

Circumcision of the Heart

Last week physical male circumcision was the topic. This week, we will spend another lesson on Romans 2:25-29. This week the topic is circumcision of the heart.

Why?

1. There was a request to explain what the circumcision of the heart is.
2. It was obvious that perhaps in response to prayer the Holy Spirit directed me in that direction and
3. The details of the topic were not cemented in my mind. More study was required. However, the coverage of the subject in this lesson is not comprehensive.

While reviewing these notes prior to posting them on the internet, it was obvious that a summary of information or an overview of the topic would be most helpful. You will know what to expect and what piece of information is being emphasized.

Summary points on the Circumcision of the Heart

1. Circumcision of the Heart is received by the believer at the point of salvation. It is one of the “34” things acquired at salvation.
2. Key to understanding the purpose of the Circumcision of the Heart is its function. It separates the domination of the sin nature from the believer’s soul. An unbeliever is dominated by the sin nature. He does not have access to walking by faith in the power of the Holy Spirit. He has no choice but to be a slave to the sin nature. The believer has a choice. Either walk in the power of the sin nature or

Circumcision of the Heart
Romans 2:25-29/Philippians 3:1-5/Colossians 2:11

walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a choice. It is most often an unconscious choice.

We are aware of the difficulties of an alcoholic. He has terrible cravings. But every believer has terrible cravings, it might not be alcohol. For some it is drugs. I believe Bill Clinton, who was not a drinker, had a “sex addiction. We have seen some of those in the early parts of Paul’s current argument. The immoral degenerate. Then in Romans 2:1-5 we encountered what R. B. Thieme Jr. might have called “Miss Goody Two-Shoes.” Someone who is so good in their own sight that they think God has to save them. But the self-righteous religious person is addicted in such a manner (mental attitude sins) that it is most difficult to provide the gospel and “win that soul.” We all have some kind of addiction. It behooves each of us to identify what addictions we have and attempt to deal with it in faith.

3. Because the Circumcision of the Heart is first found in the Old Testament, it is apparent that believers under the Law had the ability to choose between serving the sin nature and serving God. This may work differently in the Millennium. Based upon what Herman has said, that Jews in the Millennium will not sin, then it is possible that they will then always choose to walk by faith. I can’t say more than that at this time.
4. It is a permanent separation in phase 2 of the Christian life. In phase 3, eternity, the sin nature will no longer be a part of our make up.

I. Introduction

The circumcision of the heart is not a uniquely New Testament doctrine. It is first mentioned way back in the book of Deuteronomy while the children of Israel were still in the desert. There are also

Circumcision of the Heart
Romans 2:25-29/Philippians 3:1-5/Colossians 2:11

references to circumcision of the heart in Leviticus in the context of being “uncircumcised of heart.” (Leviticus 26:41)

This is not a “new” doctrine. It was taught by L. S. Chafer in his Systematic Theology.

“However, the important truth that the believer has been circumcised with a circumcision made without hands and wholly apart from the flesh, is the grace position which is now in view. In the Colossians passage (2:11), the believer’s spiritual circumcision is said to be the “putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.” Two closely related words occur in this passage, namely, body (σῶμα) and flesh (σάρξ). The physical body does not commit sin except as it is dominated by the flesh—which flesh includes the soul and spirit, and manifests that fallen nature which all possess, saved and unsaved alike. The physical body is not put off in a literal sense, but, being the instrument or sphere of sin’s manifestation, the flesh with its “body of sin” may be annulled (Rom. 6:6), or rendered inoperative for the time being. As the sin nature was judged by Christ in His death, so the believer, because of his vital place in Christ, partakes of that “putting off” which Christ accomplished, and which fell as a circumcision upon Him and becomes a spiritual circumcision to the one for whom Christ substituted. It is a circumcision made “without hands.” To stand thus before God as one whose sin nature, or flesh, has been judged and for whom a way of deliverance from the dominion of the flesh has been secured, is a position which grace has provided, and is blessed indeed.¹”

Note: L. S. Chafer was using the King James Version which used a text with “body of sin.” This is not in the modern translations. The textual evidence confirms that this phrase was not in the original but

¹ Lewis Sperry Chafer (1971). Systematic theology. Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press. Volume 3 Soteriology pp 250-251

Circumcision of the Heart
Romans 2:25-29/Philippians 3:1-5/Colossians 2:11

an addition, possibly to clarify “flesh” as related to the sin nature. For backup on this, here is a quote from Kenneth Wuest from his commentary on Colossians:

“The expression, “the body of the sins of the flesh,” needs careful study. The words “of the sins,” are not in the best texts, so the expression is “the body of the flesh.”

