

- I. The meaning of circumcision in review: You remember that a sacrament is an outward sign in the world of sense that indicates spiritual truth that cannot be understood with the senses. There are many of them in the Bible, and several of great importance in the Old Testament. One of these is circumcision. Last week we saw the meaning of circumcision. There were two basic themes connected with the sacrament.
- A. The promise of the coming of Christ and justification by faith. Abraham believed the promise that in him all the families of the world would be blessed; and received circumcision as a sign and seal of this faith. By his faith in the promise of God, Abraham was justified by faith: "He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe." and "And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." Romans 4:11, 22-24 Circumcision was a sign and seal that the promised Savior would come through Abraham, but not according to the flesh, but according to the promise. Galatians 3:16: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." The promise to Abraham which he believed and for which he received the sign and seal of circumcision was Jesus Christ.
- B. But there was another meaning to circumcision. There was a curse connected with it. Circumcision indicated the uncleanness of the flesh. That anything contrary to God's absolute requirement for purity and holiness was to be cut off. Because the sign was connected to human reproduction, it indicated that the whole of mankind was under the curse, and that everything that came forth from the sons of Adam was under the curse and wrath of God.

As Paul would say in Gal. 3:10: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." This had been re-enforced over and over in the law: "And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant."

As I pointed out last week, God's requirement is absolute obedience, and the removal from his sight everything that offends. Man in the flesh is such a creature. He is under the curse because of his sins, and everything that offends God must be cut off. Jesus put it very well: "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off. If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out."

But circumcision went even further: We saw last week that it was the pride of the heart that was the greatest offense to God. The unclean things in the heart: the pride, the hardness of impenitence, the unbelief, the hatred of God and His word: these are the signs of spiritual uncleanness, of which uncircumcision was just a sign. Therefore, God commanded them to circumcise their hearts, and love the Lord with all their hearts, and with all their souls, and with all their might.

This is the second meaning of circumcision: God's absolute requirement that everything that is in the heart of man that is offensive to Him must be removed. If it is not removed we are under the curse and must bear His awful wrath and judgment.

And so we read in I Cor. 7:19 "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandment of God." Oh, is that all!!! Sacraments are nothing if that which is signified by them is not observed or meaningless to us. To the Jew who disregarded the commandment of God, circumcision was nothing. So circumcision indicated the absolute requirement that every minute detail of the law must be kept. The law must be kept or circumcision is nothing.

II. This brings us to our text. Paul is saying that both of these meanings of circumcision are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Read verses 11-13.

A. In the first place, Christ has come, and fulfilled the promise of God in Deut. 30:5,6 "And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy father possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply the above thy fathers. And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the hearts of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live..." This is the circumcision that is referred to in verse 11: the circumcision of the heart. What does this involve:

1. Putting off of the body of sins. Everything contrary to God is cut off. If you believe the gospel, everything in you that is offensive to God is cut off, and the curse is removed: See Galatians 3:10-13. Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree. Jesus was cut off for you. He took the curse of the law. He in his body bore your body of sins, so that you might be forgiven and blessed. He was cut off from the land of the living; He became an unclean thing for you. He came and has done for you what you could not do for yourself.

This requires a verdict on your part. I see in the cross of Jesus Christ the hopelessness of anything I can do to save myself. The verdict of God against my sins is utter destruction and ruin. I am without hope and without God in the world. But I believe that Jesus died for me. Therefore, O Lord Jesus, I am going to trust you for forgiveness of my sins, and I am turning my eternal state over to you and to your care. I no longer belong to myself, but I belong to you, O Lord Jesus.

I am crucified with Christ. I see in His death my death.

2. Newness of life. The Christian gospel is of the greatest paradox: the way of death is the way of life. He that loves his life shall lose it. But to see yourself as a sinner under the curse of God, and to see in the death of Christ your own death, is to find the way of life: for Jesus Christ did not stay in the grave, but rose triumphantly on third day: and to be united to Jesus Christ in his death, means that you are also united to Him in newness of life. You cannot be united to Jesus Christ without knowing both the fellowship of his sufferings and the power of His new life.

