

Circumcision Not Required for Salvation

This morning, we continue with Paul's argument for faith alone in Christ alone. But before we jump into the text, it is advisable to review our position in Paul's argument. Rather than present an outline and point to where we are, let us use Paul's own words to better understand his argument and where we are in it.

From the start, commentators tend to be agreed that the book of Romans is about the Gospel. Paul starts us out pointing to the gospel.

Romans 1:1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,

Romans 1:2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures,

The Gospel (Good News) of God. The very first verse of Romans. Paul introduces us to the word gospel. As we have seen, that is "good news." Since the whole book is about the good news and Paul first talks about salvation/justification and then salvation/sanctification he is talking about the entire Christian experience, from trusting in Jesus Christ to walking by faith.

Paul interrupts the argument to identify the faith of the church in Rome. It is no coincidence that Paul mentions their faith. This is a word that will be featured prominently in key verses.

But then Paul picks up the argument.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation

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to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Here he connects gospel/good news to faith (believes).

Romans 1:17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “But the righteous man shall live by faith.”

Paul sets up various parts of the human race as in need of God’s righteousness. We know from past study, that there is a barrier between God and man. Paul concentrates on the problems of sin and righteousness.

Romans 3:21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

Romans 3:22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

As mentioned last week, Paul’s illustrations of the argument seem backwards to us. In Romans chapter 4 Paul starts with the result of the work of Christ: faith in God (or Yahweh in Genesis 15:6). He moves to David in Psalm 32 quoting verses that point to blessing as a result of God’s work: forgiveness of lawlessness (redemption), covering of sin (atonement/propitiation) and non-imputation of sin (?reconciliation?). In chapter 5 Paul gets down to the work of Christ.

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By referring to Abraham and David, Paul is stressing that salvation is not something new. Faith alone in Yahweh/Christ has always been the way to salvation. Always.

Now Paul is stringing words together to move the argument along.


Gospel (Romans 1:1, 1:16-17) which demonstrates God's...

Righteousness (Romans 1:16, 3:21-22) which is available through...


Faith (Romans 3:22, 4:3) which is provided by God as a ...

Blessing (Romans 4:6-8) which is the result of atonement


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Romans 4:9 Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, “Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness.”

This blessing. “This” is actually “the” blessing. The blessing of salvation through the gift of imputed righteousness.

Paul identified Abraham as someone who believed on the Lord. Paul is making the argument that if Abraham believed before he was circumcised and was imputed (credited) righteousness as a result, then circumcision is not a requirement for salvation. It is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. Not the sign of salvation.

A side note on who Abraham believed in. We look back on the cross and believe in Jesus Christ as savior because He was judged for our sins on the cross.

Abraham had to look forward. Actually, more than that, he believed in the second person of the Trinity who he had been dealing with directly.

Genesis 15:1 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great.”

Word of the Lord. Jesus Christ is identified in the Gospel of John as the “Word.”

Genesis 15:6 Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

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John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 1:2 He was in the beginning with God.

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:15 John *testified about Him and cried out, saying, “This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.’”

John 1:16 For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.

John 1:17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

Genesis 15:2 Abram said, “O Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?”

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Romans 4:10 How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;

Abraham was not circumcised until Genesis chapter 17. Genesis 15:6 occurs before chapter 17. So Abraham was uncircumcised when he believed. Jews point to those who are uncircumcised as being inferior. Paul also slipped in a quote from David who referred to things that are necessary for salvation. But David is identifying them as a result of not being put to death in accordance with the Law. He was “forgiven,” his sins were covered, and sin penalty was not imputed to him.

