

WHAT MATTERS IS THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART

Gal. 6:11-16 and Rom. 2:17-29 (**vv. 25-29**)

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I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND BIBLICAL CONTEXT

A. Historical Background

Circumcision was made a requirement when God entered a Covenant Relationship with Abraham (Genesis 17:1-27): it was meant to serve (a) as a *reminder* in each of the households of Abraham's descendants and (b) as a *mark of distinction* – a mark that will distinguish them from idol worshipping nations/people. **Circumcision** didn't make the Israelites believers; it just identified them as the descendants of Abraham and Sarah. ***Faith in God cannot be inherited since each person has to make a decision to believe in God at one point in his or her life.*** *Not all the Israelites whom Moses led out of Egypt made it to the Promised Land!* This has been proven time and again in the history of the Israelites since on many occasions they turned their backs on God only to worship various idols of many nations! *The same is true of Christians!* For example, Baptism neither proves nor makes one a believer. *The Faith that the person professed during baptism must prove itself over time.* Many *baptized* Christians have turned to Buddhism, Islam or idol worship the same way *circumcised* Jews did! *Both Circumcision and Baptism are outward symbols. But God knows what is going on in the inside! God is about the genuine inward transformation of the heart!*

The Law was given during the time Moses was leading the Israelites to the Promised Land. Among other things, the Law showed the Israelites how sinful they were. *It was given with the aim of changing their wicked ways!*

B. Biblical Context

“Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God” (Romans 2:25-29).

II. THE LESSON: What Matters is the Circumcision of the Heart

What is circumcision of the heart? To really understand *what* “circumcision of the heart” is, we need to know *how* the “circumcision of the heart” takes place. Also, by *what means* is the heart circumcised?

In Genesis chapter 1, after God created the universe and formed the Earth, He created “... man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (vv. 26-27). Then “the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and **breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being**” (Genesis 2:7). Notice that the **Physical Body** God formed of *the man* was *lifeless* until God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” The *man’s Physical Body* became “a living being” only after God breathed Life into Adam’s body. We know the **Physical Body** consists of bones, muscles, vital organs such as brain, lungs, heart, liver, etc. Furthermore, we learn from Scripture that a person consists of (a) the **Body** [Physical], (b) the **Soul** [Being/Essence of Life], (c) the **Spirit** [Spiritual], (d) the **Mind** [Intellect/Intelligence] and (e) the **Heart** (Emotions). Notice that when God breathed “the breath of Life” into **the Body**, He *gave* Soul/Essence of Life, Spirit/Spirituality, Mind/Intellect/Intelligence and Heart/Emotions and the *man* “**became a living being.**” Hallelujah! What made Adam and Eve “living beings” is what God breathed into them! In God’s “breath of life” were the Soul/Essence of Life, the Spirit/Spirituality, the Mind/Intellect and the Heart/Emotions. Notice these things

Therefore, how should we understand references to **the Heart** in the Bible? Apart from references to the Heart as one *vital physical organ* in the Body, the Heart is described as ***the seat of emotions***. In other words, the **Heart** is the **Emotional** Aspect/Essence/Nature of Man *as distinguished from* the **Intellectual** Aspect/Essence/Nature of Man as well as **Spiritual** Aspect/Essence/Nature of Man. Now, there are sets of *emotions with two extremes* a person possesses ranging from:

- **Love and Hate**
- **Happiness and Sadness**
- **Calmness and Anxiety**
- **Kindness and Cruelty**
- **Goodness and Meanness**
- **Sympathy and Empathy**
- **Compassion and Indifference**
- **Etc**

Before we deal with “circumcision of the heart,” let us understand **the influence of the Spiritual Aspect/Essence/Nature** on the **Heart/Emotions**.

According to Galatians 5:22-23, we know that the Holy Spirit produces His fruit “Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control” in the Believer. But the person who does not possess the Holy Spirit, the Bible says he or she speaks, behaves and acts according to the “sinful nature with its passions and desires” manifested in “sexual immorality, idolatry, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like” Gal. 5:19-21. As the Believer yields his/her life to Christ, the Holy Spirit *removes* these things thereby performing “**the circumcision of the heart.**” The result is that the Believer begins to *resemble more and more* “like Christ!”