“The body that was put off when the Colossian saints were saved was the physical body as dominated by the totally depraved nature. This body, while still the possession of the believer, was put off in the sense that it was rendered inoperative so far as the constant control of the evil nature was concerned. Paul states the same truth in Romans 6:6 when he says: “Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body possessed by sin might be rendered inoperative, so that henceforth we are not yielding an habitual slave’s obedience to sin.” The power of the sinful nature was broken, and it was deprived of its control over the body.²”

We did study “regular” physical circumcision last week. We learned a number of things:

A. It is the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant. It was a sign of separation to God.

According to Robby Dean, Jewish believers today are required to be circumcised.

According to Robby Dean:

“However, Jewish males are still under the eternal covenant made with Abraham and thus are still required to circumcise their sons on the eighth day.”

² Wuest, K.S. (1966). Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament for the English Reader. Page 205

Circumcision of the Heart
Romans 2:25-29/Philippians 3:1-5/Colossians 2:11

“Paul refused to have Titus, a Gentile, circumcised, but Timothy, who was a Jew (through his mother), was required to be circumcised (Acts 16:3).³”

Robby Dean points out that circumcision of the baby is a decision of the parents. The baby is not dedicating himself. The parents are dedicating themselves in the upbringing of the child.

- B. It was still required in the Mosaic Covenant.
- C. Only Males are circumcised. Effects are permanent.
- D. It is not something one does to oneself.
- E. Normally, the operation is accomplished on an 8-day old baby.
- F. Physical circumcision is not required in the Dispensation of the Church. It has no spiritual significance in the Church, with the exception noted by Robby Dean.

II. Old Testament Passages

The Hebrews demonstrated that they need to see, hear and touch in order to understand and believe. Like the apostle Thomas. Physical circumcision provided a constant reminder for the males that they were under the Abrahamic covenant and continued in the Mosaic covenant. They were separated to God. They were in service to God under the covenant. And if we use Abraham as an example, that service is accomplished by faith.

While other peoples like the Egyptians and other relatives to Moses circumcised their males, circumcision of the heart was unique to the Mosaic covenant in the Old Testament. It was related to the “heart” which in context is the thinking part of the human. It is where we

³ <https://deanbible.org/dbmfiles/slides/2022-Philippians-062b.pdf>

Circumcision of the Heart
Romans 2:25-29/Philippians 3:1-5/Colossians 2:11

make our decisions. And all, including women, were circumcised of the heart. It was related to the spiritual life of the believer and the ability to chose not to sin under the sin nature. It allows the believer to escape the domination of the sin nature. It is something accomplished by God for the believer in phase 2 salvation.

The first specific mention of “circumcise your heart” is in the book of Deuteronomy. Uncircumcised heart is found in the book of Leviticus as previously noted.

Deuteronomy 10:12 “Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,

Fear the Lord. This is a mental attitude of humility towards God.

Walk. This is ordering of one’s life. It starts with thinking.

Love. This again is a mental attitude, not a physical attribute. Biblical usage is of love that is not an emotion. It can and does reveal itself in acts, but it is something in the mind of the believer. In the New Testament, it is specifically said to be fruit of the Spirit.

Serve. Worship. Thinking.

All your heart and with all your soul. Heart as the thinking part of the believer is invisible. The soul is invisible. These are difficult concepts for a Hebrew that is based in a physical world. A physical heart can be seen. But while an animal is alive, while a human is alive, the heart is unseen.

Deuteronomy 10:13 and to keep the Lord's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?

Deuteronomy 10:14 Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it.

Deuteronomy 10:15 Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day.

Deuteronomy 10:16 So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer.

Circumcise your heart no longer. The verb means to circumcise. My puzzlement was the Qal stem. I expected a passive stem. After prayer and careful thought, here is my explanation.

