

DOCTRINE OF CIRCUMCISION

1. Definition:

Circumcision is the surgical act of cutting away part of the hood or foreskin (prepuce) from the male phallus. This surgery was instituted by God as a ritual and the sign of the covenant He made with Abraham and his descendents throughout their generations. It was also therefore a sign of the beginning of a new race of people, the Hebrews, later called Israelites or the Jewish people. (Gen. 17:1-14)

NOTE: While circumcision is practiced in other cultures for various reasons and in some cases on both males and females, it is only the male who is circumcised in Israel. Female circumcision is a barbaric rite usually associated with demonism.

2. Vocabulary:

- a. מול – mul – (Hebrew verb) – to cut around in a circle (Gen. 21:4)
- b. מול – mol – (Hebrew noun) – circumcision, or the front, or the front part of, always used as a preposition (Deut. 1:1)
- c. מואל – mo'al – (Hebrew preposition.) – before, in the presence of, opposite to, over against (Neh 12:38)
- d. מילה – mulah – (Hebrew noun) – circumcision (Ex. 4:26)
- e. περιτέμνω – peritemno – (Greek verb) – to circumcise, (Gal. 2:3; Col. 2:11)
- f. περιτομή – peritome – (Greek noun, f.) – circumcision (Gal. 5:12; Col. 2:11)

3. The origin and significance of Biblical circumcision:

- a. Abraham became the first Hebrew. The name Hebrew, עִבְרִי, 'iveri, is probably derived from the verb, עָבַר, 'avar' – “to pass over,” “to cross,” “to go beyond.” “Hebrew,” therefore, would mean “one from the other side” or “one who crosses over.”
- b. In Genesis 17:1-21 God removes Abram's sexual death at age 99 and replaces it with sexual prosperity. (Gen. 17:17)
- c. God changes Abram's name to Abraham; Abram meaning “exalted father” but Abraham meaning “father of many nations.” (Gen. 17:4; Heb. 11:11, 12; Rom. 4:17-21)
- d. God made an **unconditional covenant** with Abraham and his descendents and gave the ritual act of circumcision as the sign of this covenant. (Gen. 17:11)
This covenant is called the **Abrahamic Covenant** and is spelled out in detail in Gen. 12:1-3; 15:18; 17:1-18; 26:2-5; (Restated for Jacob: Gen. 28:13-15)
This covenant is amplified in three subsequent covenants:
 - (1) **Palestinian Covenant or Land Grant Covenant** – a Jewish homeland (Gen. 17:8, 19, 21; 26:2-5; Deut. 30:1-10)
 - (2) **Davidic Covenant** – a royal lineage to Messiah the King (Gen. 28:12-15; 32:24-29; 35:9-12; 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 89:4)

