

The Covenants, Grace, And Law (Part Six)

Circumcision

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Those of you who have been with us these last eight or ten weeks, I think you understand that I told you at the very beginning that this subject is really very large. It encompasses a great deal more than just one or two messages in regards to the covenant or justification. And so we have been going through subjects, one at a time, and right now I do not see any end in sight.

But I will remind you that in last week's sermon we looked at the attitude of the "no law" adherents and how this reflects on the God that they say that they love. Every single one of us is aware of Romans 8:7, where it says,

Romans 8:7 The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

In brief, it is saying (in regards to this issue) that despite what the people say about their love for God, they are, in reality, *against God*. That is, it can be shown by what they *do*. The enmity reveals itself in its antagonism against God's law, or against particular laws. In other words, God is saying that *carnality cannot be hidden*.

That means, of course, that it cannot be hidden in us either. When I say that there is carnality within us, it does not mean that we are unconverted. Again, recall I Corinthians 3:3 where Paul told the converted Corinthians that they were "yet carnal." They were converted. But the carnality within them could not be hidden. It came out.

That is basically what Romans 8:7 is saying. Carnality will reveal itself in a number of ways. I mentioned to you that it will reveal itself in a desire to do as little as possible, in demanding a direct "Thus saith the Lord" rather than seeing the intent of the law, or even the intent of a godly life lived. We saw that, by contrast, Paul said that faith establishes law; and that God's law is holy, just, and good.

I am against this common perception that some of God's laws are "done away." It is this phrase "done away" that I feel icky about. I feel that is a carnal and a dangerous approach to God's Word. Just as sure as I am standing here and you are sitting there, it is a subtle deception that will lead one to ignore major portions of God's Word. Hang on to that, because this sermon is going to be basically on that principle. If we feel that something in God's Word is "done away," human nature will lead a person to ignore that portion of scripture.

Now, turn with me to a very familiar scripture as we being to lay a foundation here. Jesus said:

Matthew 4:4 "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'"

Every word! I want you to see that is right in the New Testament, and it is quoted directly from the Old Testament—Deuteronomy 8:3. At the time that this was uttered by Jesus to Satan, "every word of God" consisted of the Old Testament. There was no New Testament. Now, how can one do that—live by "every word of God"—if the Old Testament is done away? Or, if the inference is made that there are major portions of the Old Testament that we can ignore or that we do not have to pay very much attention to?

Even if we believe that every Word of God includes the Old Testament, I think that you have trouble with the "begats." I mean, it just does not hold your interest. If we, believing that we are to live by every Word of God, know that even the "begats" are inspired (and we have a difficult time reading through the "begats," studying the "begats") then what do you think it is going to do to the carnality within us if we think that major portions of the Old Testament can lawfully be ignored? We will not pay any attention to it. (I am very suspicious of human nature.)

A question: Is it necessary for every law binding upon the New Testament Christian to be written in the New Testament? Let us look at another very familiar scripture.

II Timothy 3:15-17 And that from a child you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Brethren, if I am reading that scripture correctly, at the time that Paul wrote that there was no New Testament. We do not even need the New Testament! Everything that is *necessary for salvation* is in the Old Testament! Is it necessary that every law binding upon us be in the New Testament? Absolutely not! Once you begin to see that—what the scripture is really saying—it becomes self-evident.

If there is any part of the Bible that can be done away with, it is the New Testament. We do not want to take that approach either. Every bit of it is there for us—for our spiritual well-being. But the Old Testament is able to give us adequate instruction in right doing—rectitude. That is what **righteousness** means.

Let us get a little bit more specific. Does this tell us something, then, about the Sabbath, about the holy days, about tithing, about the food laws? It ought to give you an inclination in the right direction. They were all in the Old Testament.

Every word of God is **inspired**. God inspired it through a multitude of men (and women, as well) over a period of about 1500 years. It is written with an economy of words, compared to what could have been produced. I mean, if God wanted to, He could fill up libraries with His Word regarding instruction. But He used an economy of words to get across to us all that is necessary to fulfill His purpose.

