

The Circumcision of Christ

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Introduction

Circumcision in the flesh is literally the cutting-off of the foreskin of flesh from the body, “Wherefore David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and **David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king**, that he might be the king’s son in law” (1Sa 18:27). But the Old Testament also taught a figurative circumcision which is that of the heart: “Circumcise therefore **the foreskin of your heart**” (Deu 10:16); “And the LORD thy God will **circumcise thine heart**” (Deu 30:6); “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away **the foreskins of your heart**” (Jer 4:4).

The circumcision of Jesus Christ is this figurative circumcision. It’s not a literal cutting-off of flesh from the body by men’s hands, but a figurative cutting-off of sinful actions from our daily living. A cutting in the flesh has nothing to do with having a right relationship with God. However, a cutting-off of sinful acts of the flesh has everything to do with our relationship. We can’t clean up our sinfulness ourselves. But by the Holy Breath of God in our hearts, Christ performs circumcision on us without hands that removes the sins of our flesh.

We must live righteously

Toward the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount, Christ stated, “For I say unto you, That **except your righteousness** shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, **ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven**” (Mat 5:20). Now, if Christ was speaking only of an imputed, reckoned, or counted righteousness as some claim, then for what purpose is the rest of His Sermon? Why teach this Sermon at all if we don’t need to live according to the standard of righteousness embodied within it? Not only that, Christ ended His Sermon with an analogy of two houses subjected to a storm that conveys the same message of obedience. The house that remained standing through the storm is the person that not only heard but did Christ’s sayings or commandments, “Therefore whosoever **heareth** these sayings of mine, and **doeth them**” (Mat 7:24), while the house that fell is the person that only heard but didn’t do, “And every one that **heareth** these sayings of mine, and **doeth them not**” (Mat 7:26).

Moses prophesied that God’s people were to hear the Prophet that would come, “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee **a Prophet** from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; **unto him ye shall hearken**” (Deu 18:15). And he went on to say that they were to not only hear this Prophet but do what He said, “... **that we may hear it, and do it? ... that we may hear it, and do it?** But the word *is* very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, **that thou mayest do it**” (Deu 30:12-14). Paul quoted from that passage and declared that this is the message of faithfulness he was preaching, “But what saith it? The word *is* nigh thee, *even* in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, **the word [message] of faith [faithfulness], which we preach**; That if thou shalt **confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus**, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom 10:8-9). Paul’s gospel message, therefore, is faithfulness to Jesus Christ as Lord—not only hearing but also doing everything He commanded.

We love to hear Paul saying “Being then made free from sin” (Rom 6:18), “But now being made free from sin” (Rom 6:22), but not quite as thrilled when hearing his other statements from the same passage, “ye became the servants of righteousness” (Rom 6:18), “servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Rom 6:19). And Peter relayed the same message, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, **that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness**: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1Pe 2:24). The point is that because Jesus Christ freed us from our sins, we’re now duty-bound to live righteously.

Because we’re no longer under the Old Covenant Law of Moses, it’s wrongly assumed that we’re absolved from keeping God’s commandments: “For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but **the doers of the law shall be justified**” (Rom 2:13); “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but **the keeping of the commandments of God**” (1Co 7:19); “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we **keep his commandments**” (1Jo 2:3); “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we **keep his commandments**, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1Jo 3:22); “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and **keep his commandments**” (1Jo 5:2); “Blessed *are* they that **do his commandments**, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev 22:14).

Christ’s law is “written” on our hearts

Because Paul taught that we can’t be justified in God’s sight by our works under the Law of Moses, “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight” (Rom 3:20), “a man is not justified by the works of the law ... by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal 2:16), it’s considered and even taught by many that we just can’t live up to God’s moral standard of righteousness. However, Paul also taught that under the New Covenant, by the strength of God’s Breath in our hearts, we not only *can* but *must* live according to the standard He requires. To be justified before Him, we must be doers of the Law and not just hearers.

