

# *Circumcision...*

## *It's relevance to the Christian*

I remember some years ago sitting near the back of a big congregation comprised mainly of young people in a very 'with-it' church that sang all the latest choruses (*actually that should be spelled chorus*). They had a great rock band of their own musicians that played at their youth-orientated services. The visiting preacher that night had been a youth leader at that church some fifteen years or more before.

He chose to bring the topic of circumcision into his preaching, and deliberately treated the matter very lightly, carefully phrasing his remarks to extract as many schoolboy sniggers from as many of those in the audience as possible. I deliberately chose 'audience', feeling it was a better word to use than 'congregation', because of the tone of the meeting.

So why does circumcision feature in the Bible, why should it ever be mentioned from Christian pulpits - and in what context - and why did the Jews practice it?

The first Biblical mention of circumcision comes in Genesis when God had declared to Abram, now Abraham, that resultant upon his (Abraham's) great faith, He (God) was going to create a nation from Abraham's progeny. This was to be despite Abraham's and his wife's great ages, and the fact that the only child Abraham had was not of Sarah, but of Hagar, Sarah's servant.

*And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. Gen 17:7-10.*

So we see that the sole reason seen for circumcision was an indication that the person concerned had been set apart as an individual in a covenant relationship with God. This point will be pursued later while we look at the historical side, as explained in the bible. Then it might be useful to see what else the writers of other biblical books deduced from the practice. You may well be surprised when you discover that if you have been circumcised, you have quite a responsibility to live up to what it means.

It is also very interesting to note that in the following scripture it shows that Abraham, his servants, and the progenitor of the Arab race (Ishmael) were all circumcised, well ahead of the conception, birth and circumcision of the Jewish race, the progenitor of which was Isaac. It was also a long time before Moses came on the scene.

*And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, 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. In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. Gen 17:24-26.*

Having established his covenant with His people, God watched while those who followed Abraham made little effort to stay in that covenant relationship. Eventually we hear after many years that the backslid nation was allowed by God to be taken into captivity in Egypt, how Moses,

called by God as His peoples' leader to free them, incurred the anger of his heathen wife Zipporah by insisting on circumcising his son out of obedience to God... even the sign of the covenant relationship with God had been forgotten by God's chosen leader.

*Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, 'Surely a bloody husband art thou to me'. So he let him go: then she said, 'A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision'... Exodus 4: 25, 26*

Later in the exodus from Egypt, in the time of Joshua, when those who had not rebelled against God and Moses 40 years before in the wilderness, a remnant of the faithful Israel crossed the River Jordan into the Promised Land. There was a mass circumcision of the men at Gilgal, as we can read...

*At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time. And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt.*

*Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised. For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people that were men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD swore that he would not shew them the land, which the LORD swore unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey.*

*And their children, whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised: for they were uncircumcised, because they had not circumcised them by the way. And it came to pass, when they had done circumcising all the people, that they abode in their places in the camp, till they were whole. Joshua 5:2-8*

What was the purpose, might one ask? Well, going back to the Bible, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that like most things in the Old Testament, it was something done as a 'shadow' of the real thing looked forward to when Jesus Christ came in the meridian of time, fulfilling all of the Old Covenant. Note that I said **'fulfilling'**. I did not say **'doing away with'**, which many Christians quite erroneously say.

*Hold on, I hear you saying. Does that mean that Christians, like Jews and Muslims, should be circumcised?*

**Certainly Not.**

That is made very clear by all of the Apostles when Gentiles started being admitted to the church. While the quotes below are from Paul's writings, the other Apostles were of similar mind as we can read.

*And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. Acts 15:1*

*But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. Acts 15:5 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words,*

*subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: Acts 15:24*

*Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. 1Corinthians 7:18*

*But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised Galatians 2:3  
Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Galatians 5:2,3*

*For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh. Galatians 6:13*

*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. Colossians 2:11*

Let us take a look at what is said by an Old Testament prophet, and see if we can get a clue as to what circumcision meant to him...

*Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings. Jeremiah 4:4*

Now as we can find similar comparisons in the first five books - the Pentateuch, the Jewish 'Torah', it becomes really obvious that this understanding had always been intended, and that it was not something 'new', dreamed up by later leaders, or even by those in Christian times, as one sometimes hears.

*Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked. Deuteronomy 10:16  
And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. Deuteronomy 30:6*

Let us also look at these and see if we can work out what the New Testament equivalent might be....

*Only herein will the men consent unto us for to dwell with us, to be one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised. Genesis 34:22*

*But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. Exodus 12:44*

*And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. Exodus 12:48*

One wonders if we can deduce that followers of the Lord Jesus Christ could be called 'one people' in this context. They are certainly completely divided at the present time, but there is a unifying streak. Just as the 'children of Israel' were totally divided in terms of actual belief, and in their enmity towards each other, they still had the unifying belief in YHWH, the God who had provided for them, just as divided Christianity claims the same.

Christians are supposed to believe that they have been **'bought for a price'**, and that they are in reality also the slaves or servants of Christ. So once a Christian has become **'circumcised of the heart'**, then he or she can be regarded as fit to eat and fellowship with the other Saints.

So when a stranger comes and wants to 'sojourn', that is to say become one of the 'extended Christian family', because they wish to partake of the replacement to the Passover, the communion of the body and blood, then they too need to be circumcised according to the era in which they now live, the Christian era, and be circumcised in the heart.

That points towards the need for someone being brought to Christ having it explained to them that there is more to it than just sitting in a position where he or she can say *'Okay, so I am saved, now just let me go about my daily business the way I did before, or with a barely perceptible superficial change'*.

There is also the point that the action of the knife in cutting away the superfluous physical flap causes physical pain to the individual, just as the deliberate elimination of worldly, secular fallen attitudes and thoughts causes us spiritual pain while we are doing it. There is no pain if we can't be bothered to circumcise our hearts. However, neither is there any fellowship nor any 'belonging' either. We are living a sham, just as the uncircumcised Israelites were, if we have that attitude.

The bible teaches strongly that the **'Nation Israel'** in the Old Testament was not to have **any** social intercourse at all with unbelievers, and a careful reading of the New Testament says exactly the same to God's later **'chosen people'**, in regard to those who flatly refuse to listen, follow and obey the message of the Lord Jesus. Where does that place you?

Some Christians will dispute that last remark. It is my personal opinion, based upon careful reading of what the scriptures actually say. God is unchangeable. He does not change His mind, never had to create a **'Plan B'** - even for **'the Garden of Eden'** situation - and He has **always required obedience** of those who often quite presumptuously claimed to be His chosen.

So there we have my exegesis on circumcision. Not a smutty story that can be giggled at behind the back of your hand, nor smirked and guffawed at when you are blind drunk and unable to think straight, let alone control your tongue.

Why did I write that last paragraph? Because that is the scenario in which I have heard the topic ridiculed, a scenario in which I have sat, stone cold sober and with my wits about me, because of having being invited to meet with the people concerned.