Romans 4:11 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,

Romans 4:12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

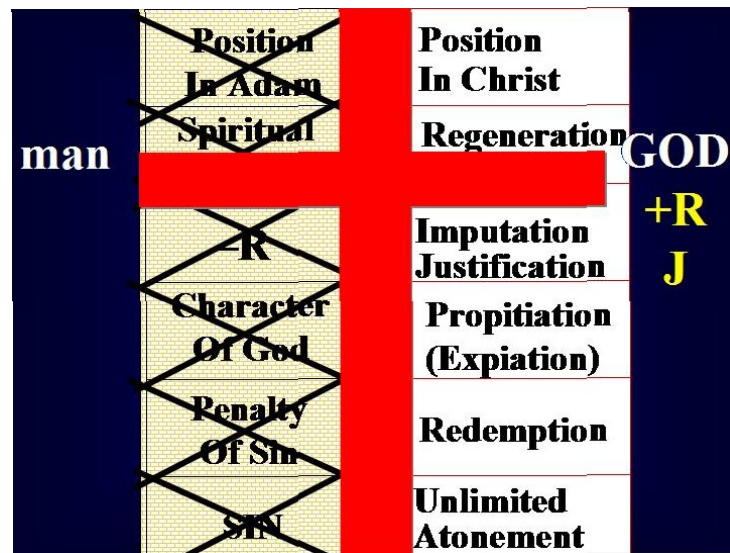
Romans 4:13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

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Romans 4:14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;

Romans 4:15 for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.

As we study Romans chapters 4 and 5, keep in mind what the book of Romans is about. The gospel. The gospel deals with the three major roadblocks in the barrier between man and God: sin, righteousness and life. Paul deals with sin and righteousness in the book of Romans.



Part of the argument Paul is making is that all have fallen short of the glory of God. So all need to be saved by faith alone in Christ alone. Both Jews and Gentiles.

Lest we forget.

First, Job was not a Jew based upon the same considerations that identify the book of Job as the first book of the Bible composed.

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Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job; and that man was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.

Secondly, as Paul points out in his argument, Abraham believed before the Abrahamic covenant and its sign, circumcision.

Romans 4:9 Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, “Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness.”

Romans 4:10 How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;

Thirdly, don't forget Jonah. He was sent to the city of Nineveh which was not in Israel. It was a corrupt and at one point hostile to Israel.

Jonah 1:1 The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying,

Jonah 1:2 “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.”

Jonah 3:1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying,

Jonah 3:2 “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.”

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Jonah 3:5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.

The lessons on the book of Romans stresses, in this part of the book, that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile when it comes to the need for salvation. And then that faith alone saves.

Romans 3:9 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

But do not forget that a foundational principle of dispensationalism is that there is a difference between the Church and Israel. When we get to Romans chapters 9-11 this will become evident. And if you have been listening for a while, you know I have said that in the series on Zephaniah. In the Millennium, the Jews will be looked up to as a special people blessed by God in the Land.

1. Important Covenantal aspect of circumcision

Genesis 17:9 God said further to Abraham, “Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.

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Genesis 17:10 This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.

Genesis 17:11 And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.

Circumcision is first mentioned in Genesis chapter 17. It is not related to salvation. Genesis 15:6 was the first documented instance of righteousness being imputed based upon a faith response from Abram. And as we saw, Genesis 15:6 was pointing to a previous time frame for Abram's faith. This is the point Paul is making. Circumcision is not related to salvation. It is a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant God made with Abraham.

2. Circumcision unimportance for salvation

Salvation is by faith, not by circumcision.

Romans 3:21 But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

Romans 3:22 even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction;

Romans 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

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3. Early Church addressed circumcision

Acts 15:1 Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

Acts 15:2 And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, *the brethren* determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.

The Jews insisted that circumcision was associated with salvation. Paul and Barnabas brought this topic to Jerusalem for a council to settle the issue.

Acts 15:6 The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter.

Acts 15:7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.

Acts 15:8 And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us;

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Acts 15:9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.

Acts 15:10 Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?

Acts 15:11 But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”

So it was decided that salvation is by faith and that Gentiles were not required to be circumcised.

If we still have time, I would like to review, briefly, dispensations in preparation for additional lessons on the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) since they do not subscribe to the theology of dispensationalism.

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