For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the **Gentiles**, which have not the law, **do by nature [*physis*] the things contained in the law**, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: **Which shew the work [*ergon*] of the law written in their hearts** ... Therefore if **the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law**, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not **uncircumcision which is by nature [*physis*], if it fulfil the law, judge thee**, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? (Romans 2:13-15, 26-27)

The Greek *physis* translated in this passage as “nature” speaks of the natural state of uncircumcision in which all male babies are born, “uncircumcision which is by nature [*physis*]” (Rom 2:27). That uncircumcised Gentiles “do by nature the things contained in the law,” “keep the righteousness of the law,” and “fulfil the law” indicates that they’re actually living according to the righteous standard of morality the Law of Moses requires and even in their natural uncircumcised state. They demonstrate in their *ergon* or actions, “Which shew **the work [*ergon*] of the law** written in their hearts,” the morality the Law requires without having a codified law external to themselves. The law they’re keeping or fulfilling in their actions is “written” internally in their hearts.

The commandments given through Moses under the Old Covenant were written literally on stone tablets while the commandments given by Jesus Christ under the New Covenant are “written” figuratively on our hearts by God’s Breath, “written not with ink, but with **the Spirit [Breath] of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart** ... Who also hath made us able ministers of **the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit [breath]**: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, **written and engraven in stones**” (2Co 3:3, 6-7). And Paul called this law on our hearts “the ministration of righteousness” (2Co 3:9). In our human strength we can’t live according to the standard of righteousness God requires but by the strength of His Breath in our hearts, we not only *can* but *must*.

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that **I will make a new covenant** with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, **I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people**. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Jeremiah prophesied of the New Covenant under which God’s law would be “written” in the hearts of His people. The writer of Hebrews quoted from this prophecy twice, “I will put my laws into their mind, and **write them in their hearts**” (Heb 8:10), “I will put my laws into their hearts, and **in their minds will I write them**” (Heb 10:16).

The good that we would

“For that which I do I allow not: **for what I would, that do I not;** but what I hate, that do I ... **For the good that I would I do not:** but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Rom 7:15, 19), “who walk not after the flesh, **but after the Spirit [Breath]** ... For as many as are **led by the Spirit [Breath] of God**, they are the sons of God.” (Romans 8:1, 4, 14).

“*This* I say then, **Walk in the Spirit [Breath]**, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: **so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.** But if ye be **led of the Spirit [Breath]**, ye are not under the law.” (Galatians 5:16-18).

Paul was teaching the same truth to the Romans and Galatians in both of these passages that the end goal of our walk with God isn’t to simply stop doing the things we shouldn’t, but to be proactively doing the things we should. Whereas the Law of Moses focused mainly on the former, the one commandment “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14), on the latter.

Christ’s one commandment, “Therefore all things whatsoever **ye would [thelo]** that men should do to you, **do ye even so to them**” (Mat 7:12), “And as **ye would [thelo]** that men should do to you, **do ye also to them likewise**” (Luk 6:31), makes us first consider what we *would* have done to us, then do the same to others. And

His commandment is what Paul had in mind when he said, “for what I **would [thelo]**, that do I not” (Rom 7:15), “For the good that I **would [thelo]** I do not” (Rom 7:19), “when I **would [thelo]** do good” (Rom 7:21), “so that ye cannot do the things that ye **would [thelo]**” (Gal 5:17). The Law didn’t help us *to do* unto others the things we would have done to us—it simply commanded us what *not to do* unto them.