Now, considering the way He did it, do you not think that He was careful enough to not include sections within it that are superfluous? In other words, He only put in what was necessary. There is nothing superfluous in God's

Word. Everything is in there for our well-being. There are some things that are repeated; and, if they are repeated, it is His way of telling us, "Hey, you'd better really pay attention to this—because it's important."

Jesus said that He always did what the Father said. Jesus kept the Sabbath. That is beyond dispute. He kept the Sabbath. The Head of the church kept the Sabbath, and so did His first converts. They kept the Sabbath. They kept the holy days. Years after Christ died and was resurrected, Peter said, "I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." Not only unclean, but also something that was ceremonially defiled. And he was not corrected on it.

Jesus said that not one jot or tittle would pass from the law until all is fulfilled. Everything has not been fulfilled. So not one jot or tittle has passed yet. We are responsible to every Word of God. So who are we going to believe? Is it going to be those who say that some laws of God are done away? Or, is it going to be our Savior and Creator who said not one jot or tittle would pass away, and who kept the Sabbath, kept the holy days, endorsed tithing, etc., etc.?

Psalm 119:152 Concerning Your testimonies, I have known of old that You have founded them forever.

The word "founded" means bottomless, or foundation, or beginning. Here it means *established*. They are established forever. Do you see what that means? In practical situations, God's laws are not done away—ever! God's laws are an eternal constant.

For a man to say that God's laws are done away is to imply that God is less than perfect. It implies that God really did not think the things through that He gave, and He has kind of hurriedly thrown something together as merely a stopgap measure until something better came along. Now, you know where that kind of thinking came from. It did not come out of God's Word. Jesus said that not one jot or tittle passes from God's law until everything is fulfilled.

Now look at another one here, in Ecclesiastes 3. This is at the end of that section where there is a time for this, and a time for that.

Ecclesiastes 3:14 I know that whatsoever God does, it shall be forever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God does it, that men should fear before Him.

God does everything in the ultimate of wisdom! Everything He does is thoroughly thought through. Every ramification is considered. God knows the end from the beginning. And so when God gives a law, *the greatest Mind that is* has thoroughly thought through every ramification that it is going to have; and He has considered it before He passes it on to mankind as something by which to live. Nothing can be added to it, nothing can be taken from it—because it is perfect.

Let us look at one out of the New Testament. Look what we are getting into here. As James was giving his pronouncement in regards to the discussion that was going on, he said:

Acts 15:18 Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.

The way that this is translated, it means that God knows what He is doing. We may not understand what He is doing, and this is a major reason why we have to *live by faith*. We do not know everything like He does, so we have to trust Him.

This is not at all unusual. Every one of you, who are an adult, knows that when you were in your home and growing up, your parents had rules. They had strictures. They gave you directions that you did not understand. You may have thought they were unfair. You may have thought they were being too harsh. You might have thought, "You are being too hard on me. You are boxing me in. You are not giving me freedom." But now that you are older and you can look back on that, can you not now say that your parents were probably right—pretty close to 100% of the time, in regard to these things. They just **knew more** than you did!

Those of you who are parents know that your children consider you to be unfair, because you are telling them to do something that they do not understand. And that is basically what James is saying here. God knows

what He is doing (from the very beginning), but we do not always know. So we have to live by **trust** in what He says. "The just shall live by faith." And a person is saved by grace, through faith—through trust.

Just as surely as when you are growing up, you do not know how many times your life may have been spared by following what your parents said to do. Or, at least, you were spared injury by following their directions. It is the same principle, no difference at all. That is a major reason, in simple terminology, why we cannot afford to assume that a certain law "does not apply to me." Do you know what that does? It puts us in a special category. It is like saying, "Well, that applies to everybody else, but not to me." That is dangerous thinking, *very* dangerous.

Now, what am I saying here? Does it mean that I am saying that every law that God has uttered—every law that is written in His Word—is absolutely binding upon us under the New Covenant? No, I am not saying that at all. To this point, what I am saying is that we cannot afford to have the attitude that "this doesn't apply to me." That is very dangerous.

So what I am saying is that there is **great wisdom** in all of God's instruction; and it is our responsibility to extract that wisdom, and to use it to glorify Him. If we think something is done away, we will pay no attention to it and we will lose its benefit. That is just the way human nature is.

