

## Doctrine of Circumcision

### A Survey of Circumcision in the New Testament

#### Part 2

1. Circumcision was given to the descendants of Abraham in order to be a sign between God and Abraham. The ritual was to be performed on the eighth day.
  - *Genesis 17:11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.*
  - *Genesis 17:12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.*
2. A distinction was always made between the circumcision of the body, and the circumcision of the heart, not made with hands.
3. The circumcision of the heart was not a usual characteristic of the Jews, which is why national Israel had to be exhorted time and again to circumcise their hearts.
  - *Jeremiah 9:26 Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.*
4. A solution was promised in the Old Testament to eliminate this tension.
5. However, in the New Testament, the tension was initially underscored when Gentiles were converted and united in worship with Jewish converts to Christ.
  - *Galatians 2:14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? 15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*
6. Turning to Romans 15, Paul notes that Christ was a minister to the circumcision.
  - *Romans 15:8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers: 9 And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. 10 And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.*

**Special Note.**

The earthly ministry of Christ did focus attention on the circumcision. *Matthew 15:24 But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

7. The next passage is found in 1 Corinthians where circumcision is declared to be “nothing”, as far as a person’s standing before God. Gospel obedience is the true sign of a right relationship with the Lord, not a physical sign in the body.
  - *1 Corinthians 7:17 But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. 18 Is any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.*
8. The next verse concerning circumcision is found in Galatians 2, where a historical reference is given concerning a Greek convert named Titus, who was not compelled to be circumcised.
  - *Galatians 2:3 But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: 4 And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: 5 To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.*
9. Beginning in Galatians 2:7, Paul draws a distinction between his ministry and the ministry of Peter.
  - *Galatians 2:7 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; 8 (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) 9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. 10 Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.*

**Special Note.**

Paul had already established his ministry to the Gentiles when writing to the Romans. *Romans 11:13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:*

10. In Galatians 2:11, Paul recounted his confrontation of Peter over the circumcision.

- *Galatians 2:11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. 12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. 13 And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. 14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?*

11. Those who insist on circumcision for salvation are taught that Christ shall then be of no profit to them, for they have placed themselves under the Law and have become a debtor to do the whole Law. In other words, a works salvation has replaced salvation by grace alone, in Christ alone.

*Galatians 5:2 Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. 3 For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. 4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. 5 For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. 6 For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. 7 Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? 8 This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. 9 A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. 10 I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be. 11 And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased.*

12. In Christ, circumcision means nothing. It is not circumcision in the body that is important, but a new creature in Christ.

- *Galatians 6:12 As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. 13 For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. 14 But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. 15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. 16 And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.*

13. Turning to Ephesians 2, the issue of circumcision is again discussed. There is a circumcision made with hands, referring to the human hand, but it means nothing without Christ.

- *Ephesians 2:11 Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*

14. In Philippians 3, the resolution of the tension between the circumcision of the hand, and the circumcision of the heart, begins. The real circumcision is that which is found in those who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus.

- *Philippians 3:1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. 2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. 3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. 4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: 5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, 9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:*

15. The truly circumcised, says Paul, will have three distinct characteristics.

- The truly circumcised will worship God.
- The truly circumcised will rejoice in Christ.
- The truly circumcised will have no confidence in the flesh.

*Romans 2:28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

16. There is to be no confidence in circumcision, in fleshly bloodlines, in infant baptism, in traditions of men, but the confidence of a Christian is in Christ. That is the distinguishing characteristic

17. The tension between the circumcision of the hand, and the circumcision of the heart, continues to be set forth in Scripture, and resolved in Christ. There is a circumcision made without hands.

- *Colossians 2:8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. 9 For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. 10 And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: 11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:*

*12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;*

*14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; 15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. 16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: 17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.*

18. Here is “Israel” circumcised, not by man, but by God, according to promise. The true “Jew” is the Jew that has been circumcised in the heart. The true mark of the spiritual Israel, the church, is the circumcision of the heart. The baptism of the professing believer is intended to reflect an acknowledged faith, and understanding of the circumcision of the heart. Baptism is not to be a mere ritual, without any corresponding reality.
19. The circumcision NOT made by hands, the circumcision of promise, the circumcision of Christ, is related to baptism. But this circumcision not made by hands demands a new heart. The new heart is based upon forgiveness of sins, “having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col. 2:13).
20. Circumcision did not replace baptism, but those who were baptized received circumcision, not of the flesh, but of the heart. Those who received faith were baptized. Those who received the forgiveness of sins were baptized. Baptism is identified with the circumcision of the heart.
21. In terms of the new creation, circumcision is not important.
  - *Colossians 3:11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.*
22. Paul knew how destructive the mixture of Law and grace could be to the gospel. Having been delivered from the bondage of the Law, he did not want anyone to return to it.
  - *Titus 1:10 For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision.*
23. Several conclusions can be made about circumcision.
  - Circumcision is a symbolic ritual, instituted by God in order to confirm His covenant with Abraham.
  - Circumcision identified Abraham’s physical posterity, and the fulfilment of that part of the Abraham Covenant, whereby God promised to Abraham a seed.

- Circumcision was divided into two facets. There was a physical circumcision, made by hands, on the body. There was a spiritual circumcision, made by God, on the heart.
  - Circumcision, that was physical, effected a change on the secret part of the body. Circumcision, that was spiritual, effected a change on the heart by the removal of a disposition of defiance and unbelief.
  - Circumcision, which is spiritual, is produced in the hearts of those who believe in Christ, making those who have been spiritually circumcised the spiritual posterity of Abraham.
  - There are two Israel's, two seeds, two circumcisions, two kinds of Jews. There are two communities in covenant with God, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Both are marked out by being circumcised.
  - The distinguishing mark of the member of the Old Covenant is circumcision of the flesh, a circumcision made by hands. The distinguishing mark of the New Covenant is a circumcision made without hands, on the heart.
  - Circumcision teaches that there must be a change in the secret place, in order to be part of the covenant of God.
24. In a comprehensive survey of the New Testament passages on circumcision, there is not a single passage that suggests that baptism replaces circumcision, in any form, or for any reason.
25. In fact, take all the passages in the Authorized Version (KJV) that deal with circumcision, and there will not be found any passage that teaches in a plain and simple way that baptism is the replacement of circumcision.