Paul explained to the Romans: “For this, **Thou shalt not** commit adultery, **Thou shalt not** kill, **Thou shalt not** steal, **Thou shalt not** bear false witness, **Thou shalt not** covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, **Thou shalt** love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore **love is the fulfilling of the law.**” (Rom 13:9-10). Except for a few positive injunctions such as “Remember the sabbath day” (Exo 20:8), “Honour thy father and thy mother” (Exo 20:12), the Old Covenant Law of Moses consisted primarily of negative “Thou shalt not” commandments. It told God’s people what *not to do*. But the law of the New Covenant written on our hearts is embodied in the one positive “Thou shalt” commandment—what God’s people *are to do*. Living according to the righteous standard God requires isn’t accomplished by striving *to not do* what we shouldn’t but by striving *to do* what we should! It isn’t about looking to an external code of ethics to tell us how we shouldn’t treat others, but looking at ourselves to know how we should treat them, “these, having not the law, **are a law unto themselves**: Which shew the work of the law **written in their hearts**” (Rom 2:14-15).

Looking at ourselves as the law we’re to obey is what Christ commanded, “Therefore all things whatsoever **ye would that men should do to you**, do ye even so to them” (Mat 7:12), “And as **ye would that men should do to you**, do ye also to them likewise” (Luk 6:31). Since we were all created with the same essential needs, we know what we should do to others by looking at ourselves first. James likened Christ’s “word” or commandment as though we’re looking at ourselves in a mirror, “For if any be a hearer of **the word**, and not a doer, he is **like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass**” (Jas 1:23).

Early in his letter to the Romans, Paul said that we “do by nature the things contained in the law” (Rom 2:14), “keep the righteousness of the law” (Rom 2:26), and “fulfil the law” (Rom 2:27). He then explained later how this is accomplished, “That **the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us**, who walk not after the flesh, but **after the Spirit [Breath]**. For they that are after the flesh do **mind [phroneo] the things of the flesh**; but they that are **after the Spirit [Breath] the things of the Spirit [Breath]**.” (Rom 8:4-5). And he said the same to the Philippians and Colossians, “Whose end *is* destruction, whose God *is* their belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame, **who mind [phroneo] earthly things**” (Phl 3:19), “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. **Set your affection [phroneo] on things above, not on things on the earth.**” (Col 3:1-2).

To mind “the things of the Breath” as opposed to “the things of the flesh” is to set our affection or desire “on things above” instead of “on things on the earth.” This is what Christ taught, “Lay not up for yourselves **treasures upon earth**, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: **For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**” (Mat 6:19-21).

Where your treasure is

Christ’s statement “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mat 6:19-21), gets to the very root of the problem. Since our hearts will be wherever our treasure is, our hearts are changed by changing our

treasure. The “things of the flesh” (Rom 8:5) are essentially “that they may have glory of men” (Mat 6:2), “that they may be seen of men” (Mat 6:5), “that they may appear unto men” (Mat 6:16). When we treasure or value the praise, attention, recognition, approval, and affirmation of people, our hearts won’t be pure, “Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Mat 5:8). We’ll be doing good things with the impure motive of getting glory in some way from people. The solution for this wrong condition of heart is changing our treasure.

Paul also said, “But he *is* a Jew, which is one **inwardly [kryptos]**; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; **whose praise is not of men, but of God**” (Rom 2:29). The Greek adjective *kryptos* means “secret” or “hidden.” He was teaching what Jesus taught, “That thine alms may be in secret [*kryptos*]: and **thy Father which seeth in secret [kryptos] himself shall reward thee openly**” (Mat 6:4), “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret [*kryptos*]; and **thy Father which seeth in secret [kryptos] shall reward thee openly**” (Mat 6:6), “That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret [*kryptos*]: and **thy Father, which seeth in secret [kryptos], shall reward thee openly**” (Mat 6:18). The name “Judah” from which “Jew” is derived means “praised.” Therefore, the Jew that’s truly living up to his name is the one who doesn’t treasure being praised by men but by God. That God will “reward thee openly” is that there will come a day when God Himself will praise, recognize, and affirm us openly and publicly in front of everyone. Those good things we did in secret that only God saw won’t be secret anymore! When our treasure becomes receiving praise from God on that day, then the motives of our hearts for the things we do will be pure.

