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Sermon Notes

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## **Abraham's Circumcision: Sign and Seal, Not Source**

### **Romans 4:9-12**

#### **I. Paul's Genius: Total Concentration**

A. Napoleon & Churchill

B. Paul also

1. Total concentration on Christ
2. Total concentration on heaven
3. Total concentration on pure doctrine

C. Here: Again and again on justification by faith ALONE apart from works

#### **II. Overview of Romans 4:9-12: Justification & Circumcision**

A. Jewish mindset on circumcision: "Children of Abraham"

1. Basis of right relationship with God: "Abraham is our father"...COVENANT
  - a. circumcision meant inclusion in the covenant
  - b. covenant guarantees acceptance by God
  - c. therefore: circumcision the BASIS of right relationship
  - d. without circumcision NO SALVATION
2. All the world divided into two categories: circumcised & uncircumcised
3. Gentiles as such: excluded (unless they convert)
  - a. Gentile "dogs" on the outside
  - b. Gentile conversion possible... baptism & circumcision required!
  - c. BUT even then, not permitted to call Abraham "father"

B. Key question: The Relationship between Justification & Circumcision (vs. 9)

1. This “blessedness” = justification
  - a. vs. 6-8 sins ARE NOT IMPUTED
  - b. vs. 3 God’s righteousness IS IMPUTED
2. Key question: how does circumcision factor in
3. Most Jews had already settled this issue!
4. Problem: Some Christians misunderstood
  - a. Galatians
  - b. Acts 15

C. Paul’s Answer: Abraham’s Experience

1. Abraham’s status when justified: uncircumcised
  - a. in effect, Abraham, the father of the Jews, was a “Gentile” when declared righteous
  - b. Scripture: Genesis 15 & 17

***Genesis 15:5-6 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-- if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.***

***Genesis 17:9-14 Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. <sup>10</sup> This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup> For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner--those who are not your offspring. <sup>13</sup> Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup> Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."***

***Genesis 17:24 "Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised."***

2. Key issue: chronology

Some Christian scholars believe there was a 12 year span between the promise of Genesis 15 (when Abraham was justified) and his circumcision. Jewish rabbis believed it was 29 years... either way, for many years Abram walked as a justified, uncircumcised man!!

3. Conclusions:

- a. circumcision is NOT the basis of justification!! NOT ITS SOURCE
- b. faith is possible for both circumcised and uncircumcised people

D. Secondary question: Why then was circumcision given?

- 1. Question implied in vs. 11
- 2. Answer given in vss. 11-12
  - a. sign of righteousness of faith
  - b. seal of righteousness of faith
  - c. enablement of Abraham's fatherhood of BOTH circumcised & uncircumcised

### III. Why is Justification by Faith ALONE So Important?

A. Excludes boasting

***Luke 18:9-14 To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: <sup>10</sup> "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' <sup>13</sup> "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' <sup>14</sup> "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."***

- 1. Pride the root of our rebellion
- 2. Boasting the immediate fruit of pride
- 3. Boasting destroyed by this doctrine: justification by faith alone

4. NOTE: we MUST have this done
  - a. ours is a terribly BOASTFUL culture
  - b. examples abound

- 1) Boastfulness in athletics... pointing to oneself after scoring a key basket; gloating over opponent after tennis match; selfishness in negotiating contracts
- 2) Boastfulness in politics: "negative advertising" a problem... even worse is boastfulness... "I alone can solve these many problems"
- 3) Boastfulness in talk shows: the arrogant host, the clever one-liner put-down
- 4) Boastfulness in bumper stickers: in your face pride

5. Basic idea: nothing you do can in any way improve your standing with God... you must simply receive it by faith alone as a free gift; VERY HUMBLING!!!

B. Ensures imputed righteousness

1. Righteousness from God available

***Romans 1:17 "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed..."***

2. HOWEVER... this righteousness from God only given to humble faith

***Romans 1:17 "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed FROM FAITH TO FAITH..."***

***Romans 3:21-22 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.***

3. Paul MUST emphasize this again and again, so that we may let go our works
4. Paul wants to give you a blessing!!!
  - a. total forgiveness of all sins
  - b. perfect righteousness in the sight of God
5. Reliance on works for these two guarantee you will never receive either one

C. Explains relationship between faith and works

1. For Jews, circumcision a basic act of obedience
  - a. God clearly commanded all Jews to do this
  - b. refusal to circumcise your infant sin an act of rebellion against God
2. Constant misunderstanding about relationship between faith & works
  - a. Genesis 15: Covenant promises made by grace alone from God to Abraham
  - b. Genesis 22: Covenant promises SEEM to be based on Abraham's obedience

***Genesis 22:15-18 The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time<sup>16</sup> and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son,<sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies,<sup>18</sup> and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."***

3. "Strife" between Paul and James: Abraham key witness for both Rom. 4 & James 2
4. Paul's explanation of the relationship

***vs. 11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.***

- a. circumcision a "sign" of righteousness of faith

Word "sign" means outward visible symbol of inner reality of faith... circumcision was a "sign" of Abraham's righteousness of faith

- b. circumcision a "seal" of righteousness of faith

Word "seal" means outward evidence of inner reality... vindicating proof

***1 Corinthians 9:1-2 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? <sup>2</sup> Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.***

Was Paul an "apostle" before he led the Corinthians to faith in Christ? Of course... the conversion of the Corinthians did not MAKE Paul an apostle, but it was outward, visible evidence of his apostleship

Question: would Paul have been an apostle without any outward visible seal?  
Absurd question... for the fruit of his ministry was guaranteed by the reality of his call!!