1. It is well-known that circumcision is not accomplished by the one being circumcised.
2. It is usual for the operation to take place on an infant 8 days old.
3. For an adult, it requires an act of volition, free will to be circumcised.
4. This is contrasted with stiffen your neck indicating this is a free will decision to stop resisting God's grace and get with faith.
5. A question arises if this is said to a believer. If that believer already possesses a circumcised heart, this may mean, you

Circumcision of the Heart
Romans 2:25-29/Philippians 3:1-5/Colossians 2:11

have it, now use it. This reminds me of a line from the Jason Bourne movie, *The Bourne Legacy*. “You were given a Ferrari. Your people treated it like a lawn mower.” Something like that is true of most Christians. We have been given fabulous assets in the Christian life. How many actually use them. Or more to the point, how many Christians even know they have them and what they are?

So rather than a command to circumcise oneself, this is a call to faith.

Stiffen your neck. This is an idiom using the Hebrew word for “obstinate.” According to Miriam Webster on-line, obstinate means “stubbornly adhering to an opinion, purpose, or course in spite of reason, arguments, or persuasion.”⁴ It has to do with volition, free will. This is a contrast to circumcise your heart.

Deuteronomy 30:6 “Moreover 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, so that you may live.

God will circumcise your heart. God is the active agent in this circumcision. He does it.

Love the Lord your God. The purpose of this circumcision is to allow the believer to love God. The only way this can happen is if the believer can be freed from the domination of the sin nature.

Jeremiah 4:4 “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord And remove the foreskins of your heart,

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/obstinate>

Circumcision of the Heart
Romans 2:25-29/Philippians 3:1-5/Colossians 2:11

**Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem,
Or else My wrath will go forth like fire And
burn with none to quench it, Because of the
evil of your deeds.”**

Circumcise yourselves. This is translated as if it was an active voice/reflexive verb. It would make you think that the individual can accomplish this on his own. But, this is the Hebrew Niphal stem. That could be translated as reflexive or passive. While the NASB and NIV translate it as reflexive, I prefer that it be translated as a passive. We know from both the New Testament and from Deuteronomy 30:6 that God is the one who does the circumcision of the heart. So it doesn't make sense to translate it as reflexive. It could be translated as “receive circumcision to the Lord.”

However, you can make the case for the reflexive if you consider the element of free will. “Make use of the Circumcision of the Heart.”

Remove the foreskins. Here the verb is not niphal stem but the hiphil causative stem. You will be caused to remove the foreskins of your heart. Again, there is the involvement of free will.

III. New Testament Passages

Stephen gave a sermon to the unbelievers of the Sanhedrin.

Acts 7:51 “You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.

Stiff-necked. Here is an echo of Deuteronomy 10:16 and perhaps Jeremiah 6:10.

Circumcision of the Heart
Romans 2:25-29/Philippians 3:1-5/Colossians 2:11

Uncircumcised in heart. By Stephen's use of this term, it is obvious that the members of the Sanhedrin were familiar with the Old Testament concept. It appears to be a synonym for anti-God unbelief.

Acts 7:52 Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;

Acts 7:53 you who received the law as ordained by angels, and yet did not keep it."

Philippians 3:2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;

Philippians 3:3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

Note the contrast between circumcision (of the heart) and the flesh.

Philippians 3:4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh.

Colossians 2:9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

Circumcision of the Heart
Romans 2:25-29/Philippians 3:1-5/Colossians 2:11

Colossians 2:10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

Colossians 2:11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

Colossians 2:12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Romans 2:29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

IV. Summary

1. Circumcision of Christ or of the heart is one of the 34 things a believer receives at the point of salvation. (see the previous quote from L. S. Chafer)
2. It is a permanent possession.
3. It provides separation from the sin nature such that we have a choice to be controlled by the sin nature or guided by the Holy Spirit. It breaks the power and domination of the sin nature over the believer.
4. Allows the believer choice between trusting God and trusting the “flesh” or sin nature.

Circumcision of the Heart
Romans 2:25-29/Philippians 3:1-5/Colossians 2:11

In the following slide from Andy Woods' Soteriology series, the "power" of sin is broken. L.S. Chafer uses the term domination.

Three Tenses of Domination on

Phase	Justification	<u>Sanctification</u>	Glorification
Tense	Past	<u>Present</u>	Future
Saved from sin's:	Penalty	<u>Power</u>	Presence
Scripture	Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5	<u>Philip 2:12</u>	Rom 5:10

4. Since New Testament writers used Old Testament passages on the circumcision of the heart, this is something common between believers under the Mosaic covenant and Church Age believers.