

People of God, perhaps you may never have been to a Church service where the circumcision of Jesus was the topic of the sermon, let alone did you know that such a day was in the church calendar. You might be wondering why the church would consider such an occasion to be worthy of commemorating.

Well the simple fact is that circumcision of all males was required by the Covenant God made with Abraham, and was further required in the law given to Moses. And all who did not obey this covenant by cutting of the foreskin of the flesh, they would be cut off from God's people; for he has broken my covenant, says the Lord.

The act of circumcision was a symbolic picture of the removal of sin from the heart. Just as the foreskin was removed from the flesh, so did God command that we remove sin from our hearts and that we love God. Those who were circumcised were brought into Covenant with God and they were placed under the requirement that they love God and keep themselves from sin.

But what we find in the story of God's people is what we find in all of us. That none of us love God. That no matter if people undergo a physical ritual to remove a piece of flesh from the body, that does not enable the heart to truly love God. Circumcision of the flesh, does not accomplish the spiritual reality of what circumcision pointed to.

So we read in the Torah, in the first 5 books of Moses, how God's circumcised people, were hard hearted, and they did not follow God's ways. And so, in order to remove sin from the people collectively, God would occasionally cut-off some of the people. As

Paul says, *Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.*

In the Covenant made with Abraham, God promised to give Israel numerous offspring, and give them the land of Canaan, and he would give them the blessing of God. And circumcision was the sign that God was going to do these things for Abraham and his offspring, upon the condition that Abraham and his offspring observed the covenant of circumcision.

Which means more than just simply that they would have all the male children circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after their birth. It meant that they would love God and walk in his ways and remove their sins from their hearts. And if they did not do that, then they would be cut off.

Hence the dilemma. Because of sin, nobody loves God and hates sin as we ought. Nobody seeks to cut off sin from their hearts as they ought in order to truly love God in their hearts. So, how is God going to keep his promise to Abraham if His people cannot fulfill the requirements of the Covenant?

In this way – God promised to keep the Covenant of circumcision for them. In order for Israel to enter into the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant, God is will have to fulfill the covenant for them himself. God is going to circumcise Israel truly. Not just in the flesh, but in their hearts, and in the hearts of the offspring after them. The result of this heart circumcision will be that the Covenant made with Abraham will be fulfilled. Abraham's offspring will be numerous, they will live in the land God promised to give them, and they will love the Lord God with all their heart and soul.

As Deuteronomy 10 says - <sup>12</sup>“And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup>and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good? <sup>14</sup>Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. <sup>15</sup>Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. <sup>16</sup>Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

And again he says in Deut. 30: <sup>5</sup>And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed, that you may possess it. And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers. <sup>6</sup>And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

We must never forget, People of God, the tremendous grace of our God, who gives to us what he requires of us, in order that we would receive what he has promised.

Now when exactly did God fulfill this requirement for us? In Jesus.

Jesus is the True Offspring of Abraham, and on the 8<sup>th</sup> day after His birth he underwent circumcision of the flesh as was required by the law and the covenant. And when he was circumcised, he shed his blood. The circumcision of Jesus, and indeed, every male circumcision in the Old Covenant, was a type and shadow of the true circumcision, the true shedding of blood, which would bring the blessings of the covenant when Jesus died on the cross.

The little Lord Jesus, shedding his blood at 8 days old was prefiguring the true shedding of blood. Christ's death on the cross is his true circumcision, and the Covenant made with Abraham was fulfilled when Christ died to take away the sins of God's people, to make them offspring of Abraham by adoption and children of God, to give them the land of the Heavenly Canaan as their inheritance, and enable them to love God.

When Jesus Christ was truly circumcised on the cross, he was undergoing the curse of the covenant for all the people of God. As God promised to Abraham, every male who does not keep covenant will be cut off. But Jesus, as the true Israel, as our covenant head and representative, he was cut off on our behalf – cut off from the land of the living, cut off from the fellowship with God's people; but most importantly, he was cut off from the eternal fellowship he had with His Father in the unity of the Spirit. As he said on the cross, *My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.*

On the cross Jesus Christ became the curse for all God's people who have broken covenant with Him. As Galatians 3 says – *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’ – so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”*

By faith in Jesus, God would restore us to himself, who is the true promised land, and he would give us the Promised blessing of the Holy Spirit, who makes us to love God in heart and soul.

