**Sermon Title: Old Testament Illustrations of Justification by Faith Alone, Part 2**

**Sermon Text: Romans 4:9-12**

**Sermon Purpose: To call the hearer to a biblical understanding of justification by faith alone.**

**Sermon Purpose: There are 3 aspects related to the subject of circumcision.**

**Introduction: “**The Jewish apocryphal *Book of Jubilees* declares: ‘And every one that is born, the flesh of whose foreskin is not circumcised on the eighth day, Abraham, for he belongs to the children of destruction; nor is there moreover any sign on him that he is the Lord’s but (he is destined) to be destroyed and slain from the earth. (15:25ff)’

Many Jews believed that salvation was based on their obedience to God in being circumcised, and that, therefore, their eternal security rested in that rite. In his commentary on the *Book of Moses*, Rabbi Menachem wrote, ‘Our Rabbins [rabbis] have said that no circumcised man will ever see hell’ (fol. 43, col. 3). Circumcision was considered such a mark of God’s favor that it was taught that if a Jew had practiced idolatry his circumcision must first be removed before he could go down to hell. …

The *Jalkut Rubem* taught that ‘Circumcision saves from hell’ (num. 1), and the Midrash Millim that ‘God swore to Abraham that no one who was circumcised should be sent to hell’ (fol. 7, col. 2). The book *Akedath Jizehak* taught that ‘Abraham sits before the gate of hell, and does not allow that nay circumcised Israelite should enter there’ (fol. 54, col. 2).

Such beliefs were so strong in Judaism that many of them were carried over into Christianity by Jewish converts in the early church. …The unanimous decision, expressed in a letter sent to all the churches, was that obedience to Mosaic ritual, including circumcision, was not necessary for salvation (see Acts 15:19-29).

…Yet the Holy Spirit had revealed to him, and the Jerusalem council had acknowledged, that neither circumcision nor any other ceremony or human act, no matter how divinely ordained, could bring salvation. Circumcision had never saved a Jew and it could never save a Gentile (Rom. 2:25-29). …

A person who trusts in circumcision, or in any other ceremony or work, nullifies the work of Christ on his behalf. … ‘For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision neams anything, but faith working through love.’ (Gal. 5:6).

In the region of Phrygia, which bordered Galatia, the dominant pagan religion involved the worship of Cybele. The Cybelene priests normally castrated themselves as an act of sacrificial devotion, and that is perhaps the mutilation to which Paul refers in Galatians 5:12. …

The Judaizers – those who claimed that a Christian, Gentile as well as Jew, had to keep the law of Moses in order to be saved (see Acts 15:5). … ‘Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ’ (Gal. 6:12). …

Genesis 17:10-14 makes clear that the act of circumcision was a God-given mark of His covenant with Abraham and his descendants, the Jews. It was on the basis of that passage that the rabbis taught, and most Jews believed, that obedience to that rite was the means of pleasing God and becoming right with Him. But Paul uses that very passage to demonstrate that, to the contrary, Abraham was not made righteous before God by his circumcision but that when he was given the command of circumcision he had already been declared righteous….

The relevance of this basic truth for our own day is great. Although few people, even Jews, now believe that circumcision brings salvation, countless millions firmly trust in some other form of religious ceremony or activity to make them right with God.

Among those claiming the name of Christ, the Roman Catholic church is by far the greatest offender. Throughout its history it has taught salvation by human works, made effective through the mediation of the Catholic priesthood.

In his book *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (ST. Louis: B. Herder, 1962), Dr. Ludwig Ott explains the cardinal teachings of Roman Catholicism in regard to salvation and spiritual blessing.

Ott defines a sacrament by the Roman Catechism (II I,8) as ‘a thing perceptible to the senses, which on the ground of Divine institution possesses the power of effecting and signifying sanctity and righteousness’ (p. 326). He goes on to say that the sacraments confer grace immediately without the mediation of a person’s faith (p. 326) and that the sacraments confer sanctifying grace on the receivers (p. 332). Since sacramental rites confer regeneration, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life, ‘for the dispensing of this grace it is necessary that the minister accomplish the Sacramental Sign in the proper manner’ (p. 343). Roman Catholicism maintains that neither orthodox belief nor moral worthiness on the part of the recipient is necessary for the validity of a sacrament (p. 345).”

