

Circumcision

(Rom 4:9-16)

- Read Rom 4:9-14
 - Remember in ch 4, Paul is proving that not only is justification by faith, it has always been so
- I. Paul introduces 2 objections that he anticipates the Jew will make concerning his teaching about Abraham (and David), that both were justified by faith alone without works
- A) 1st argument- Circumcision (v.9-12)
 - B) 2nd argument- Covenant of Sinai (v.13-16)
 - 1. Note how tenacious unbelief always is. Answer and objection and immediately the unbeliever goes to the next one
 - i. This is due to the fact that the natural man clings to his credit of any kind or amount
 - 2. Note also the importance of the history of the Old Testament and the place it finds in the New Testament church
- II. Abraham's experiences are written for our admonition and learning (Rom 15:4)
- A) Gen 15:6 (the statement of Abraham's justification) was 14 years before Gen 17 (circumcision the seal of the covenant)
 - 1. Now if Abraham was justified in the sight of God 14 years before he was circumcised, then how long before that statement was God already at work in him? Before the foundation of the world!
 - 2. God intended to use Abraham as a pattern, for all believers, so God declared him justified before He commanded him to be circumcised, thus proving circumcision played no role in his justification
 - B) 2 Reasons given in our passage as to why Abraham was circumcised:
 - 1. Sign- to seal unto Abraham the righteousness he already had in God's eyes
 - i. Seal- authenticates, gives assurance, validates, confirms, authorizes, closes tight
 - a) John 6:27- God "sealed" Christ (at His baptism)
 - b) 2 Cor 1:22- Paul "sealed" also
 - c) Eph 1:12-14- Holy Spirit "seals" believers "after" believing
 - 1) There are many ways the Spirit seals the believer and goes on sealing him (sanctification)
 - ii. Circumcision "sealed" unto Abraham a fact that was already true concerning him and his relationship to God
 - a) Abraham was saved even if he had never lived to reach circumcision
 - 1) In exactly the same way those that God chooses are saved even if they do not all reach the same level of assurance or of "sealing"

2. Pattern- Abraham is the man God chose to define the process by which God operates in justification
 - i. Abraham is not the first man saved by grace, he is the man God selected to begin to declare what He had been doing all along
 - ii. Abraham to be a pattern for 2 groups of believers:
 - a) V.11- Gentiles who walk by faith
 - b) V.12- Jews who walk by faith
 - 1) Not simply “Jews” alone, because they are circumcised
 - (a) Gal 5:6- Circumcision of itself avails nothing, but true faith substantiated by love
 - (1) James 2:14-21- Abraham’s faith “worked”
 - (b) Circumcision is useless if it be not affirming faith already at work in the believer
 - (1) Exactly the same with baptism
 - (c) Circumcision is not “the thing,” it is a sign of “the thing”
 - (1) Rom 2:28-29- Not a Jew outwardly (or in profession)
 - (2) Phil 3:3- True circumcision is inward
 - 2) The Jews turned the seal of circumcision into the cause of justification, just as so-called Christians do with baptism
 - (a) John 8:30-44- “We be Abraham’s seed (the circumcision)”

III. What the sign of circumcision revealed

A) Rom 4:13- The promise of God concerning Christ

1. Gen 12:1-4- God to “cut out” a people for Himself by promise
 - i. Those that did not keep the covenant would be “cut off” as they had been “cut out” already (Gen 17:14)
2. Gen 17- Circumcision is a covenant sign, or assurance of the person’s position in the covenant
 - i. The same way that the Lord’s Supper is a covenant meal for us
3. The promise was to Abraham and his seed
 - i. Thus Abraham was circumcised as an adult, and then began circumcision the male children of his household as falling under the covenant promises (compare baptism)
 - a) In this way circumcision connects directly to the “offspring” and is performed on the reproductive organ
 - 1) Circumcision is then a seal of the work of God in His covenant promises to Abraham and his “seed”
 - 2) Circumcision marked the members of the family as in the unique position of possible blessings, and also entitled them to partake of many covenant promises, but if the heart were uncircumcised, that same near proximity became the greater curse (Heb 6:4-6)

- 3) Rom 4:13-16- The giving of the Law was exactly the same as circumcision
 - (a) Merely being a recipient of the Law did not entitle that person to the blessings of the Law, but might as easily bring on the curse of it
 - (1) We can say the same thing about being born to true Christian parents, that it is a great advantage to a child, but in no way ensures that child's salvation
 - (2) Compare circumcision on the 8th day and infant baptism or "Christening"
4. Circumcision was also a reminder to Abraham of the promise of God concerning that "Seed" and that Abraham could in no wise produce the "Seed" himself (having just proven that in Gen 16)
- B) The cutting away of the flesh as a veil
 1. The foreskin is completely useless in producing fruit, and instead is a hindrance
 - i. Josh 5:1-10- The reproach of Gilgal
 - a) Circumcision did not start in the world with Abraham, it goes back to nearly 3000 BC, both in Mesopotamia and in Egypt
 - 1) Egyptian circumcision was performed as a prenuptial rite, reserved mostly for the wealthy, and was for the purpose of enhanced pleasure (females also)
 - 2) Egyptian circumcision was only a "dorsal incision" and was not the removal of the foreskin
 - (a) This probably explains Josh 5:2-3 and the "reproach" of Egypt
 - 3) In this way of rolling off reproach, circumcision pictured the removal of sin
 - (a) Josh 24:14- "Serve in sincerity and put away the gods you have formerly served" (as in the fleshly lusts involved in Egyptian circ. Rites)

IV. Circumcision's deeper meaning

- A) Deut 10:16- Circumcision of the heart, as in Deut. proves that circumcision always had a deeper significance than simply the outward rite
 1. Deut 30:6, Jer 4:4- Circumcision then was to be an outward sign of an inward reality
 - i. Rom 9:6-8- But all who were physically circumcised were not in the true Israel
 - a) Where circumcision did not represent the actual removal of the person's sins by justification by faith, that person now falls under a worse curse and is "cut off"
 - 1) Gal 5:12- "I wish they were 'cut off' (amputated) that now trouble you"
 - 2) Phil 3:2- Beware of the "concision" (mutilation)
 - 3) 1 Cor 7:18- Become not "uncircumcised" (drawn on)