Acts 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, "Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Acts 15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

I am going to use circumcision as an example of why it is needful for us to have this attitude that *there is wisdom in every law of God*. At this council [in Acts 15], it was determined that a person could make and keep the New Covenant without being physically circumcised.

At this point, I might also add that the issue here was much wider than just theological. It involved at least three related issues:

(1) Gentiles, Jews—it did not matter—circumcision was seen by the people as that step that obligated one to the whole law. That is, the Old Covenant law. You can see that. It is expressed by Paul in Galatians 5:3. So, circumcision was seen as that step which obligated one to the whole Old Covenant law.

(2) Circumcision was also seen as a cultural form that made one a citizen of the commonwealth of Israel. I will tell you, this one was a real sticky wicket. You might remember that even though the church is called "the Israel of God," in Galatians 6:16, Paul also said, in Romans 11, that the Gentiles "being a wild olive branch" are grafted in amongst the natural branches. That is, Israel. You also might recall Ephesians 2, where Paul said to the Ephesian Gentiles, "At that time, you were separated from the covenants of God and the commonwealth of Israel." So this second one was a sticky wicket.

(3) Since circumcision was that step that confirmed that a person had made the Old Covenant with God, it was therefore theologically out of sync with the New Covenant reality that access to God and justification by grace through faith in Christ's sacrifice. This is the primary reason—the primary factor—that Paul addresses in Romans and Galatians. It is the theological issue. But never forget that circumcision represented more than just the theological issue. There were national and cultural issues, as well as racial issues.

Because of justification by faith and by grace, it is this that makes possible the making of the New Covenant. The commentators admit that this issue of Gentiles becoming a part of Israel had very far-reaching cultural ramifications and was a very real factor in this dispute.

You and I cannot more fully understand this issue unless we factor in the Jewish code of laws. (Not God's laws, but the Jewish code of laws.)

Ephesians 2:11-15 Wherefore remember, that you 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 [that

is, the Jews]; that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even [or against] the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of two one new man, so making peace.

There is sufficient evidence—both within the Bible and in secular history—that even the Protestant commentators recognize and understand that Paul may **not** be referring to God's law at all in verse 15. Rather, he is referring to the Jewish regulations that exceedingly exacerbated the separation of Israel from the Gentiles.

That God's law separates (the Bible calls it "sanctifies," sets apart) those who obey it, is an established biblical principle. Jesus said, in His prayer to His Father:

John 17:17 Sanctify them through Your truth. Your word is truth.

You keep the Sabbath, and it immediately sanctifies you from your neighbor. You keep God's law, and it will sanctify you. That is a given. If you try to keep God's law and then you factor into your own life the Jewish code of laws, now you not only are sanctified before the people but it exacerbates the problem considerably. What we are talking about here would be just like rubbing salt into a Gentile's wound.

Now, turn with me to Galatians 2. Peter and Paul had a run-in because of something Peter did.

Galatians 2:11-14 But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain men came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles. But when they were come, he withdrew himself and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision [Jews]. And the other

Jews, dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compel you the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?"

Brethren, where does it say in the law of God—where does it say in the Old Testament—that an Israelite cannot eat with a Gentile? It is not there. Where did it say that an Israelite could not eat with a Gentile? In the Jewish code of law—not God's law! It was not in God's law at all! You see, when the Jews did that, the Gentiles put everything together into one basket; and they ended up blaming God. If the Jews did it, it must have been the law of God. Oh no, it was not! It was the Jewish code of laws.

Mark 7:1-3 Then came together unto Him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashed hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders.

They did not get that out of God's law. Does God's law advise normal and right sanitation and cleanliness? Yes, it does—but not this. This was the tradition of the elders.

Mark 7:6-9 He answered and said unto them, "Well has Esaias [Isaiah] prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.' Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups. And many other such like things you do." And He said unto them, "Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition."

I have before a book from my library. It is called, "The Code of Jewish Law." Those here can see that this book is 1½ inches thick, and it is written

in fine print. Any of you familiar with a computer, the font that is used here is about a #8. That is pretty small. It contains thousands of regulations that have to do with daily life of the Jew. Do you know why they did this? They did it in good intentions. They did it out of a desire to try to help keep the law of God, but they regulated the people to death!