[John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Romans 1-8*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1991, pp. 248-250]

**I. The blessedness of justification by faith covers all who believe. V.9**

**II. The blessedness of justification by faith credited to all who believe. V.10-11a**

**III. The blessedness of justification by faith is effective for all who believe. V.11b-12**

**I. The blessedness of justification by faith covers all who believe. V.9**

Paul anticipates the question that Jews would be asking at this point in his argument: “If Abraham was justified by his faith alone, why did God demand circumcision of Abraham and all his descendants?”

The covenant that God made with Abraham was not established based on circumcision. When Abraham was first given the covenant promise, he was only seventy-five

[**Genesis 12:1** Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. **2** I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.  **3** I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." **4** So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram *was* seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. **5** Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. **6** Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites *were* then in the land. ].

Circumcision came at least 14 years after Abraham was declared righteous but also twenty-four years after he first entered into a covenant relationship with God. Abraham received the covenant promise by faith, while he was an uncircumcised Gentile.

It might seem to some that God’s blessing was only for the circumcised since Davids

[**Psalm 32:1** Blessed *is he whose* transgression *is* forgiven, *Whose* sin *is* covered. **2** Blessed *is* the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit *there is* no deceit. **3** When I kept silent, my bones grew old Through my groaning all the day long. **4** For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah]

was written by a Jew for the Jewish people.

Paul returns to his key text in [**Genesis 15:6** And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.] and showed that the crediting of righteousness to Abraham took place when he was uncircumcised, so God’s blessing is also for Gentiles who believe.

**II. The blessedness of justification by faith credited to all who believe. V.10-11a**

A. Circumcision was a **sign** of faith and righteousness.

Paul said circumcision was a physical racial mark of identity for His people. Even under the New Covenant, Paul had no objection to a Jew being circumcised, as long as the act was seen in the light.

**Acts 16:3** Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took *him* and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.

B. Circumcision was a **mark** of God’s covenant.

It set Abraham’s descendants apart as uniquely His chosen people, the Hebrews, or Jews as they became known during Babylonian Exile.

**Joshua 5:2** At that time the LORD said to Joshua, "Make flint knives for yourself, and circumcise the sons of Israel again the second time."

C. Circumcision was a **seat** of righteousness by faith.

Every time the act of circumcision was performed God’s people were to be reminded of God’s righteousness that Abraham had, and all other believers have, through faith, completely apart from circumcision.

A sign points to something, whereas a seal guarantees something. Circumcision was the authentication that God’s covenant promises would be fulfilled.

**Deuteronomy 30:6** "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

**Jeremiah 3:3** Therefore the showers have been withheld, And there has been no latter rain. You have had a harlot's forehead; You refuse to be ashamed. **4** Will you not from this time cry to Me,`My father, You *are* the guide of my youth?

**Jeremiah 9:24** But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I *am* the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD. **25** "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will punish all *who are* circumcised with the uncircumcised-- **26** "Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all *who are* in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all *these* nations *are* uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel *are* uncircumcised in the heart."

Every male child of Israel was a testimony that men’s hearts need spiritual circumcision, or cleansing.

Circumcision was a sign and a seal. It marked out a man as part of the nation of Israel. It was also to be a seal of the righteousness a man had received by faith.

**III. The blessedness of justification by faith is effective for all who believe. V.11b-12**

The timing of Abraham’s circumcision enabled him to be the spiritual father and model for justification by faith to both the circumcision Jew and the uncircumcised Gentile. (Jesus’ Baptism)

In a similar way baptism symbolizes a believer’s death and resurrection with Christ.

Communion symbolizes His redemption on our behalf, which we are to commemorate until He comes again. Neither act has salvation merit in itself.

**Romans 2:28** For he is not a Jew who *is one* outwardly, nor *is* circumcision that which *is* outward in the flesh; **29** but *he is* a Jew who *is one* inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise *is* not from men but from God.

Abraham received circumcision after he was reckoned righteous in order that he might be the father of all who believed uncircumcised or circumcised. Racially Abraham is the father of all Jews spiritually, he is the father of both believing Gentiles and of believing Jews, because of imputed righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ, therefore they follow the steps of faith of Abraham.

Abraham was the physical father of the Hebrew nation but his greatest legacy was his example of faith. Jews and Gentiles alike can follow in the footsteps of Abraham’s faith.