

TRUE AND ACCEPTABLE CIRCUMCISION

Colossians 2:11

Our text revealed that there are two types of circumcision, one performed by human hands and the second performed by Christ. It described the greater benefit and blessings that comes from the circumcision of Christ. The lessons in this reference are the focus of our message today as we consider these three subtopics:

1. Divine mandate on Jewish circumcision
2. The goal of biblical circumcision
3. The necessity and surpassing benefit of spiritual circumcision

1. Divine mandate on Jewish circumcision

Colossians 2:11, Genesis 17:10-14, Leviticus 12:3, Joshua 5:2, 8-9, Ezekiel 44:9

Our text's reference to circumcision made by human hands refer to the rites of circumcision which God mandated Abraham and by extension all Israelites in all generations to have. Performed as a ritual of removing a male child or adult's foreskin (prepuce), it was an external sign of the covenant that God made with Abraham in Genesis 12 to bless him and his descendants. It was the evidence of individual Israelite's subscription to the covenant, the expression of their faith in it and affirmation or attestation of their commitment to fulfil its obligation which is whole-hearted devotion to God and obedience to all His commandments.

Punishment of physical death on earth and eternal damnation hangs on the head of anyone born as an Israelite who is not circumcised Genesis 17:14. Thus and over time, physical circumcision or circumcision of the flesh became a symbol of Jewish identity, distinction, separation and peculiarity required for participation in Passover and entitling them to enjoy special political and religious favours from God Ezekiel 44:9. Are there Christian experiences today comparable to Jewish circumcision? To answer this question, we need to examine the goal of biblical circumcision.

2. The goal of Biblical circumcision

Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, Jeremiah 9:25-26, Romans 2:25, 28-29

Operationally, the word "*circumcision*" means "*cutting off*" or "*cutting away*". Even to the Jews, circumcision was more than a physical symbol. It was meant to be a physical testimony or signature of divine ownership, of one who fears the Lord, who is wholeheartedly consecrated to walk in all His ways. It was to be an external sign of inward presence of faith and grace. Circumcision as a concept as taught in the Bible and resonating in both Old and New Testament scriptures teaches on the need to renounce sin, conquer and subdue self and sinful nature, lusts and propensity to live lives that contravenes the word of God. Jews tried to do so but failed and were rejected by God.

Heart's circumcision was predicted to be the solution to Israel's incessant covenant infidelity. It also became clear that circumcision was a symbolic act like others such as blood sacrifice, sprinkling of water or bathing, laying on of hands, anointing with oil, fellowship by meals etc. They have deeper spiritual and far-reaching meaning and implications. Moses in Deuteronomy and the prophets in their writings pointed to the need for a spiritual operation in believers' heart comparable to Jewish physical circumcision but all encompassing. The experience, an operation in the human heart, performed not by human hand but by God through His Spirit will entirely transform a man's life and make him totally devoted to God.

3. The necessity and surpassing benefit of spiritual circumcision

Colossians 2:11, 1Corinthians 6:9, 10, Mark 7:20-23, Ezekiel 36:26-27, I Samuel 10:6-9

God has always had controversy with sinning and sinful men. It doesn't matter whether the sin is committed as a state of mind or an actual physical act. Sins like rage, anger, intoxication and drunkenness, revelling, fornication, adultery and idolatry, witchcraft, cursing, lying, bribery, murders, malice, gossips and slanders, stealing, greed and envy are obvious, and can be physically observed, others like the thoughts that motivated and inspires them, lusts, covetousness, hate, hypocrisy and selfish tendencies lies deep and buried in the heart; they defile and disqualifies from serious intimate fellowship and relationship with God here on earth and eventually in heaven. We must be freed from them. This is only possible through spiritual circumcision or circumcision of the heart because the heart of the matter is a matter of the heart. Life runs true to the heart. None can commit sin without first ruminating and incubating such sin in his heart.

True circumcision, acceptable circumcision, otherwise called circumcision of the heart or sanctification involves God cutting away things from our hearts; things that prevents us from fearing God, loving Him with all our hearts, serving Him whole-heartedly, obeying His principles and precepts including anything we love more than God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives that will prevent the doubts, dismays and disappointments we encounter daily in our relationship with God and with fellow humans from turning into bitterness and resentment. Heart circumcision affects our eyes and the things we see, our ears and the things we listen to, our lips and the things we say; indeed, hearts circumcision affects every area of our lives and being. It cuts away unbelief, sinful nature and tendencies. It establishes and authenticates our peculiarity and separation from all others in the world in the same way that physical circumcision does for Jews in the Old Testament. It reinforces our collective identity and our shared vision of eternal wellbeing in God's presence. We cannot do it by ourselves but God promised to do it for us. He will do it today if we allow Him and pray.