Before I came here, I was sitting on the bed in the motel room and I just blindly flipped this book open. This is right about in the middle of the book, and let me read you a few things. It just happened to open up to some things in regards to the Sabbath:

It is forbidden to write or to draw a picture, even with the finger in liquid spilled on the table, or on the rime of a window pane, or anything similar to it—no matter how impermanent such writing is. It is even forbidden to make a mark upon any object with the fingernails. Wax, or the like, found on a book—even if it is only one letter—must not be removed. Just as it is forbidden to write on the Sabbath, it is also forbidden to erase any writing. Nevertheless it is permissible to break and to eat on the Sabbath tarts on which letters or figures have been made; but if they have been made as a charm for children, one should avoid doing it.

I want to read this one to you, because it is interesting:

Just as it is forbidden to erect even a temporary structure on the Sabbath, even so it is forbidden to make a temporary addition to a permanent structure but a doorway which is not made for general entrance and exit, but is used as such only occasionally, and one has attached a door for that opening which does not swing on pivots. The term "pivots" signifies a piece of wood or iron projecting from the door which is made into an aperture in the threshold in the upper doorposts so that the door swings both ways. The same applies to doors with hinges, but one has tied it up thereto and hung it up close to the opening therewith. As long as there is a hinge on the door, but even if there is no hinge at present but the place where it has been is still discernible, one may close the opening with it on the Sabbath.

What did I say? You have not the foggiest idea.

However, if the door bears no sign of a hinge, it is forbidden to close an opening with it on the Sabbath. For since the doorway is used only on rare occasions and it is not obvious that the door has been intended to be used as a door, it is equivalent to the act of building. However, if it is attached and hung up well, so that when it opens it does not drag on the ground, even if it is suspended above the ground only so much as a hair breadth, it is then obvious that it has been intended as a door and it is permissible to close the opening with it.

It is forbidden to sweep the house, even if the floor is made of stone or a board; but it may be done by a non-Jew. However, even a Jew is allowed to sweep if he is doing it in an entirely unusual manner, as when he sweeps it with goose feathers or the like.

This was what made the anger! It was not the law of God. This was what built that *wall of partition* that separated the Jew and the Gentile, and made them so angry they could hardly spit. God's law, indeed, does sanctify; but it does it in a holy way. It is not done to make your neighbor look like an idiot—something less than a human being, something like a dog (which is what they called the Gentiles).

It is no wonder that Jesus said: "Full well you reject *the commandments of God*, that you may keep *your own tradition*." Even though it was done out of good intentions—to keep people from breaking the law. What it did was become an impossible-to-keep burden that kept people from enjoying life. It exacerbated the Gentiles. And worst of all, it succeeded in making people fiercely separate and fanatically intolerant. At the same time, it led them to believe that this was what pleased God and made them acceptable to Him. (We have a modern version of this today. It is called Islamic Fundamentalism.) In the minds of the Gentiles, circumcision and the law of God became linked to this; and you see, circumcision was right at the vortex of this mix.

It is important to remember that Judaism lurks behind the early New Testament church. And Judaism was a **perversion** of the religion that God

gave to Moses. The Sadducees and the Pharisees in their applications gave to religious life in Judea a pale that was beyond the laws of God. They became, then, the objects of Christ's correction. Not the laws of God, but the Sadducees' and the Pharisees' (and most specifically, the Pharisees') application.

So keeping these things became a major issue in the "*works of the law*" discussions in the Bible, along with circumcision. Circumcision *is* a work of the law, but so were these other things; and they were not clearly differentiated within the Bible. Keeping the Ten Commandments is a work of the law. Keeping the law of Moses is a work of the law. And so when you study, all of these things have to be factored together in order to get the correct understanding. What was Paul talking about in this circumstance?

I Corinthians 7:18 Is any man called being circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised.

You may or may not be aware that the pressures regarding circumcision were so great at this time. It was a cultural thing, as well as mixed together with religion. But pressures put on Jewish men by their peers led them to have a surgical correction to themselves, so that it appeared that they were still uncircumcised. That is why Paul says, "Let him not become **un** circumcised."

