



November 8, 2024

The Apostles Decision and Circumcision

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

Let's continue from last week's thoughts...returning to Acts 15, where we observed that the consensus of the apostles was *"that the Gentiles or non-Israelites were not required to have their males physically circumcised to become part of the body of believers."*

Did that mean that the whole package of laws found in the Pentateuch and the five books of Moses were all void and no longer applicable to New Covenant believers?

Let's examine the rest of the decision and the instructions given to the Gentiles and those uncircumcised.

The resident apostle and leader of the Jerusalem congregation, James (the Lord's brother), made the concluding statement. *"Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood."* (Acts 15:19-20)

Were these instructions totally new ideas? No. These prohibitions are found at least in principle in the Pentateuch.

The prohibition about not eating blood is found in Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 3:17; &

Deuteronomy 12:16, 23. There was the prohibition of eating something that died of itself found in Deuteronomy 14:21. When something dies of itself or is strangled, the blood is not properly drained out. I remember finding an animal while out walking in the woods when I was a young boy. I did not even touch it, as I was not sure how it had died...and this scripture came clearly to mind at that time as well.

The worship of idols is condemned in Exodus 20:4-5; Exodus 23:24; Leviticus 19:4; etc.

The word translated "sexual immorality" in Acts 15:29 is *porneia*. The Online Bible Greek Lexicon applies this word to "adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals etc." The seventh commandment found in Exodus 20:14 forbids adultery. Leviticus 18:22 forbids homosexual acts, and Leviticus 18:23 and Leviticus 20:15-16 forbid having sexual acts with animals. Leviticus 19:29 forbids offering a daughter as a prostitute and thus causing her to commit fornication. So clearly the laws found in the terms of the Old Covenant were not at all abolished by the Acts 15 decision.

How did the practice of physical circumcision arise then?

Circumcision was introduced to Abraham and was required of those who would enter the covenant pertaining to receiving the land of Canaan as an inheritance. Notice Genesis 17:7-8: "*And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.*" Circumcision of the males was required to enter this covenant and it was in essence a sign of the covenant by which the LORD promised the land of Canaan to Abram and his descendants. (vs. 10-11)

The covenant made at Mount Sinai pertained to the civil structure to govern Israel when they entered the promised land of Canaan. The Israelites in essence were under a Theocracy wherein the LORD was their king and the Pentateuch was their constitution. Notice the mention of the tribes to be driven out and the boundaries of the territory to be occupied by the Israelite tribes in Exodus 23:28-31.

Under the New Covenant, those entering it are not part of any physical nation or territory. They are to show allegiance to a heavenly kingdom that they look forward to but has not yet been established on the earth. (Hebrews 11:14-16). Those called to enter the new covenant seek a better, heavenly country, not the land of Canaan. The New Covenant is termed a "*better covenant, which was established on better promises.*" (Hebrews 8:6) Instead of being promised a good life in the flesh in the land of Canaan, believers are promised eternal life and entry into the New Jerusalem that is part of a new heavens and a new earth. (Romans 2:7; 1 Timothy 6:19; Revelation 21:1-3, 27)

Those being added to the body of believers under the New Covenant are instructed to be baptized following repentance. (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 10:47-48)

Physical circumcision was *symbolic* of a more important and meaningful event. We'll continue this discussion next time...

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.



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