



October 29, 2021

Circumcision of the Heart and God's Law

Warm hellos friends, brethren, co-workers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God, from here on the Gulf Coast. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you all doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

We are living in an increasingly lawless and violent world. There are horrible things still happening to so many that are caught in the wake of violent, lawless, barbaric people. Leaders and nations, (including our very own) seem focused on ignoring the laws set in place by both man and God.

The book of Romans describes the dynamics of what happens when one rejects the true God as lawgiver and the ultimate source of law and order. All sorts of lawless and perverted behaviors can then be easily justified as okay. Human nature is inclined toward this kind of mindset and reasoning. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be." (Romans 8:7)

In my studies over the years, and often times professors would tell us "humans are basically good, and would never cause harm to other humans intentionally". This is part of the reason there is so much confusion and fear currently, because there is a genuine disconnect between modern thought, teaching, and reality, based on the Divine Laws of God.

Some Bible readers have adopted the point of view that "*Under the New Covenant the laws of God are no longer necessary to be observed*".

Some conclude that the ministerial conference of Acts 15 concluded that the laws found in the Hebrew Scriptures are no longer in force. The first verse clearly spells out the issue at the core of the recorded controversy. Some Christians of Jewish descent troubled non-Jewish Christians with the assertion, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." We find, that there are actually two parts to the assertion:

- The claim that God required circumcision for all male Christians and,
- The implication that practicing circumcision would somehow "earn salvation".

Of course, this would mean adult circumcision, which God required of Israel only once (Joshua 5:1-3). Acts 15:10 acknowledges how difficult this would be.

After convening with members and elders, the leaders of the Church at Jerusalem issued a formal statement, showing the errors in this reasoning (verses 23-29). Because some continued to debate for years whether God required circumcision, the New Testament often repeats the indisputable fact that physical deeds can never earn salvation.

Circumcision was the identifying mark of one who was subject to the covenant that God made with Abraham (Genesis 17:1-14). The Jews viewed it as a formal and binding requirement on all the people of God. Having been followed for many generations, the Jews viewed circumcision as a virtual badge of godly citizenship; and therefore, it was difficult for them to consider it no longer essential.

Paul added clarity later, by explaining that circumcision was indeed essential, but that "circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, and *not in the letter*" (Romans 2:29). He was referring, of course to the cutting off of the over-riding influence of human nature and the necessary conversion or changing of the mind. God actually revealed this fuller spiritual understanding of the circumcision covenant through Moses (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6) and the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 4:4), but the non-converted Israelites missed its meaning. Might I ask are we any different in this nation today?

Modern readers of Acts 15 often overlook the background or purpose of the conference in Jerusalem, perhaps because the question of circumcision doesn't concern most people today.

That being said, some people today attempt to read a "non-law keeping" message into verses 24-29. But the ministry/leadership did not convene a conference at Jerusalem to discuss "the law".

If you and I use a little common sense, we can see the fallacy of any attempt to force the idea that these verses *terminated the law of God*. If anyone says that verses 24-29, (especially verses 28-29), show that the early Church didn't believe God binds the Christian to any laws other than those stated, he must also accept the logical extension-the early Church taught that God permits swearing, idolatry, dishonoring of parents, murder, adultery, stealing, and lying!

Of course, that's absurd, but it illustrates the point. The Jerusalem Church leaders were not abrogating these laws, and neither did they invalidate the Sabbath law (the one of the Ten Commandments often objected to by modern "Christians").

The main conclusion of the Conference leaders was that *God did not require male Christians to undergo circumcision for salvation*. The issues specifically noted in verses 28-29 related to problems common to the gentile population from which God was calling people to Christianity. These instructions also have a basis in the laws recorded in the Pentateuch (Leviticus 17:14;

18:5-20; Deuteronomy 12:23) The ministry pointedly reminded them of the need to withdraw from those unacceptable practices-not that such change would earn them salvation. God requires obedience of Christians, but it earns nothing. Salvation is a gift.

In His teaching on the night before He was taken, Jesus emphasized the love expressed in action that He expected from His disciples. "If you love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15) Also compare John 14:21 and John 15:10. The apostle John repeated this same instruction. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3)

The final book of the Bible in the New Testament canon also reminds the believer of the importance of obeying Gods' laws and commandments. "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city." (Revelation 22:14)

The foundational law of God is universal. It formed the basis of the Old Covenant and remains the basis of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:8-13).

Many sincere people carelessly equate "grace" with freedom from any obligation to obey God's laws. Breaking His Laws is sin (1 John 3:4). God's grace is the extension of a pardon, the suspension of the death penalty. It is only common sense, as well as the teaching of the Bible, that God expects the pardoned individual to be law-abiding from that point on, submitting to *His spiritual law*. Assuredly, there is freedom in grace. It includes freedom from the death penalty, as well as the freedom to live life the way God wants us to live. But it does not include the freedom to break any of the laws of God.

Reflect on this with me on this Sabbath, and throughout the coming week, will you?
Arms up friends! Our prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Please do pray for us as well.

-Scott Hoefker

(Pastor, Church of God Ministries)

Church of God Ministries (CGM)

(Ministerios de la Iglesia de Dios)

tshoefker@cogministries.org

www.cogministries.org

P.O. Box 983

Daphne, AL 36526-0983

251-930-1797 Office