I Corinthians 7:18-19 Is any called in uncircumcision? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God [and let me add here, "is what matters"].

What is important is the keeping of the commandments of God. Obviously then, we ought to be able to draw a conclusion. When it said in Acts 15:5, "You must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses," based on what Paul says here in I Corinthians 7:19, the Ten Commandments were not included in the "law of Moses" statement of Acts 15:5. Every one of us ought to be able to see that.

Now, what about circumcision?

Acts 16:1 Then came he to Derbe and Lystra. And, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek.

In this kind of a situation, the mother's race was considered by the Jews to be the deciding factor. And since she was a Jewess, in the eyes of the Jews, Timothy was a Jew (even though he was half Gentile, half Jewish). So this was a genealogical decision that the Jews had made.

Acts 16:2-3 Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him [on his journeys]; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters. For they knew all that his father was a Greek.

Paul—who is the great apostle against circumcision, right? People reach that conclusion. It almost seems, the way some write, as though he hated it—because it was the antithesis of everything he believed. Not so! Not so at all! Paul had Timothy circumcised. And he did that as a concession to the Jews. He obviously did not consider circumcision a curse. This is the same apostle who wrote in Galatians that, if you are circumcised, it commits you to the whole law.

Obviously, Paul understood things differently than people are interpreting today. Was he committing Timothy to the whole law? I do not think Paul contradicted himself. Are you beginning to see what I mean? This circumcision thing is not as simple as people would like to make you think. A person has to use **discernment**. Use the Spirit of God. Look at the Scriptures throughout the entirety of the Bible. In one place Paul says, "Well, we don't have to be circumcised." In another place, he turns around—the same apostle—and he circumcises.

Wait a minute. It is going to get richer than that in just a minute. But that ought to at least tell us that he was not against God's law. That ought to at least tell us that he [Paul] did not consider everything "done away." Is it possible that when he wrote that he was defining an important *theological*

point that we needed to understand? And that even though that theological point is true, there are *practical ramifications* to circumcision that are important and should not be cast aside? Here was an important consideration. For the sake of Timothy, and for the sake of the Jews—Paul circumcised. It was not a curse.

Acts 21:18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

Paul has returned to Jerusalem, and he has come into James. James is the leading theologian, apostle, at the church in Jerusalem.

Acts 21:19-21 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law. And they are informed of you, that you teach all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs."

You can see what we are leading to here. What the Jews were saying about Paul was a lie!

Acts 21:22-24 "What is it therefore? The multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that you are come. Do therefore this that we say to you. We have four men which have a vow on them. Take them, and purify yourself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning you, are nothing [They are not true.]; but that you yourself also walk [live your life] orderly, and keep the law."

Did Paul jump up and say, "That's a lie! I don't have to. It's done away!" I am not twisting anything. Either God's Word is true, or it is not. Paul was **not**

guilty of teaching people that they should not circumcise and reject Moses. It is pretty hard to get around that one. He was not against the laws. He willingly entered into what James suggested.

Why, then, is there so much written about circumcision? Because it was at the vortex of an important theological consideration that had spiritual ramifications, and would have had those ramifications (because of the New Covenant) whether there were Gentiles called into the church or not.

The thing about circumcision did not depend on Gentiles being called into the church. It depended upon, if I can put it this way, God's cloud moving in a different direction.

Genesis 17:9-14 And God said unto Abraham, "You shall keep my covenant therefore, you, and your seed after you in their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your seed after you; every man child among you shall be circumcised. And you shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of your seed. He that is born in your house, and he that is bought with your money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from my people; he has broken my covenant.

Circumcision was *the sign* of the covenant Abraham made with God. And ever after this time when Abraham and his family were circumcised, all of his male descendants were also circumcised. In verse 11, the word "sign" (or in the King James it says, "token") is a word of very wide application. It generally means something that points to another. Used in this kind of context, what the sign points to cannot be seen. Thus it carries the implication of *evidence, proof, argument, that which authenticates*.

