



Links Players

FOLLOWERS OF JESUS 3: FOOTSTEPS OF FAITH

And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. (Romans 4:12, NIV)

IF GOLF'S MOST UNCOMFORTABLE WORD IS *SHANK*, the Bible's most uncomfortable word might be *circumcision*. Just when people think they know what the Bible is all about, they come across a passage like Genesis 34. You can read it all for yourself, but here are the highlights: The rape of Dinah is avenged by her brothers, who convince the men of the offending family to be circumcised, under the pretense that her rapist can then marry her. But while the community of male enemies are nursing their pains, the brothers rush in and kill them all. If thinking about circumcision already makes you squirm, you might want to skim Genesis 34 quickly.

So what is all this about circumcision in Paul's letter to the Romans, and how does it fit our ongoing consideration of following Jesus? Actually, it has much to do with getting our righteousness in order.

Let's start here: If you're trying to get to Jesus through good works, you're doing things backwards. The clear presentation of the apostolic letters is that Jesus comes to us first, and if we follow him in faith, then our righteousness has begun.

Paul made this argument by unpacking the life of Abraham, who was highly esteemed as the first Jewish patriarch. The Jews in Rome, who were Paul's original audience for this letter, knew all there was to know about him. And while at Abraham's time, the law was many generations from being given to Moses, God established circumcision as a sign that these people were set apart as his.

What was most important to Paul in his letter, though, was that his readers remember the order of things. Abraham believed before he was circumcised. Faith preceded his act of righteous obedience to God. And in the line we now call chapter 4, verse 12, Paul wrote that it is the footsteps of Abraham's faith in which we walk.

Call this good news, if you will: It is faith, not circumcision, that truly sets God's people apart. But the better news yet is that God keeps his promise of making us joint-heirs with Christ because of faith. "The promise comes by faith" (v. 16). So if we are to say we are followers of Jesus, we must do so by way of our faith, not by fulfilling a list of rights and wrongs. Those come only after our faith has taken root.

Opening questions Which comes first—a love for golf, or an adherence to its etiquette and rules? What makes appreciation an effective motivator in any pursuit?

READING Romans 4:1-8; Romans 4:20–5:2; Galatians 3:26-29

The basis of true righteousness (Romans 4:1-8)

How do we know the importance of faith in God's work (rather than our own) thanks to Abraham and David?

Faith in Christ (Romans 4:20–5:2)

How does Jesus enter the picture because of faith? What blessings come to us when we believe in him?

The shared walk of faith (Galatians 3)

What makes us children of God? Who also walks this walk of faith with us? How does the work and promise of Christ bring us together? How do friends of faith help us as we follow Christ?

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2020 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available here: https://youtu.be/-8jzr_Yxx9M