- (3) **New Covenant** (to Israel) – with eternal blessings (Gen. 17:1-21; Jer. 31:31)
- e. Therefore, circumcision becomes a physical act and ritual that portrays a spiritual significance, namely, the relationship between God and Abraham and Abraham's descendents forever.
4. The ramifications and continuation of circumcision:
- Abraham** – became the **father of a new race or ethnic group** at 99 years of age and was given a personal “unconditional covenant” by God. (Gen. 17:1-24)
 - Isaac** – became the son of the promise to Abraham. (Gen. 17:21; 21:1-8; Acts 7:8)
 - Jacob** – became the **father of the Israelites**. (Gen. 28:12-15; 32:24-28)
 - Moses** – became the **father of the nation of Israel**, and he was given the “national conditional covenant” known as the “Mosaic Covenant.” (Ex. 3:4-22; Ex. 6:7, 8; 19:1-6; 20:1-21; 24:3-7; 32:15-19; 34:1-5, 18-28; Levit. 12:3; John 1:17; 7:22)
5. Circumcision was a sign of submission and obedience to God's authority:
- Moral authority** – (Abrahamic Covenant – blessing by association)
 - Servants and foreigners not of Abraham's descendents who lived in the household and under the watch care of Abraham were all circumcised. (Gen. 17:10-14, 23-25)
 - All male children, whether descendents of Abraham or not, who lived in the household and under the watch care of Israel were all circumcised on the eighth day. (Gen. 17:12; Ex. 4:24-26)
 - Spiritual authority** – (Abrahamic Covenant – blessing by obedience)
 - Abraham was obedient in this blood ratified covenant by the circumcision in his flesh. He became totally dependent on God to provide him with the ability to procreate. (Gen. 17:1-11, 26; 21:1-4; Rom. 4:1-22)
 - Therefore, circumcision is an outward sign of an inward acceptance of God's promise. (Gen. 15:1-6; Rom. 2:25-29; 3:1-4)
 - Collective spiritual disobedience produces national discipline. The nation Israel is said to have uncircumcised ears (Jer. 6:10) and uncircumcised hearts. (Levit. 26:14-36, 41; Jer. 9:25, 26; Ezek. 44:6-9)
 - Collective spiritual obedience to God produces national blessing. (Levit. 26:1-13; Jer. 4:4; Deut. 10:15-17; 30:1-20, especially verse #6)
6. Circumcision is one of three great rituals in the Bible: circumcision, baptism, and communion.
- Circumcision:**
 - The circumcision of Abraham indicated the **faith he had** in God **before** he was circumcised. (Rom. 4:3, 11) This ritual was a **testimony** of Abraham's faith.

- (2) The circumcision of infants was a ritual that **identified them** with the **promises** made to Abraham and his descendents. (Gen. 17:12)
 - (3) Circumcision of unbelievers such as foreigners, servants, and non-Jews **identified them** with the **protective watch care** of the people of promise; and after Moses received the law, circumcision **identified them** with the **civil or moral law code**. (Codex #3 of the Mosaic Covenant)
 - (4) For those uncircumcised adult Jews and Gentiles who professed faith in the Lord God of Israel, circumcision became a **testimony** of that **conversion**.
- NOTE:** In each case above the ritual of circumcision had a corresponding reality.

b. **Baptism:**

- (1) While there were ritual washings in the Old Testament Levitical sacrificial system, baptism is primarily thought of as a New Testament ritual. (Heb. 6:1-2)
- (2) The ritual of water baptism is an **overt testimony** of the **inward spiritual reality** of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 10:47, 48)
- (3) Spirit baptism is **identification** with the Lord Jesus Christ in His spiritual death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and session. The baptism of the Holy Spirit enters us into union with Jesus Christ at the moment we believe in Jesus Christ as our personal savior. (Rom. 6:3, 4)

NOTE: See the Doctrine of Baptisms.

c. **Communion:**

- (1) Communion is **a memorial** to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross which provided our eternal salvation and **a promise** of His return for us at the resurrection of the church age saints, the rapture of the church. (1 Cor. 11:23-26; 15:51-53; John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 5:14-18)
- (2) Communion is also **a test** of our spiritual growth to maturity and our concentration on the pertinent doctrines of reconciliation. (Col. 1:20, 22; Eph. 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:18; Rom. 5:10)
- (3) In the church age we have the ritual of communion which is to be performed habitually or periodically as a memorial to God's salvation grace provided through Christ's death on the cross.
- (4) Communion is therefore similar to the host of Old Testament rituals which were to be performed with habitual and scheduled regularity as types and shadows of the person of Jesus Christ and His work on the cross.

