

## 12. Learning the Purpose of Circumcision and the Law

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how Abraham and David were justified and made right in the sight of God. We saw that they both had righteousness put to their accounts totally apart from their works. In fact, we saw that God put righteousness to the account of David at the time that he confessed his sin to the Lord. However, Abraham and David were both circumcised as a sign of the covenant that God had made with Abraham. Today, we are going to see that Abraham had faith put to his account as righteousness long before he was circumcised. This is important for all Gentiles to understand so we want to help our children understand it clearly so that they can help others.

In Romans 4:9-10, we read, “Does this blessedness then *come* upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.” We see that these verses raise an important question, especially since most of the Christians in Rome were Gentiles and had not been circumcised. As a result, Paul asked the question, can this blessedness come only on those people who have been circumcised? He followed this with a second question, can this blessedness also come on the uncircumcised? The answer to this question was very important for the Christians in Rome to understand since most of them were Gentiles. The same is true for our children today.

In our last topic, we saw that Paul quoted Genesis 15:6 in Romans 4:3. Genesis 15:6 says, “And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” As we look at that whole chapter in Genesis, we see that God put righteousness to the account of Abraham because Abraham believed the promise that God would multiply his descendants like the stars of heaven. That promise came to Abraham at a time when he did not even have any children. Now, we learn another important lesson. We see that this was at least 14 years before Abraham was circumcised because Ishmael had not even been conceived yet. Genesis 17:24-25 tell us, “Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.” As a result, Abraham had not been circumcised at the time that faith was put to his account as righteousness.

This is why Romans 4:11-12 says, “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised.” God had purposely put the faith of Abraham to his account as righteousness many years before Abraham was circumcised so that Abraham could be the father of all those who believe.

As a result, Abraham is called the father of all those who believe whether they are Jews or Gentiles. God did this so that we would all understand that God puts faith to the accounts of Gentiles who are not circumcised just as he puts faith to the account of Jews who are circumcised. God wanted to make it very clear that circumcision had nothing to do with the fact that God places

righteousness to the account of every person as a result of faith and has nothing to do with circumcision.

This is a key lesson that we want to help our children understand because of the fact that Abraham is called the father of faith. In our last topic, we saw that one of the times that Abraham demonstrated his faith was when he left his father to go to the land that God had promised to him. Genesis 12:4 tells us, “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.” Here, we see that this example of faith happened twenty-four years before Abraham was circumcised. As a result, Abraham had shown his faith in God for many years by the time that he was circumcised.

This is important to understand since we see that we also walk in the steps of the faith which Abraham had while still uncircumcised. Hebrews 11:8-10 says, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.” We want to help our children understand this example so that they can learn to walk by faith. 1 Peter 2:11 says, “Beloved, I beg *you* as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.” When our children understand that we are also strangers and pilgrims on this earth, they realize the importance of abstaining from fleshly lusts because their vision is on the future promise.

Romans 4:13 says, “For the promise that he would be the heir of the world *was* not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.” In Genesis 12:3, we read, “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.” This last statement, that in Abraham all of the families of the earth shall be blessed, was the promise to Abraham that Christ would come through the family of Abraham. That is why it says that the promise was made to his “seed”, a particular descendent, and not to “seeds”, which would refer to all of the descendants of Abraham.

God wanted to make it clear that the promise that Christ would be the descendent of Abraham that would provide salvation was made before Abraham received circumcision. This also meant that Christ was promised to Abraham several hundred years before the Law was given to Moses. This will help our children to understand why Abraham is called the father of faith. Abraham showed his faith in the promises of God long before his descendants received the Law. Abraham also showed this faith many years before he received the covenant of circumcision. As a result, we can help our children understand why Abraham is the father of faith. He believed the promises of God and God put that belief to his account as righteousness. In the same way, when we as Gentiles place our faith in Christ, the Father places that to our account as righteousness.

That is why Romans 4:14-15 goes on to say, “For if those who are of the law *are* heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law *there is* no transgression.” The rich young ruler thought that he could inherit eternal life because he had kept the law. Luke 18:18 tells us the statement that he made to Christ. That verse

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says, “Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’” Here, we see that he wanted to know if there were any other goods works that he needed to do to earn eternal life. Christ asked him if he had kept the commandments that talk about the relationship of man to other people. In Luke 18:21, we read, “And he said, ‘All these things I have kept from my youth.’” However, when Christ told him to get rid of his idol (money) and come and follow Christ the rich young ruler went away sorrowful.

If that young man could have kept the law perfectly, then he would not have needed faith. However, it was impossible for him to keep the law. In fact, if any person other than Christ could have kept the law perfectly, it would have been unnecessary for God to give the promise to Abraham and put righteousness to the account of Abraham. The rich young ruler showed that he lacked faith by choosing to turn away from Christ, because his riches were more important to him than faith in Christ.

Instead of perfectly keeping the law, the law showed the rich young ruler that he was facing the wrath of God. The part of the law that Christ first mentioned to the rich young ruler was the part of the law that talked about the relationship of man to other people. The young man actually thought that he had kept that part of the law. However, when Christ asked him to get rid of his idol and follow Christ instead, he immediately turned away from Christ. John 3:18 says, “‘He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.’” The rich young man showed that he was condemned already because he was not ready to believe in Christ.

The purpose of the law is to show that mankind is guilty before God. The word that is translated “transgression” means *to disregard or to violate the law*. If there would have been no law, it would be impossible to disregard or violate the law. However, the law was given. It shows that all are guilty because they have disregarded and violated the law. That is why Romans 3:19-20 said, “Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.” No person can be justified or declared righteous before God by their own efforts, because no one has kept the law perfectly. We each have to realize that we are guilty before God.

We want to show our children how to clearly explain that the purpose of circumcision and the purpose of the law were not to make a person righteous before God. We want to help them learn to explain to every person that the only way to be righteous is to have God put righteousness to our account when we place our faith in Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to lead people to faith in Christ.