Paul says something similar in Romans 8 says – *“By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,*

*in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”*

What is the righteous requirement of the law? As we have said – That we would love God in heart and soul. How does that happen? We must have the curse of God removed from us. And the curse of the Covenant removed from us when Jesus underwent the true circumcision, his death on the cross.

And when Jesus Christ died for you in his flesh, he gave you His Spirit, who gives you faith, in which you receive the forgiveness of your sins, and he gives you your love for God in your heart and soul. God did in you what the law could not do, because the law had no power to create love in your heart for God. The Law only has power to condemn the guilty. It cannot give you the ability to fulfill the law by loving God with your heart and soul.

And so, Jesus underwent the true circumcision to remove the curse of sin from us, and to give us the promised blessing of the Spirit, in his crucifixion.

As Colossians 2 says – *“In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, (that phrase, made without hands, is a reference to the spiritual reality which God accomplishes) - And then notice how it is that we have been circumcised without hands in the circumcision of Christ, he says – having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

Thus, there is a connection between circumcision and baptism, and the connecting point is the death of Christ. In Christ's death, he was truly circumcised, cut off, in order to forgive sins. You

therefore received your circumcision made without hands in the circumcision of the heart, in which God forgives you of your sins and enables you to love God with your heart and soul, when he united you to Christ's circumcision in his death. And how is it that we partake of this spiritual circumcision of Christ, made without hands? Through Baptism. Baptism unites us to Christ in His death (circumcision), and his resurrection.

Paul continues - *And you, who were dead in the trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses...*

We used to walk in the "uncircumcision of the flesh" Paul says, which just means we used to walk according to the law of sin within us, not loving God in our heart and soul. But now we walk according to the law of the Spirit who has made the circumcision without hands in our hearts, when we were baptized into union with Christ in His death and resurrection, in whom we have all our trespasses forgiven.

And this of course ties in quite well with the second part of today's commemoration - the name of Jesus. Our Lord was given the name 'Jesus' at His circumcision. And it was at His true circumcision on the cross that he fulfilled the meaning of His name. Jesus, which is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew name Joshua, means, YHWH is Salvation, or, YHWH Saves.

Matt 1:21 says, *His name is Jesus, because He will save his people from their sins.* Jesus is our Savior, he saves us from sin, death, and hell. All through the Scriptures we see the powerful name of Jesus being the name which brings healing. Jesus is the name which forgives. Jesus is the name which makes demon tremble. Jesus is the name

into which we are justified. It is *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*<sup>11</sup> *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

It is the name of Jesus is into which we and our children are baptized, with our names united to Jesus. Have you ever wondered why I ask the parents what the child's name is at the baptism? Because, it is at our baptism into union with Christ that we are given our identity and personal vocation to live as Christians, which we will grow into and develop throughout our whole life. We are come away from the baptismal font, not just wet with water, but with our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit united to the Name and Person of Jesus. And this Christian name provides us with a sense of calling and duty throughout our lives.

Just as circumcision was the entrance rite into the old covenant and required the child to live as a faithful covenant member all his days, or be cut off – so too does baptism bring a child into the New Covenant, into Jesus himself, and requires that he believe in Him who fulfilled the covenant duties and obligations for us perfectly, by suffering and dying and rising from the dead, all our days. And if we fail to maintain our faith in Christ, then we too will be cut off.

The naming of the child at baptism therefore implies a personal response from the child to the Lord because this child's name is united to the name of Jesus in His death and resurrection, in his circumcision, and therefore Jesus, having Lordship over every baptized child, promises that he will forgive this child of all their sins, and will bring them into the Heavenly Land of Canaan, and

He will be their God. And for that we give praise to God, and believe in him and love him with all our heart.