7. Old Testament ritual versus New Testament ritual:

- a. The Old Testament ritual system parallels the New Testament ritual of communion:

Israel' Ritual System:

- (1) Many rituals
- (2) Periodical or habitual

Church Age Communion:

- (1) One ritual
- (2) Periodical or habitual

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| (3) Shadows and types of Christ | (3) Memorial to Christ, anticipates second advent |
| (4) Tests spiritual growth | (4) Tests spiritual growth |
| (5) Part of congregational worship | (5) Part of congregational worship |
| (6) Confession of sins | (6) Confession of sins |
| (7) Studying God's word | (7) Studying God's word |
| (8) Does not save | (8) Does not save |
| (9) Does not produce spirituality | (9) Does not produce spirituality |

b. Similarly the ritual of circumcision parallels the New Testament ritual of water baptism:

Physical Circumcision:

- (1) Ritual
- (2) Performed only once
- (3) Every male Jew
- (4) Overt sign of the Abrahamic Covenant
- (5) Overt sign of the new race – the Hebrew (Jew)
- (6) Public testimony
- (7) Cutting off flesh
- (8) Represents identification with God and the people of God
- (9) Represents spiritual circumcision
- (10) Does not save
- (11) Does not produce spirituality

Water Baptism:

- (1) Ritual
- (2) Performed only once
- (3) Every believer in Jesus Christ
- (4) Overt sign of the New Covenant
- (5) Overt sign of a new race – the Christian
- (6) Public testimony
- (7) Washing the flesh
- (8) Represents identification with Jesus Christ
- (9) Represents spirit baptism
- (10) Does not save
- (11) Does not produce spirituality

8. There is contrast, however, between ritual circumcision and its reality, spiritual circumcision: (Col 2:10-14)

Physical Circumcision:

- (1) External surgery, circumcision of the foreskin
- (2) Done by human hands
- (3) Part of the body, "the foreskin"
- (4) Abraham and the Jews
- (5) Does not save
- (6) Does not produce spirituality

Spiritual Circumcision:

- (1) Internal surgery, circumcision of the heart
- (2) Done without hands by the Holy Spirit
- (3) The whole "body of flesh"
- (4) Christ and believers in Him
- (5) Salvation – victory over sins
- (6) Spirituality – victory over the old sin nature (OSN)

9. Circumcision was part of the Mosaic covenant. (Ex. 4:24-26; 12:48; Josh. 5:2-12; Ezek. 44:7; Rom. 2:25; Gal. 6:12-15)

10. Spiritual circumcision was always God's desire for Israel. (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Ezek. 44:9; Rom. 2:28-29)
11. Israel's rejection of God's word is called having "*uncircumcised ears*," (Jer. 6:10) and "*uncircumcised hearts*." (Jer. 9:25, 26 with Levit. 26; Acts 7:51)
12. The "*circumcision*" was a term often used to describe Israel in the New Testament. (Gal. 2:8; Col. 4:11; Eph 2:11, 12; Titus 1:10)
13. Circumcision as a physical ritual has no significance to the believer in the Church Age. (1 Cor. 7:18, 19; Gal. 5:2, 3, 6; 6:15; Col. 3:11)
14. Circumcision was distorted into a system of legalism in the Church Age by the Judaizers (Titus 1:10):
 - a. Some taught that circumcision was essential for salvation. (Acts 15:1, 5, 24)
 - b. Some taught that circumcision was essential for spirituality. (Gal. 5:2-12 with Gal. 3:1-3)
 - c. Such legalism produces spiritual arrogance. (Gal. 6:12-18)
 - d. The apostle Paul, himself, succumbed to this legalistic pressure on one occasion when he circumcised Timothy. (Acts 16:3) Later Paul recanted and clearly restates the issue. (Gal. 5:2-4; 10-12; Phil. 3:2; Col. 2:11; Rom. 4:9-12)
15. Church Age believers who are filled with the Holy spirit are said to be the "*true circumcision*." (Phil. 3:3; Rom. 2:26-29)
16. The work of Jesus Christ on the cross which provided our salvation is called "*the circumcision of Christ*." (Col. 2:11-14)
17. The believer's salvation is called a "*circumcision made without hands*." (Col. 2:11) This circumcision is said to be a "baptism into Christ's death and resurrection," (Holy Spirit baptism). (Col. 2:12, 13; Rom. 4:11b; 6:3, 4, 5, 8; Acts 1:5)