

January 17-Genesis 17

In Genesis 17 we read about God's covenant with Abraham and how God designed the covenant to work with the men of Israel being circumcised as a sign of the agreement (v. 11). If a man refused to be circumcised, he will be cut off from the blessing and from the nation of Israel (v. 14). Circumcision was God's way of identifying His people in the world. It was to be evident to the entire world that the people of Israel were a unique people who served the one true God.

Of course as Leviticus states repeatedly, the ultimate mark of God's people should be their holiness. God repeats "be holy because I am holy" often in the Levitical law as His ultimate desire for His people. Circumcision however was another, more immediate method of separation from the lost people around Israel. Obedience to this command was necessary, however Israel proved time and time again that they could be obedient to the outward commands of God while neglecting to love Him and obey Him in their hearts. God describes His people in Jeremiah 9:26 as "uncircumcised in heart". God has always known the condition of each person's heart and His chief desire has always been not just cold obedience but loving submission.

In the New Testament, Jesus reserves most of His harshest words for the Pharisees who strove to live a life of full outward obedience to the law. Jesus' speaks about the problem with their heart stating in Matthew 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others." Notice in this verse that Christ does not chastise the Pharisees for their obedience in tithing; He simply rebukes them for neglecting the deeper truths of the law.

God desires faithful obedience that originates in a love and devotion to Him. This love comes from a heart that has been changed by His grace and made alive by His Spirit. Interestingly enough, Paul uses the imagery of circumcision in Colossians 2:11 stating "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ". God's people are still a circumcised people, however now our circumcision is of the heart. Our hearts have been fundamentally altered by Christ, in fact according to verse 13 Christ made our hearts alive in Him! This new life enables us to lovingly obey Christ all the days of our lives.