God promised Abram descendants as numerous as the stars, but as days passed, he still had no son. He initially thought he could rely on his nephew Lot, but Lot left. Later, he placed hope in his servant Eliezer, but God told him only one born from him could be his heir, so Eliezer didn't count either.

Where was his son? Genesis 16 records that his wife Sarai suggested that her Egyptian maidservant Hagar become Abram's concubine to bear him a child. Abram agreed, and at 85 years old, ten years after entering the promised land, Hagar bore him a son named Ishmael, the ancestor of today's Arabs. When people wait long for God's promise, their faith weakens, and they try to fulfill God's promise through

their own efforts, producing a fleshly descendant like Ishmael, who is not the promised heir.

The trouble Abraham caused through the flesh affected his promised descendants, continuing to this day, and remains an unresolved issue in human history. In the Middle East, the conflict between Jews and Arabs is a major variable in world peace, a situation that will persist until Jesus Christ returns.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is a serious issue. It's not just our father of faith, Abraham, who made this mistake; God's children today repeatedly make the same error. God's promises can only be awaited in faith. God has His timing and His way of fulfillment, needing no human help, yet human flesh cannot stop interfering, often causing harm. Abram did this, and we do too.

After being justified by faith, Abram still had to learn to set aside fleshly efforts. We are the same. Justification by faith shows that Christ is the author of our faith, and as we progress on the path of faith, we need to continually experience Christ as the perfecter of our faith. This is not easy. Abram failed, and we often fail too, which is why Hebrews 12:2 encourages us, "looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith."

Abram's act of producing Ishmael through the flesh greatly offended God, so much so that God did not appear to him for 13 years. Genesis 17:1 records that when Abram was 99 years old, God appeared to him a sixth time, revealing Himself as the Almighty God, the Hebrew term El Shaddai, meaning the all-sufficient supplier. On one hand, God revealed Himself as the all-sufficient supplier; on the other, He told Abram to be blameless. This means human blamelessness is not achieved through self-effort, which only produces a fleshly son like Ishmael, who persecutes the promised heir. Human blamelessness can only come from God's all-sufficient supply.

Thus, God gave Abram a new beginning, changing his name from Abram, meaning "exalted father," to Abraham, meaning "father of many nations." As the ancestor of the Israelites, he was the exalted father; as the father of faith for Gentile saints from many nations, he became the father of many nations.

After renaming Abraham, God established the covenant of circumcision with him. Genesis 17:12 says, "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." Circumcision means cutting off the flesh while standing in the position of justification, as the flesh cannot fulfill God's promise but only persecutes it.

After establishing the covenant of circumcision, God told Abraham to rename his wife from Sarai, meaning "my princess," to Sarah, meaning "mother of nations." He also told Abraham that Sarah would bear him a son named Isaac. God clearly stated that the promised heir must come from Sarah, who prefigures grace, meaning the promised heir must come from grace. Thus, Sarah became the mother of many nations, as all Gentile saints are justified by God through grace.

Galatians 4:22-24 says, "For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants." Thus, Hagar prefigures the covenant of law, and Sarah prefigures the covenant of grace. Only through grace can the promised heir be produced, and the promised heir is justified by God through faith, unrelated to works.

Circumcision came after justification by faith. In today's terms, after we believe in Jesus Christ as our lifelong Savior, we are baptized. The spiritual meaning of baptism is our union with Christ's death, cutting off our flesh. When we rise from the water, we are resurrected, bearing the likeness of new life.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! Through Paul's epistle of Romans, we understand that justification by faith and circumcision correspond to New Testament saints being saved by grace through faith, followed by baptism as God commands, ensuring salvation. Help us not only to know the truth but to resolve to live by it throughout our lives. Bless and guard our daily lives. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.