3. This is the work of God. "operation" means "working" and powerful working in you.

Eph. 1:19

Phil. 2:13

Heb. 4:12

Gal. 5:6. Faith by working love.

The key is not whether or not the work needs to be done; but who is doing it. Circumcision tells us what we must do if we are going to do something to be pleasing to God: take the

knife and start cutting. When you finish you will be dead, and still not saved, because you still have the corruption of the heart. What knife will you use to cut away the hardness of your heart? What knife will remove the pride, the unbelief, the hatred toward God and your neighbor?

You need the powerful working of God himself: and that is the power that is in the Gospel of Christ: the power of faith, of trust, of Jesus Christ.

No wonder Paul cried out: "O that I might know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, that I might be conformed to his death." This is the only hope for wretched sinners such as we are.

Romans 4:4,5 Here is the key to the whole matter.

### III. And that brings us to the sacrament:

- A. In their former hopelessness the Colossians carried a badge in their own flesh: their uncircumcision: This indicated that they were without God and without hope in the world: that they were not of the nation of Israel who had had the promises and the covenants, especially the promise of the coming of Christ. They were ceremonially unclean, and bore the sign of their uncleanness in their flesh.

For you see, as circumcision indicated the promise of Christ's coming, and the promise of His renewing and cleansing; so uncircumcision indicated alienation from all these good things.

- B. But not only had good things come to the Colossians through the preaching of the Gospel, but something ceremonially had happened to them: they had been baptized, and therefore they did not need to be circumcised. The circumcision made without hands by Jesus Christ was signed and sealed to them in their baptism.
- C. The bible uses many figures to indicate what had happened to them: They were washed; they were raised from the dead; they had put on Christ; they were a new creation; they were buried with Christ; they were united to Christ as a body to the head.
- D. With the coming of Christ, therefore, circumcision no longer had any meaning in a religious sense. To be circumcised for religious purposes would now be a badge of unbelief: that Christ had not come, and I am trusting in my ability to cut off anything that offends God. Christ has become of no use and no value to such, and they are therefore under the curse of the law, and without hope.
- E. This is exactly the meaning of baptism to the believer. Christ has come, and we are united to Him. Being united to Him we have all the benefits of His obedience: his death, his burial, his resurrection; his working in us by His Spirit; cleansing from sins; one figure does not exhaust it at all. Water baptism is a sign of the baptism that Jesus performs, the baptism of the Holy Spirit from which all His blessings come to us. We have no confidence in the flesh, but hope in the promise of the power of God through the Holy Spirit to unite us to Jesus Christ, and work in us all those things that we are unable to do for ourselves. Our trust in him is complete and total. We need nothing else: not the law nor the ceremonies of the law; not the strength and power of the flesh; not the pride and intellect of the flesh; but the power of the gospel: the faith that works by love: or this faith that is working love.

What does this have to do with me? you ask. Let me summarize:

### **Conclusion**

1. If you are not a Christian; if you do not trust in Christ, then the only avenue left to you is the way of the law. And the law says this: "cursed is everyone who continueth...." You better get serious about it, and start removing everything from your life and thought and heart that is contrary to the God who made you. Don't waffle or shift around in all directions: this is what you are required to do. This way is absolutely hopeless for you, and the cross of Jesus Christ proves it. God would not have sent His son to a futile and useless death if you could have done it for yourself. Your unbelief richly deserves the wrath of God.
2. If you are a Christian, then you must cling only to Christ, and now allow anything to draw you off from Him. You are complete in Him, and there is nothing you can do to add to his perfect salvation. By His Spirit He has begun to work in you all things that are pleasing to Him. This power is through the gospel, and is through the gifts that He has given to you. So you must make much of the gospel, the Scriptures, and the fellowship of the saints.
3. This is witnessed by your baptism. It matters not whether you are baptized as a baby or as an adult, the meaning is the same: your salvation comes only through the power of the risen Christ: through the baptism of the Holy Spirit of which baptism is the sign and seal. It is this power working in you which is the fulfillment of all the promises of God, and is His work alone.

May God bless you.