Now let us consider how we should then live in light of these truths. Firstly, we come to know and believe that our acceptance with God, the removal of the punishment of our sins, and our inheritance in the Heavenly Canaan, is in no way whatsoever based upon us keeping the Covenant. We are only covenant breakers, and we deserve nothing else but to be cut off. But Jesus is our salvation, and in as much as Jesus is presented to us as crucified, so too are all our sins and their punishment cut off and removed from us on the cross. This is not because of works done by us in righteousness, but by His grace and mercy alone has he saved us.

Therefore, as you contemplate the sins of this past week, whatever sins they may be, how ever bad they are, you need to not look to your performance of righteousness for your only comfort and hope. If you look to your own righteousness, or, more accurately, if you look to your own sinfulness and lack of righteousness, and you convince yourself that your salvation or damnation is based upon your sins, then you have not believed the gospel of Christ. Now that you are a Christian, and you bear the name of Jesus upon you, all your sins are absolutely forgiven – all of them – yes, even that one – they are all on the cross and cannot come back upon you, so long as you continue to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in faith for salvation.

Let me make this point again, because I think someone out there needs to hear this. No matter how bad you are, no matter what sins you have committed, now matter how convicted your heart and



soul are because you loved your sins this week more than you loved God, none of that affects your salvation in the least.

You are not saved because of your good deeds. And neither are you condemned because of your sins. Not anymore. *For there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Your sins are forgiven, and you are accepted in Christ Jesus as his beloved child. Believe it by faith.

*“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup>For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. <sup>11</sup>For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” <sup>12</sup>For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. <sup>13</sup>For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

It is our faith which justifies us before God, and not our deeds, whether good or bad. Christ accomplished it all for you.

Now this amazing display of the love and mercy and grace of God toward you should affect your heart and make you love Jesus more in your heart and soul. If the circumcision of Christ is the foundation of the circumcision of our hearts, then that means that we should be people who do seek to live lives of holiness and righteousness and we should seek to cut off sin from our lives. We should not take the grace of God for granted.

As Paul says in Romans 6 – *“Shall we continue to sin so that grace may abound? By now means! How can we who have died to sin, still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus*

*have been baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with him into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life...Therefore you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."*

We walk in the Spirit by faith in Jesus, not out of a fear of God that he is going to destroy you if you don't start acting right – which is still a good and proper feeling to have. But rather, you should follow in His ways and resist the devil when he tempts you, and you should love goodness and do righteousness because God in Christ loves you, and you love him and are thankful to him for everything He has done for you. You circumcising the sins of the flesh of your heart flows out of love and thankfulness to Jesus and the salvation that he has accomplished for you. You do not earn or acquire the newness of life by trying to do good deeds. Rather, you receive the newness of life as a gift from Jesus who circumcises your heart by faith.

This order is important. For if you get it wrong, then you lose all hope of salvation, because you can never do enough to kill all the sin in your life, you can never do enough good deeds to be righteous. For if you seek to be righteous by keeping the law then you are required to keep the whole law. But since you cannot keep the whole law, you might as well trust in Him who did. For if you trust in the one who has done it all for you, believing in His name, then He will save you, and you have all the comfort for your soul in life and death. But if you try to measure up to Christ by looking to your own performance, you are placing yourself back under the curse of the law, which Christ himself died to free you from.

Paul has to address the Galatians concerning a similar issue, saying,

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup>Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? <sup>3</sup>Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? <sup>5</sup>Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— <sup>6</sup>just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”?

<sup>13</sup>Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us— for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— <sup>14</sup>so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Believe in the name of Jesus, the one into whom you were baptized, in the name of the one who underwent the true circumcision of the flesh, so that you do not have to undergo the curse of the covenant. Believe in Jesus and receive the adoption of sons as a gift, and hold onto him by faith, as he promises to bring you at last to the Heavenly Promised Land, in fulfillment of the covenant he made with Abraham. Amen.