

Foremost Foreshadow

Circumcision of the Heart

May 30, 2021

Today we're checking to see if we've all been circumcised ... in our *heart*.



Does anyone really know the real you? Probably not. We protect our heart mostly by exposing only as much as we think safe from rejection. But when we try to hide any part of our heart from God, like Adam and Eve, **we only end up hiding from our only hope** of finding the love, acceptance, forgiveness, healing, renewal and transformation that our aching heart so desperately desires. Which is why it needs to be *circumcised*. Trust me, you're *gonna* need to get *comfortable* with that word today. So maybe it would help if I told you how I *first* learned what *circumcision was*. I was *way* too old. 8th grade. And a girl explained it to me. In front of the class. Because I asked.

Mrs. Ellis' was teaching about Nazi Germany, and we asked how they knew who was a Jew. So she mentioned circumcision and quickly moved on. I raised my hand and asked what it was. She told me to stop trying to make the class laugh. Did I mention they were laughing? I told her I really didn't know – but she was too embarrassed to explain; so she asked if someone could whisper it to me. So this *girl* sitting across from me comes over and whispers. And I said to Mrs. Ellis, "They do *what* to the *what*?!" And she just nodded. I looked around ... the entire class was nodding! At recess I said to my buddies, "Aren't you glad *we're* not circumcised?" And they said, "We *are*." "But *she* said they cut the end off!" Which is why I said, "They do *what* to the *what*?!" To which Mrs. Ellis and you all just nodded!

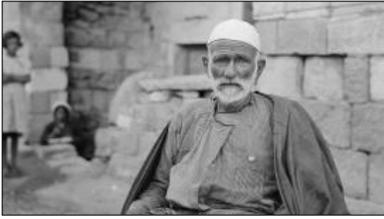


Last Sunday we spoke about those **superficial, highly visible identity markers** that allow *anyone* in *any* group of *any* kind to have a sense of security and belonging and acceptance. They're not bad. It's just what we do. For instance when I say Boy Scout, what we all picture are their most visible identity markers. The problem comes when we make them sacred.

And I told you about the big three, most used by the Jews of Jesus' day to reinforce *their* identity as God's *chosen* people: **dietary laws**, and **holy days**, and **circumcision**. But by far, that last one is the first and foremost of the three. It's gotta be the granddaddy of all identity markers.

[God had said to Father Abraham] "You are to undergo **circumcision**, and it will be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is *eight days* old *must* be circumcised," – Genesis 17:11-12 NIV

Why do you suppose God chose *that* particular part?



I can picture Abraham saying, “Lord, how ‘bout this? I pierce an ear, or cut off a *finger!*” But the promise was all about our Father-Creator sending salvation to the world through the procreation of Father Abraham. So it makes sense. Plus it was practical. A few times *every day*, no matter how hectic the life, or busy the schedule, nature forced them to contemplate the covenant.

[Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by *faith* while he was still *uncircumcised*. – Romans 4:11 NIV

Abraham and his offspring were signed, sealed, and ultimately delivered! But **many mistook the sign on the surface for the meaning of its message**. And after Christ fulfilled the promise with a *new* covenant, they weren’t ready to let go of the *old* sign. So there were Jesus-following disciples called Judaizers pressuring *non-Jewish* believers to come to Christ *and then* to be circumcised *in order to complete* their salvation. And the Apostle Paul didn’t take that too well.

Watch out for those *dogs*, [wolves in sheep’s clothing] those men who do *evil*, [perverting the very essence of salvation by grace] those *mutilators* of the *flesh*. ... If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put *confidence* in the flesh, I have *more*: circumcised on the *eighth day* ... a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. [What he once believed to earn points with the Lord, he now knows only serves to displace the work of Christ on our behalf and disqualifies us from the grace of God] ... not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. – Philippians 3:2-9 NIV

Want to see what he’s talking about?

For circumcision is indeed profitable if you *keep* the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, *your* circumcision has become *uncircumcision*. – Romans 2:25 NKJ

[But] When you were dead in your sins and in the *uncircumcision* of your *sinful nature*, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, – Colossians 2:13 NIV

In Him you were *also* circumcised, in the *putting off* of the *sinful nature*, [that trusts in identity markers and our own works of the flesh] – Colossians 2:11 NIV

[Because Moses himself had said] “Now, Israel, what *does* the Lord your God require of you, but to *fear* the Lord your God, to *walk* in all His ways and to *love* Him, to serve the Lord your God with *all* your *heart* and with *all* your *soul* ... Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, – Deuteronomy 10:12, 16 NKJ

[And this *heart procedure* is] ... *not* with a [physical] circumcision done by the hands of men but with the [actual] circumcision done by Christ, – Colossians 2:11 NIV

[After all, Moses was pretty clear that] The *Lord your God* will circumcise your *heart* and the heart of your *descendants*, to *love* the Lord your God with *all* your *heart* and with *all* your *soul*, that you may *live*. [Instead of being destroyed] – Deuteronomy 30:6 NKJ