So also with Abraham... clearly justified years before circumcision... God gave him a command to be circumcised, and he obeyed

### **Biblical principle; the same faith that justifies also obeys, producing good works**

So also with your good works of faith!

5. Circumcision a **sign** and **seal**, not the **source** of Abraham's right-standing with God

D. Empowers worldwide evangelism

*vs. 11 So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.*

1. Paul clearly referring to Gentile believers here
2. Circumcision battle fought and won... justification has nothing to do with circumcision
3. Circumcision merely one regulation identifying Jews as a separate nation
  - a. also dietary rules...

*Deuteronomy 14:3-10 Do not eat any detestable thing. <sup>4</sup> These are the animals you may eat: the ox, the sheep, the goat, <sup>5</sup> the deer, the gazelle, the roe deer, the wild goat, the ibex, the antelope and the mountain sheep. <sup>6</sup> You may eat any animal that has a split hoof divided in two and that chews the cud. <sup>7</sup> However, of those that chew the cud or that have a split hoof completely divided you may not eat the camel, the rabbit or the coney. Although they chew the cud, they do not have a split hoof; they are ceremonially unclean for you. <sup>8</sup> The pig is also unclean; although it has a split hoof, it does not chew the cud. You are not to eat their meat or touch their carcasses. <sup>9</sup> Of all the creatures living in the water, you may eat any that has fins and scales. <sup>10</sup> But anything that does not have fins and scales you may not eat; for you it is unclean.*

NOT for sanitation but for separation!! [Illus. Missionary in Alaska, collects road kill]

***Deuteronomy 14:21 Do not eat anything you find already dead. You may give it to an alien living in any of your towns, and he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner. But you are a people holy to the LORD your God.***

***Mark 7:19 "Jesus declared all foods "clean.""***

b. hair styles

***Lev. 19:27 Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard."***

c. clothing regulations

***Deuteronomy 22:11-12 Do not wear clothes of wool and linen woven together. Make tassels on the four corners of the cloak you wear.***

d. agricultural regulations

***Deuteronomy 22:9-10 Do not plant two kinds of seed in your vineyard; if you do, not only the crops you plant but also the fruit of the vineyard will be defiled. Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together.***

This makes the gospel non-transportable!!

Illus: 1962, Don Richardson arrived in Netherlands New Guinea (now called Irian Jaya) to work with the stone-age, headhunting Sawi tribe with his wife & 7-month old child: in *Peace Child*, he tells of village chieftan Hato:

Skilled with a bow, killed a wild boar, delighted to eat it; tribe loved treachery, saw Judas as a hero, Jesus as weak... eventually came to Christ as Richardson explained the simple gospel through the analogy of the Peace Child, part of the Sawi ritual for making peace between warring tribes

Could Hato, the pig-eating stone-age headhunter be saved if it meant full submission to all the laws of Moses?? Hair cuts, clothing, farming rules, traveling three times a year to Jerusalem??

We are free from all those cumbersome regulations... the gospel travels light, with no equipment but faith

***Romans 10:9 if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.***

Clear power for us to take this portable message with us

E. Enables final unity between Jew and Gentile

***vs. 12 And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.***

1. Paul refers to Jews who are truly Jews... believers in the Messiah Jesus Christ
2. Evidence of this... they “walk in the footsteps of faith” of “Gentile” Abraham

Word means “walk in line”... image, single file...

Illus.: child stepping in footprints of father in snow

- a. Abraham lived between 12 & 29 years as an uncircumcised believer
  - b. circumcision didn’t change his heart at all!
  - c. he lived moment by moment in faith & obedience to God
  - d. sacrifice of Isaac demonstration of his heart for God
  - e. true Jews have THIS KIND of faith
3. Three clear statements from Paul on circumcision

If you want to be a “true child of Abraham,” a “true Jew,” then follow Abraham’s faith, not his circumcision.

***Galatians 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.***

***Galatians 6:15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.***

Once that new creation is in place, you express obedience to God’s commands out of a heart of love: love for God, love fore neighbor

***1 Corinthians 7:19 Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.***

Your obedience to God's commands is not the **source** of your justification, but it is the **sign** and **seal** of it... thus you are acting just like your Father Abraham

## IV. Summary and Applications

### A. Summary

- Paul's total concentration on one thing... justification by faith ALONE
- Jewish obstacle: circumcision... Paul's example: Abraham
- Abraham justified first; circumcision came years later; Abraham a GENTILE believer
- Circumcision a sign and seal of righteousness he had by faith
- Justification by faith alone apart from circumcision has implications
  - Excludes boasting
  - Ensures imputed righteousness
  - Explains relationship between faith and works
  - Empowers worldwide evangelism
  - Enables final unity between Jew and Gentile

### B. Applications

- A Lesson on Right Boasting: "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord!" Your salvation is all of Him, not because you did some religious ritual
- A Lesson on Ritual Baptism: Your baptism doesn't save you any more than Abraham's circumcision saved him... both were commanded by God, both acts of obedience, both signs/seals of righteousness by faith

**DON'T RELY ON A RELIGIOUS RITUAL, EVEN IF GOD COMMANDED IT!!!** Baptism doesn't save, faith in Christ saves... obedience is evidence of faith

- A Lesson on Radical Obedience: Follow in the footsteps of Abraham's faith... faith makes footprints!! Are you following Abraham's? Are you leaving any footprints of faith for your children to follow

- A Lesson on Worldwide Evangelism: Are you living to take the gospel to the ends of the earth? This gospel travels light and simple and far and wide... God made this gospel the only light for the lost... are you praying for the advance of missions? Are you praying over whether God has called you to leave your country and your people and go to some promised land where you can preach the gospel??