In other words, this **sign** authenticates something. It is pointing to *something that cannot be seen*. The circumcision itself could be seen. It was pointing to something that could not be seen. Used in this kind of context, it comes very close to the English word **seal**. A seal is that which gives *genuineness* to something. So if a highly placed person puts his seal on a letter (and since that person is the only person that has the seal), it authenticates that the letter came from that person—such as a king, a duke, or whatever. Circumcision authenticated something. It pointed to something that could **not** be seen.

Exodus 12:13 And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where you are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

That is the same word, token, as used in Genesis 17. The blood was a **sign** pointing to the fact that there were Israelites inside. The Israelites could not be seen. The blood could. I am going to change that just a bit and say that the blood *authenticated* that there were people under its protection inside the house. Do you get it?

Exodus 12:48 And when a stranger shall sojourn with you, and will keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.

Same word again. We are dealing with circumcision; and, in this case, it authenticated—it pointed to—someone who was permitted to eat the Passover. This was the Lord's Passover. And so then the circumcision was the sign that authenticated that this person had, indeed, made the covenant with God. You could not see the covenant. You could see the sign.

Under the Old Covenant, circumcision was the **sign** that one had made the Old Covenant; and it represented that which ensured his acceptance with God. It was proof that he was heir of the promises given to Abraham. It was this fact—when contrasted to Christ's sacrifice, faith, and grace—which precipitated the major theological argument of the first century. And it is

through Paul's persuasive writings that we understand clearly that no physical thing, no ritual of or by itself, has any power to transfer righteousness to the doer. Please get that. No physical thing—ritual, mark, or whatever—has the power, of and by itself, to transfer righteousness to the doer.

Back to the Old Testament again; and to me this really gets rich. Even before one leaves the Pentateuch, we find God giving intimations of circumcision—applying it to something far greater and more meaningful than merely cutting off a man's foreskin. And this begins to teach us why we should not have a "the law is done away" attitude, because much **spiritual instruction** is in the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy 10:12-16 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, and to love Him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all your heart and with all your soul. To keep the commandments of the LORD, and His statutes, which I command you this day for your good? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD'S thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the LORD had a delight in your fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

Notice the interesting context here. Notice the verbs—fear, love, walk, serve, keep. Boy, that sounds just like the New Testament! This is the context that circumcision falls in. The principle of circumcision that points to something! Fear and love are interrelated attitudes; and those who have them **will** walk in God's way. They **will** obey Him. They **will** keep His laws. There is not a single person who can honestly claim to love God and at the same time neglect His laws. These verses link them together!

The book of I John clearly says that. It teaches that in I John 3-5. That is a major principle of Christianity. Sin is the breaking of the law. Love is law keeping. God's way is at least partly described by His laws. Why are we to love Him? This context, in which circumcision appears, tells us. Is it because of His saving acts? Is it because of our general prosperity? Are we bound to

do this just because of these things? The context tells us that it is *because He loved us first*. That is what obligates us. Read it. He said, "I chose **you** above all people on earth. That's why you are to love Me."

And so, what is our love? It is a response to His love! How do we express that love? We keep His commandments. Please do not forget circumcision, because it has very much to do with what we are talking about here.

I John 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us.

Romans 5:8 But God commended His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

What am I saying here? Even before we leave the first five books of the Bible, God is already beginning to establish—by giving intimations, if nothing else—that membership in the Old Covenant had *spiritual ramifications*. It is in this context that the word *circumcision* appears.

What—to **God**—did the circumcision really represent? The Israelites forgot this in a hurry, as He just told us there in Deuteronomy. To God (1) the outward circumcision was, in reality, of very little significance and (2) real membership—even in the Old Covenant—was something that was *inward*, not outward. That is all the way back in Deuteronomy, folks. But still on the same subject of circumcision, let us go to Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

Jeremiah 9:25-26 "Behold, the days come," saith the LORD, "that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised; Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.

Did you notice who was included with those Gentile nations? Judah! Do you think that there was a period of time when the Jews did not circumcise? They always circumcised! Throughout their history, that is something that they never forgot [except in the wilderness]. But God ranks them with nations that you and I normally think of as being uncircumcised.

