

DOCTRINE OF CIRCUMCISION

September 23, 1993

- I. Definition: Circumcision entails the surgical removal of the foreskin of a male person as a religious ritual. Female circumcision involves the surgical removal of the clitoris. It was never a practice authorized in the Bible. It destroys the female's capacity to derive pleasure from sex and, as such, amounts to mutilation. Certain societies practice it to insure marital fidelity among their women. The Greek word is περιτομή (*peritome*; verb is περιτέμνω, *peritemno*) and means, literally, "to cut around". The noun is used in reference to the Jewish people (i.e., "the circumcision", cf. Gal.2:7) who have practiced it since the days of the first Jew, Abraham.
- II. God first established circumcision as the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, Gen.17:10-17.
 - A. Abraham (and his entire male household) was circumcised when he was 99 years old.
 - B. From that day forward all Jewish male children were to be circumcised on the 8th day after birth, Gen.17:12.
 - C. It was commanded as a part of the Mosaic Covenant, Lev.12:3.
 - D. Non-Jews could not participate in the feast of Passover unless they were first circumcised, Ex.12:43,48.
 - E. Moses' failure to circumcise his son almost cost him his life, Ex.4:24-26.
 - F. Failure to be circumcised resulted in excommunication from Jewish society, Gen.17:14.
 - G. The reversionistic Exodus Generation failed to have their sons circumcised in Egypt, Josh.5:37.
 - H. Jesus Christ was circumcised on the 8th day in compliance with the Law, Lk.2:21.
- III. Circumcision is merely a token of the reality of the need for an inner and spiritual circumcision not made with human hands, but by the Spirit of God, according to Deut.10:16; 30:6; Jer.4:4; and Rom.2:28,29.
 - A. Deut.10:16 constitutes a command to circumcise the heart and not to stiffen the neck, indicating that positive volition to the Law demands the laying aside of that which is useless (analogous to the removal of the foreskin).
 - B. Deut.30:6 indicates that it is God who circumcises the heart of man.
 - C. Jer.4:4 warns the Jews that if they will circumcise their hearts, God's wrath will not fall.
 - D. In Rom.2:28,29 Paul affirms that a true (complete) Jew is one who has circumcision of the heart.
 - E. And conversely, that physical circumcision apart from spiritual renders the physical as uncircumcision, cf. Rom.2:25.
- IV. The immediate spiritual significance of circumcision is the isolation of the ISTA/OSN, as taught in Col.2:11 "*and in Him (positional sanctification\union with Christ) you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh (analogous to the foreskin) by the circumcision of Christ.*"
 - A. All who are believers in Jesus Christ have isolated the OSN (cp. Gal.5:24, where the analogy is crucifixion).
 - B. Hence, all who are believers constitute "*the true circumcision*", Phil.3:3.
 - C. Furthermore, the ritual is not binding in the present dispensation (1Cor.7:19; Gal.6:15), just the abiding reality made possible by the salvation, rebound, and maturity adjustments to God.
- V. Circumcision (along with any other legal work) was never intended as a requirement for salvation, as seen in the case study of Abraham in Rom.4:9-12.
 - A. Paul shows legalistic Jews that Abraham was declared righteous/justified while still "uncircumcised".
 - B. And therefore, all who follow "in the steps of faith" (three adjustments to God) have Abraham as their father.
 - C. This includes believing Jews as well as uncircumcised Gentiles, Rom.3:29,30.
- VI. Believing Jewish legalists, following their unbelieving counterparts in Judaism, sought to impose circumcision upon the early Gentile Christians, Act.15:15.

- A. This first occurred when Paul returned from his first missionary journey in Galatia, cf. Act.14:27,28.
- B. The Judaizers came from Jerusalem to Antioch (large Gentile community) and infiltrated their ranks.
- C. They first sought for social segregation between Jewish and Gentile Christians, Gal.2:4,5,11-14.
- D. Meanwhile their disciples moved in on the newly founded Gentile churches of Galatia and persuaded them that salvation was not by faith alone, cf. Gal.1:6,7; 3:1.
- E. Immediately upon hearing of this Paul wrote and sent off the Galatian letter.
- F. After much heated debate at Antioch (Act.15:2) a council was called in Jerusalem to resolve the matter (Act.15:6-12).
- G. The clear verdict of James, presiding over the Council, was that Gentiles are not required to be circumcised.
- H. Hence, the apostles and early Church affirmed to posterity that salvation was "*by grace through faith*", totally apart from any works, cf. Eph.2:8,9.

VII. Review of the main points relative to circumcision.

- A. Removal of the foreskin signifies the reality of isolation of the sin nature.
- B. The foreskin represents the OSN with its propensity for sin, human good, and human viewpoint.
- C. The foreskin of the heart is initially cut off at the point of salvation.
- D. The HS isolates at salvation (and at each subsequent application of Rebound) "the body of the flesh" or spiritual foreskin of the heart/soul, Rom.2:29; Col.2:11,13.
- E. We should beware of legalists who substitute ritual for reality, cp. Phil.3:2.
- F. The uncircumcised state represents either an unsaved and/or unclean condition, cp. Lev.26:41 (Jews in captivity); 1Sam.17:26,36 (Goliath); Jer.9:25,26; Ezek.32:18-32; 44:7.

Phil.3:3 "*for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory/boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.*"