

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

Romans 4: 11-12

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 4. We will read verses 11-12 today.

Paul wisely pointed out that Abraham was justified by God through faith in Genesis 15, while Abraham was circumcised in Genesis 17. In other words, when God counted Abraham as righteous because he believed, Abraham had not yet been circumcised. Therefore, circumcision could not possibly be a prerequisite for justification by faith.

For New Testament saints, when we believe in Jesus and receive Him as our Savior for life, we are justified by God through faith—this is the first step. After believing, just like Abraham, during the process of waiting for God's promises, our faith may weaken, and we may try to attain God's promises through our own efforts. As a result, we give birth to something of the flesh and offend God. At this point, God wants us to see clearly that "He who believes and is baptized will be saved"—a truth clearly stated in Mark 16:16. We must realize that our flesh must go through death with Christ in order for us to live in the likeness of new life. This is the true meaning of baptism: to die with Christ and to live with Christ. Then we are willing to be baptized, helping us to be delivered from sin, the world, and the flesh. Let us look at Paul's continued discourse on justification by faith and circumcision.

Verse 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,"

Abraham was justified by God through faith. Circumcision was a sign, and this sign of circumcision was the seal of the righteousness that he had by faith more than ten years earlier, before he was circumcised. The Greek word for “seal” originally referred to an official seal impressed on a wax-sealed document to guarantee its authenticity and ownership. Abraham had already been justified by faith, and more than a decade later, after experiencing failure in the flesh and giving birth to Ishmael, God came again to make a covenant with him, leaving a mark on him—that he must put away the flesh. This sign sealed the truth of justification by faith and confirmed that justification by faith is from God, belongs to God, and will not be altered by man’s weakness or failure in the flesh.

Because Abraham was justified by God through faith before he was circumcised, he became the father of those who believe in Christ without being circumcised—in other words, he became the father of faith for the Gentile saints. Just as God justified Abraham by faith, He will also justify the Gentiles by faith. This is exactly what Galatians 3:7–9 says, “Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.”

The Bible clearly points out that Gentile saints are the descendants of Abraham by faith. That is, when God pointed to the stars in the heavens and told Abraham that his descendants would be like them, Abraham believed, and God counted it to him for righteousness. Those stars in the sky symbolized the descendants of Abraham by faith. They, like Abraham, would all be justified by God through faith.

These Gentile saints, who became Abraham’s descendants by faith, are not circumcised and bear no physical mark of circumcision on their bodies, but they have received a spiritual circumcision, just as Romans 2:29 says, “but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter.” This circumcision of the heart means experiencing death with Christ on the cross, just as Galatians 5:24 says, “And those who are Christ’s have crucified the

flesh with its passions and desires.” This is the true meaning of being circumcised in the heart.

Verse 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.”

Abraham is also to be the father of those who are circumcised—this refers to Abraham being the father of the Jews. The Jews have always respected Abraham and often take pride in being his descendants. But here Paul adds an important condition: not only must they be circumcised, but they must also walk in the steps of the faith that Abraham had before he was circumcised. These steps of faith include the path Abraham walked while he was still uncircumcised. Paul is helping the Jews go beyond the physical mark, beyond the ceremonial law, and return to what is most essential in being a descendant of Abraham—that is, to walk in the steps of Abraham’s faith. Merely having the physical sign of circumcision does not make one a descendant of Abraham; one must also walk in the same steps of faith as Abraham did.

When Jesus was carrying out His ministry on earth, He also gave the Jews the same warning. For example, in John 8:39–47, there is a record of a debate between Jesus and the Jews. In John 8:39, the Jews said, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham.” This is the same definition Paul gives for being a descendant of Abraham. As the conversation continues, in John 8:44 Jesus says, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.” Because they did not follow in the steps of Abraham’s faith but instead followed their own desires, Jesus said their father was the devil, not Abraham.

Dear brothers and sisters, you may wonder why Paul especially emphasizes to those Jewish men who are circumcised that they must not only be circumcised but also walk in the footsteps of faith that their ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised. This is because Abraham was first justified by God and only afterward

was circumcised; therefore, circumcision was the seal of his justification by God. For most Jews, however, they were circumcised on the eighth day after birth, so this circumcision became merely a physical mark on them. The value of this mark itself was not so high, so Paul added an important condition. They must follow how Abraham walked by faith and followed God's leading before he was circumcised. Those Jews who already have the physical mark of circumcision must also walk in faith following God. Thus, following God in faith is the necessary condition—those who bear the mark of circumcision still need the reality of faith to follow God.

The circumcision that the Jews received corresponds to the baptism of New Testament saints today. For the vast majority of believers, they first walk a journey of faith; then, after deciding to believe and identifying with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, they receive baptism. Justification by faith is the necessary condition, and baptism is the seal or confirmation of that justification by faith.

Here I want to especially speak to those saints who have received infant baptism. Infant baptism is somewhat similar to the circumcision of the Jews—it is a mark placed on the child because of the parents' decision when the child is not yet able to follow God. If this child grows up without ever experiencing faith in following the Lord, then infant baptism becomes merely a mark and cannot help him be saved. This is exactly what Paul said to the Jews: it is not enough to be circumcised; one must also walk in the footsteps of faith that Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Therefore, I encourage those saints who received infant baptism to seriously examine their faith and to have a visible testimony in their daily lives. After this examination, if they are sure they have faith in following the Lord, they should also add a prayer of confession to the Lord's recognition, just as Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Believing in the heart and confessing with the mouth are necessary conditions for salvation. Of course, if one can also have a confirmation ceremony and testify before others, that would be even better.

In summary of verses 11 and 12, whether Jew or Gentile, justification by God comes only through faith, and we must walk in the footsteps of Abraham's faith. Therefore, circumcision or uncircumcision is not important. Paul says the same thing in Galatians 5:6, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love." What matters is being in Jesus Christ, not circumcision. Only those who are in Jesus Christ can rely on faith to live a life full of love.

Dear brothers and sisters, Abraham, as the father of faith before circumcision, shows us that we too, like Abraham, are justified by God through faith. But even more important than being justified by God is that after justification, we must also walk in the footsteps of Abraham's faith.

Those Jews who bear the mark of circumcision in the flesh insist that the Gentiles be circumcised, yet they themselves do not walk in the footsteps of Abraham's faith. Paul directly condemns them in Galatians 6:13–15, saying, "For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation."

Paul's declaration also encourages us New Testament saints to boast only in the cross of Jesus Christ. Not only has Jesus been crucified, but we too must be crucified with Christ. How are we crucified? Paul says, "For me, the world has been crucified to me"—meaning that to me, the world is dead; I no longer love the world or pursue its things; the world is as if dead to me. But Paul also says, "and I to the world"—meaning that in the eyes of the world, I am considered dead, already crucified, so the people of the world do not seek me anymore.

Dear brothers and sisters, we must truly appreciate Paul's steadfast devotion to the truth and how he lived out that truth in daily life as a person completely separated from the world. Not only did he see the world as dead to him, but the world also regarded him as dead. Therefore, to him, circumcision or uncircumcision meant

nothing; what mattered was being a new creation. I pray that we all can learn and follow Paul's determined heart.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for placing the book of Romans before us, letting us know how precious justification by faith is. Our father of faith, Abraham, was first justified by faith and then received the covenant of circumcision. It is the same for us New Testament saints; through believing in Jesus Christ, we are justified by God and born again. Afterward, we are to live a life that cuts away the flesh and follow in Abraham's footsteps by faith. Lord, help us every day to overcome the desires of the flesh and the temptations of the world, knowing that we belong to You. May we all live a life pleasing to You in faith. We pray this in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.