

First Faith, Then the Sign of Faith (4:9-12)

Sign and Seal (4:9-11a)

4:9 Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, “Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness.” 4:10 How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; 4:11a and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised...

- To what “*blessing*” is Paul referring? The triple “*blessing*” of the previous verse:
 - 4:6...just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works [in Psalm 32:1,2a]:*
 - 4:7 “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered.*
 - 4:8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.”*
- Paul, citing David, tells us that the greatest blessing is God’s crediting righteousness to those who believe in His Son – those who try to be righteous before God on their own are outside of this blessing. God’s greatest blessing is not just having righteousness credited, but also the forgiveness of our violations of God’s Law!
- We need both in salvation!
 - We need our violations of God’s Law taken away from us so that we do not receive His wrath forever.
 - We need a perfect righteous life to stand before a perfectly righteous God forever.
 - Both of these are ours by faith in Christ. He takes the penalty for our lawlessness so that it is not credited to our account before God. We receive credit for Jesus’ perfectly righteous human life on earth.

- Who receives this blessing? Paul examines the life of Abraham to find an answer. Abraham had righteousness credited to him long before he was ever circumcised – before he received the sign of being in covenant with God. He was saved solely by faith, not by the sign of faith (circumcision).
- What was old covenant circumcision, then? “...*the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith...*” God gives His people signs and seals of their being justified (declared righteous before Him by faith).
 - A “*sign*” in this context means something God gives for believers to show forth their invisible faith. We can’t see someone’s faith – we can see their obedience to God that comes out of their faith. In the old covenant, circumcision was the visible “*sign*” of invisible faith.
 - A “*seal*” is something that God gives the believer to give them assurance and comfort that they are in covenant relationship with Him by faith. The old covenant believer, in difficult times, could be reminded that they were in faith-communion with God by the “*seal*” of the covenant (in that case, circumcision).
 - **The new covenant has its “*sign*” and “*seal,*” too: baptism.¹**

Father Abraham (4:11b,12)

4:11b...so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, 4:12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the

¹ “Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized a **sign** of his fellowship with Him in His death and resurrection; of his being engrafted into Him; of remission of sins; and of giving up into God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life” (1689 Baptist Confession, 29.1).

circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

- Abraham is “*the father of circumcision to those who...are of the circumcision*” if they have faith in Jesus Christ! It is what God has done in the heart that matters (remember Romans 2:28,29).
- Now that Christ has come, the old covenant “*sign*” and “*seal*” of circumcision is not longer valid:
 - “*Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God*” (1 Corinthians 7:19). Paul will later say that the things he writes to the Church “*are the Lord’s commandment*” (1 Corinthians 14:37).
 - “*For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus...there is neither Jew nor Greek...for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:26,28).
 - “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love*” (Galatians 5:6).
 - “*...put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One Who created him – a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised...but Christ is all, and in all*” (Colossians 3:10,11).
- In the New Testament, we read of Jews claiming spiritual superiority just because they were physical descendants of Abraham.² A person is a child of Abraham not by being born a Jew, but by putting faith in Jesus Christ (as Abraham did):

- “*...be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham*” (Galatians 3:7).
- “*The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles [uncircumcised non-Jews] by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying [in Genesis 12:3], ‘All the nations will be blessed in you.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer*” (Galatians 3:8,9).
- “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law...in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith*” (Galatians 3:13,14).
- “*...if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise*” (Galatians 3:29).³

The Foundation of Believer’s Baptism: Our Chief Mark As Baptists

- The Old Testament sacrament of belonging to the covenant people of God was circumcision. **The New Testament sacrament of belonging to the covenant people is baptism.** The parallel between the two is seen in Colossians 2:11,12.
- Here we see that Abraham was justified by faith (Genesis 15:6) before receiving the covenant sign (Genesis 17:9-14).
- This is a biblical reality reflected in the Baptist doctrine of believer’s baptism.⁴ We administer the covenant sign

³ This is why I tell you that Galatians 3 should be read every week – it teaches us how the Old and New Testament fit together for us in Christ! It gives us a whole Bible that is ours in Christ! By the way, the extended allegory of Galatians 4:22-31 teaches the same thing.

² Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8; John 8:39-58.

(baptism) only to those who give profession to faith in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation before God.

Our Inheritance (4:13)

4:13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Galatians 3:16 is the Game-Changer

- The original Greek doesn't say “*descendants*,” but a singular “*descendant*,” or “*seed*.”⁵
- Galatians 3:16 is one of the most important verses on how to interpret the Old Testament: “*Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ.*” If we ignore Galatians 3:16, we will understand all the promises to Abraham as belonging to the nation that came from him (physical Israel). If we let Galatians 3:16 to teach us how to interpret the Bible, the promises to Abraham are made to the One Who

⁴ “Christian baptism is the immersion of a **believer** in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer’s faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord’s Supper” (Baptist Faith & Message 2000, VII).