This is a rather long and interesting section. It actually begins at the beginning of chapter 4 and goes all the way through the end of chapter 9. The point is this: Jeremiah exhorts the Jews to be *committed to the covenant* on an ethical and a moral basis—rather than merely being mutilated physically.

By the time we get to Jeremiah 9:26, God declares that He is going to punish all—whether they are circumcised or uncircumcised. The unusual element in this whole thing is that those nations, which He mentioned along with Judah, also circumcised their males. Even today, those nations are Islamic; and they still circumcise.

What He is saying is that the Jews—though they were *physically circumcised*—were just as *uncircumcised in the heart* as the Gentile nations that God never dealt with in a covenant relationship. Again, God is clearly showing that *the Old Covenant circumcision was spiritual*. In the New Covenant, brethren, nothing really changed.

Are you beginning to see why Paul would circumcise somebody? The outward circumcision made no difference spiritually; but it did make a cultural difference. So, for the sake of Timothy's life and so that the Jews were not offended, Paul said, "Go ahead and do it." Even under the Old Covenant, all the physical circumcision did was point to something that was **inside**. It was pointing to something that could not be seen on the outside. Is that not simple? It is so beautiful!

Jeremiah 6:10 To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken. Behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it.

Exodus 6:12 And Moses spoke before the LORD, saying, "Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?"

We saw in Jeremiah that it is possible for the ear to be uncircumcised. Anybody here in the habit of cutting off their ear? We see here in Exodus 6 that it is possible for the mouth to be uncircumcised. Nobody wants to cut off his or her lips. Are you beginning to see why the New Testament says, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing"? What is important is *keeping the commands of God!* Let us get our mind on that.

Acts 7:51-53 You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, do you always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom you have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

Stephen told the Jews that they were *uncircumcised in heart*. An uncircumcised heart is one that is closed and is impervious to God's attempts to have an effect on it. The uncircumcised in heart resist Him. That is why He told the Israelites, and like Stephen said to the Israelites, "Be no more stiffnecked." It is a sign, a Bible symbol, of **resistance**. You get your back up. And when God speaks His Word, people get their back up against it.

That is why the carnal mind will always reveal itself. It gets its back up against God's Word, and the enmity comes out—in a breaking of the law of God, in a breaking of the Word of God—and it cannot be hidden. It absolutely cannot be hidden! Now, God is willing to hide it *if we will repent*; and He wipes it away. But it is not hidden from us. In the heart of our heart, we see that resistance begin to rise. That is a good sign to you and me that there is still carnality there that has to come out.

Uncircumcised ears are those which hear imperfectly because it only hears what it wants to hear, or it hears with such a strong prejudice that it rejects truth out of hand. *Uncircumcised lips* speak the Word of God imperfectly,

incoherently, because (as Moses showed) they are either sealed fully or in part. In regard to an *uncircumcised heart*, that which hinders is cut away.

Are you beginning to see the parallel with physical circumcision? If *that which hinders* is cut away by the circumcision made without hands, then the uncircumcised heart opens up and it becomes pliable and amenable to the direction of God. The result of such circumcision is **submission to the will of God**.

Deuteronomy 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

God says to the Israelite that this is something they have to do.

Deuteronomy 30:1-6 And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you shall call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD your God has driven you, and shall return unto the LORD your God, and shall obey his voice according to all that I command you this day, you and your children, with all your heart, and with all your soul; that then the LORD your God will turn your captivity, and have compassion upon you, and will return and gather you from all the nations, whither the LORD your God has scattered you. If any of you be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the LORD your God gather you, and from thence will he fetch you. And the LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and he will do you good, and multiply you above your fathers. [Now, look at the next verse.] And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live.

In one place He says that it is something that we have to do. In the other place He says, "I will do it." What conclusion is there? It is *a cooperative effort*. That is, the circumcision that saves—the circumcision that points to the fact that "This one has made the covenant with Me."

Now, of our circumcision, what can you see? What you see is that the person is submissive to the law of God. So circumcision—far from being done away—is a very important spiritual aspect of the New Covenant. And when we come to understand, it was for this purpose that the New Covenant was made. God designed it so that we can be **circumcised in heart**. Did He not say that He is going to write His laws *in our heart*? As long as that heart is uncircumcised, it will resist.