The circumcision of Christ

We become Circumcised in the heart by changing our treasure, “But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and **circumcision is that of the heart**, in the spirit [*breath*], *and* not in the letter; **whose praise is not of men, but of God**” (Rom 2:29). When we’re no longer seeking praise from men but only from God, our hearts will change, “How can ye believe, which **receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?**” (Jhn 5:44).

Circumcision in the flesh is made by hands, “Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called **the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands**” (Eph 2:11). But the circumcision of Christ is without hands because it’s a figurative “cutting off” or “putting off” of the sins of the flesh, “In whom also ye are circumcised with **the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ**” (Col 2:11). Paul will say a little later “**put off all these**; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth” (Col 3:8). Christ circumcises our hearts by “cutting off” these kinds of sinful actions from our lives.

“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this; **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself**. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. *This* I say then, **Walk in the Spirit [*Breath*], and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh**.” (Gal 5:14-16). If we’ll “Walk in the Breath” and keep this one “Thou shalt” commandment, we won’t “fulfill the lust of the flesh.” The lusts of the flesh will be “cut off” and we won’t be doing what the “Thou shalt not” commandments in the Law of Moses were against.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; **Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like**: of the which I tell you

before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. **But the fruit of the Spirit [*Breath*] is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.** (Galatians 5:19-23)

The “Thou shalt not” commandments were against the works of the flesh. But not so with the fruit of the Breath for which “against such there is no law.” God’s Breath in our hearts produces fruit so that we’re not fulfilling or doing such works of the flesh. There’s no need for “Thou shalt not” injunctions against anything we’re doing when everything we’re doing is “Thou shalt.”

It was a negative “thou shalt not” commandment that was the first ever mandated, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, **thou shalt not** eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17). This was figurative and prophetic of the Law of Moses to come with all of its “Thou shalt not” commandments. And as with the first man, “And the eyes of them both were opened, and **they knew that they were naked**” (Gen 3:7), so it is with mankind because of the Law, “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and **all the world may become guilty before God**” (Rom 3:19). The Law exposed mankind’s guilt, leaving us “naked” or without excuse before God’s judgment.

“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. **Love worketh no ill to his neighbour:** therefore love *is* the **fulfilling of the law.**” (Rom 13:9-10). Because “Love worketh no ill,” it doesn’t violate any of the “Thou shalt not” commandments but fulfills or keeps the righteous moral standard the Law required. Our “nakedness” is “clothed” by “putting on” the Lord Jesus Christ, “**But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ,** and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof*” (Rom 13:14). And we “put Him on” by obeying His one commandment: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Mat 7:12); “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luk 6:31); “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Mat 22:39; Mar 12:31).

Paul told the Ephesians, “Wherefore **putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour:** for we are members one of another” (Eph 4:25). The cure for lying is speaking the truth! We would want our neighbor to always be truthful to us, therefore we should always be truthful to our neighbor. And the solution for stealing is working, “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth” (Eph 4:28). Working enables us to give rather than take. The circumcision of Christ is that we do the things we would resulting in that we won’t do the things that we wouldn’t.

Conclusion

We not only *can* but *must* live righteously to have eternal life. Christ stated it emphatically, “For I say unto you, That **except your righteousness** shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, **ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven**” (Mat 5:20). Paul taught it explicitly, “To them who by **patient continuance in well doing** seek for glory and honour and immortality, **eternal life**” (Rom 2:7). Eternal life isn’t by abstinence from wrong doing but continuance in well doing!

God's Breath in our hearts is the means by which we live righteously, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye **through the Spirit [*Breath*] do mortify the deeds of the body**, ye shall live" (Rom 8:13). We fulfill the righteous moral requirements of the Law by the strength of God's Breath in keeping Christ's one "Thou shalt" commandment. By keeping this one commandment, the works of the flesh are effectively "cut off" or "circumcised" from our lives. This is the circumcision of Christ from the heart.