[For God warned them through Jeremiah] Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, [which it did, 40 years after the cross (in 70^{AD}) and Jerusalem was destroyed] – Jeremiah 4:4 NKJ

“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, [through Jeremiah] “that I will punish all who are circumcised and yet uncircumcised – Jeremiah 9:25 NAS

And He will destroy on this mountain [warned Isaiah] the surface of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. – Isaiah 25:7 NKJ

But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. – 2 Corinthians 3:14 NIV

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. – Galatians 5:6 NIV

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. [In the heart! Making us right in God’s sight] – Galatians 6:15 NIV

A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. – Romans 2:28-29 NIV

[And yet] When Moses [written code] is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. – 2 Corinthians 3:15-16 NIV

[For] Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, – Romans 15:8 ESV

[God said to Abraham] “This is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ... [I will] be your God and the God of your descendants – Genesis 17:3-7 NIV

In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, – Genesis 22:18 NKJ

And it will be the sign of the covenant between Me and you ... every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, – Genesis 17:11-12 NIV

And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of [Joseph and Mary’s] Child, His name was called Jesus, – Luke 2:21 NKJ

And after eight days [after Jesus rose] His disciples were again inside, – John 20:26 NKJ

[For God had said by Ezekiel] “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” – Ezekiel 36:26 NIV

So Jesus said to them again, “Peace to you!” ... [and] He breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. – John 20:21-22 NKJ

Now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language ... since you have taken *off* your *old self* with its practices and have put *on* the *new self*, which is *being* renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, *circumcised* or *uncircumcised*, – Colossians 3:8-11 NIV

You are *all sons* of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into *Christ* have *clothed* yourselves with Christ. There is neither ... *male* nor *female*, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. – Galatians 3:26-28 NIV

For both *He* who *sanctifies* and *those* who are *sanctified* are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them *brethren*, – Hebrews 2:11 NAS

For we *are* the *circumcision*, [the reality of the authority that the superficial sign always only and ever signified] who worship God in the Spirit, [and] rejoice in Christ Jesus, [above all else] and have no confidence in the flesh, – Philippians 3:3 NKJ



Because the utmost marker was *actually* the foremost *foreshadow* all along. Turns out **it's all about internal change, not external activity**. Always was. **It's all about exposing our heart to Dad**. So when we're next tempted to rest on some reassuring religious marker, we best remember:

The righteous will live by *faith*. – Galatians 3:11 NIV

So watch out for those dogs! It doesn't matter if it's **circumcision, catechism, confirmation, or communion**, the ceremony means nothing if it's not related to a dynamic, personal, Scriptural, spiritual relationship with our Father through our Savior who died to cleanse our heart and connect us to Dad. At best, **the ritual can only reflect the reality**. And whenever a believer walks in disobedience they cancel *everything* the rituals stand for.

After Paul's warning regarding those dogs, and boasting about his faultless legalistic righteousness, and his desiring a righteousness through faith in Christ alone, he says:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, [You see, immaturity says "look how far I've come," but maturity says "look how far I have to go," because transparency is the true mark of spiritual maturity] but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 3:12-14 NIV

Like Paul, the longer I grow as a Christian, the more *aware* I am of my own inadequacies, limitations, weaknesses and faults. And the more willing I am to share them. Who knows who it just might help. **Do you have regrets? Of course you do**. I do *too*. That's rhetorical. **We all do**.

So what are yours? We'd like to hear. It's the most interesting thing you have to share! And who knows who it just might help.

Paul really regretted *murdering, torturing, and imprisoning* so many of Jesus' first followers! **Can you even imagine the guilt that must've clung to his heart?** No human hands could've removed it.



So when he says, "Forgetting what's behind" he isn't advocating amnesia; and he's certainly not asking us to deny or evade our past, but to *disable* its *power*. Because **we poison ourselves by dwelling on the past**. Two snakes slithering along, one asks "We poisonous?" The other says "I don't know, why?" "Cause I just bit my lip."

By all means, *learn* from the past, just don't *dwell* on it. Snip it in the bud! You can't win that race looking over your shoulder. Otherwise **you'll just remember the test and forget the lesson**. That's why it's so important to face it; forgive it; confess it; grieve the *losses* and the *consequences*; and then release it. So the next time you catch yourself pondering past regrets and telling yourself you're unworthy, **bite your lip and remind yourself it's poison**.

Don't focus on the nonsense you should dismiss, just snip, snip, snip! And don't dismiss the substance you should focus on, just – bump, bump, bump!

It's a fight to the finish. And **if you're coasting, I'm pretty sure you're going downhill**.

So, *who's* a true Jew? Well, without *Christ*, *no one!* But *with Christ*, *anyone ... can* be.

If *you* belong to Christ, then you *are* Abraham's seed, *and* heirs according to the promise. – Galatians 3:29 NIV

But we gotta stand *firm* against those good-for-nothing, dirty dog, Jesus-*plus*-something-else, superficial identity markers, and work on putting our *total* trust in Christ.

Religion says, "Do!" ... Jesus says, "Did!" and the Gospel says, "DONE!"

There are no *degrees* of justification through Christ.

What's done is *done!*