Now let us examine the verses in Galatians 5:11 to 16. In verse 11, Apostle Paul wanted to assure the Galatian churches that he wrote the epistle.

1. **vv. 12-13. Outward Flashiness can be a Cover Up for Inward Deficiency.**

The Jews who insisted on circumcision as a requirement for Salvation not only *lacked* the Knowledge and Understanding that comes from the Word of God, but also Faith in Jesus Christ! ***In other words, they didn't have the Holy Spirit in them!*** Recall from the Book of Acts that the Jews who came all the way from Jerusalem were intent on disrupting the churches that Apostle Paul was establishing everywhere. They didn't come to encourage him personally or support his Ministry! No! They came with the intention of *imposing* circumcision on the *new believers* and *confusing* them with their false teaching! ***By insisting circumcision as a requirement for Salvation, they tried to nullify the Redemption that came through the Blood of Jesus Christ!*** *What they lacked in the Spirit, they compensated for it in their fleshiness!* And weak believers bought it! You know, bling-bling works on some people! ***Outward Flashiness can be a cover up for Inward Deficiency!*** You know how some people are *outwardly* loud, bold and boisterous. Often, it is a sign that something is wrong *inwardly*. ***They try to cover up their inward deficiency by outward flashiness!***

Apostle Paul also pointed to what *motivates* the Jews. Since they couldn't or were unwilling to bear the Cross of Christ, it was easier for them to push the old religious traditions *devoid* of spiritual substance and vitality which give life to faith. ***Accepting Christ brings about inward change! Inward change then produces outward change which mirrors Christ. So, the problem with the Jews was that they didn't want to be like Him!*** Accepting Christ by faith results in *inward change*! God made it easy! All they had to do was *believe* in Him. Or as Jesus said to them at one point, “at least believe in what I did.” ***No, they didn't want to do that and change!*** They resisted/refused the radical transformation the Word of God and the Holy

Spirit bring! They would rather cling to hatefulness, viciousness, jealousy, lying, selfish ambition, etc. ***They didn't want their stony hearts to be circumcised by the Holy Spirit!***

2. **v. 14. If I must Boast, I Boast of the Cross!**

For Christians, The Cross is both a **Symbol of Suffering and Victory** because of what Christ achieved for our Salvation. The Cross, in the hand of evil people, is an instrument of cruelty, torture and death. But in the hand of God, The Cross became an instrument of Salvation through Christ for those who believe. Only God can bring about such a gloriously redemptive victory through an object of suffering and agonizing death! Those who understand what Jesus had done when He offered Himself as the Lamb of God are not ashamed to “pick up their cross” and follow Him! If suffering is part of carrying the cross, we should gladly welcome it because we identify with our Lord Jesus Christ! It is the *ultimate privilege* to be identified with Son of God! We also know that there is Glorious Victory in the Blood of the Lamb! There is Resurrection in the Blood of Jesus! That is why Apostle Paul who suffered persecutions, endured hardships and toiled in the Ministry of the Gospel could boast “in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!” If you and I must boast, we should boast “in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

3. **v. 15. Circumcision or Uncircumcision Does Not Change Me!**

Apostle Paul concludes his epistle saying “what counts is a new creation” in Christ. In other words, people can mutilate themselves all they want in the name of circumcision. But that won't change anything because they will still be as nasty, arrogant, selfish and hateful as mutilated people! **Circumcised or uncircumcised, an evil person shall remain evil! Circumcision or uncircumcision does not change a person.** But if a sinful person accepts Jesus as his or her Savior, the Holy Spirit will perform divine surgery on his or her heart, and he or she shall become “a new creation!”

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III. CONCLUSION/APPLICATION

- a) **We must apply the Word of God in our lives.** Scripture says, “**Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says**” James 1:22.
- b) **Circumcision of the Heart is an ongoing thing. We must allow The Holy Spirit to cut off somethings and prune what must remain in order for us to be fruitful for the Kingdom of God.** John 15:1-17.