⁵ Geneva Bible (1560), King James Version, New King James Version, Young’s Literal Translation all render the word as “seed.” The English Standard Version and New International Version render it “offspring” (which can be singular or plural).

came out of physical Israel, that is, Jesus Christ.⁶ Oh, beloved, there is a wide gulf of difference between these two interpretations!⁷

Not Through the Law

- Abraham was justified (declared right before God) by faith, not by keeping the Law. The proof is in the timeline: the Law was not given until around 500 years after Abraham lived!

Heir of the World: Looking to the Kingdom of God

- In Daniel 7, we have an interesting parallel that teaches us an incredible principle: **our faith-union with Christ the King means that we will reign with Him over all.**
- Here is Daniel’s vision:
*“I kept looking in the night visions,
And behold, with the clouds of heaven
One like a Son of Man was coming,*

⁶ “...the final authoritative interpreter of a specific Scripture is the rest of Scripture...the NT finally clarifies and authoritatively interprets previous OT type and shadows...there must be a final dependence upon the NT revelation to determine how the OT is fulfilled in it...the NT claims priority to teach how the Old is fulfilled in it as the inspired commentary on the OT...the priority of the NT for interpreting how the OT if fulfilled in it is fundamental to consistent biblical and systematic theology.” Frank A. Malone, “Biblical Hermeneutics and Covenant Theology,” in *Covenant Theology: A Baptist Distinctive*, ed. Earl M. Blackburn (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2013), 67-76.

⁷ Ignoring passages like Galatians 3:16 will give you two different peoples of God, Israel (Old Testament) and the Church (New Testament) – which is denied by many passages, but especially Ephesians 2:11-22. OR, not seeing Galatians 3:16 as a key to interpretation will teach you that the Old Testament is about Israel and the New Testament is about Jesus, instead of seeing that “all Scripture is a testimony to Christ, Who is Himself the focus of divine revelation” (Baptist Faith & Message 2000, I).

*And He came up to the Ancient of Days
And was presented before Him.
And to Him was given dominion,
Glory and a kingdom,
That all the peoples, nations and men of every
language
Might serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
Which will not pass away;
And His kingdom is one
Which will not be destroyed” (7:13,14).*

- After these “night visions,” Daniel is given an interpretation. Read what the interpretation of the “Son of Man” receiving an eternal Kingdom is:
 - “...the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come” (7:18).
 - “...the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom” (7:22).
 - “...the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him” (7:27).
- Daniel 7 gives us the framework for understanding promises of believers’ reign – it is by union with Christ, Who is the King.⁸
- This is important for our lives: Jesus is in charge of everything as King of kings and Lord of lords.⁹ We

⁸ We see this in two Revelation parallels: READ Revelation 11:15; 22:3,5. See also 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10; 20:4,6.

pray for His Kingdom to come on earth (Matthew 6:9). We teach fellow believers to obey Him as King (Matthew 28:20). We will one day reign with Him, as expressions of His authority and not our own.¹⁰

The Purpose of the Law (4:14,15)

^{4:14}For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; ^{4:15}for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.

- The description “those who are of the Law” means those who are trying to be right before God by keeping the Law (which cannot be done). If you can keep the Law well enough to be saved, there’s no need for faith.
- The Law, Paul reminds us, is God’s means of showing humanity they fall short of His glory. It brings His “wrath” on the Law’s violators – all of us outside of Christ.
- “...where there is no law, there also is no violation...” We have to preach lost humanity’s guilt under God’s Law! If we don’t, they don’t see they are in violation of His perfect standard of righteousness, and don’t know they need a Savior! The Law was given to show us we are guilty before God and need the grace that comes through His Son by faith alone: **READ Galatians 3:23,24.**

⁹ READ Matthew 28:18; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Ephesians 1:18-23; Revelation 1:5; 12:10; 17:14; 19:16.

¹⁰ This is what human beings were created to do in the beginning. This is what the image of God was to be: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule...’” (Genesis 1:26). The satanic desire to be God instead of reflecting His image, and to be in control over all, instead of reflecting His sovereignty, is found in all of us. The Bible gives expression to it in this condemnation of the king of Babylon (whose desires reflected that of the satan): READ Isaiah 14:13,14. Do you see that in your heart? A desire to control everything, especially things that belong solely under the Lord’s authority?