

Circumcision continued

1. *A sign of God's grace*

2. *A test of obedience*

3. *Circumcision was a sign of the human problem*

4. *Circumcision speaks of God's willingness to give a new heart to enable obedience*

5. *Circumcision also speaks of continuing and progressive renewal*

6. *Circumcision spoke of God's willingness to come to the aid of those with a new name and new nature*

7. *Circumcision was a call to obedience*

Circumcision symbolised the things that were happening when Abram was ninety-nine years old, and when God was carrying forward His plans to give Abram an oath of blessing.

Circumcision is:

(1) First and foremost the sign of God's moving in grace and God's promises; also

(2) It was a test of obedience.

3. **Circumcision was a sign of the human problem.** The fact that the sign was connected with the human organ of procreation is significant. It points to birth and what is inherited by birth. It points to inherited sinfulness. In popular thinking circumcision has connections with hygiene. Its use as a spiritual symbol suggested there was an inherited uncleanness in the human race that was spiritual rather than physical. It suggested that the 'heart' needed to be circumcised, and that an uncircumcised inward nature was the very essence of the human predicament.

4. **Circumcision, then, speaks of God's willingness to give a new heart to enable obedience.** Only those with a circumcised heart can obey God. Circumcision signifies consecration. This is why we have phrases like that in Jeremiah 4:4 '*Circumcise yourself to the LORD...*'. When Abraham remembered the day when God imposed circumcision on him, he remembered it was the day when God said '*Walk before Me ... Be perfect*'. A person with a new heart, a new nature, has been purged of dominating and domineering uncleanness. He is in a position to obey God. Circumcision was a sign of new birth.

5. But it is not merely 'birth'; **circumcision also speaks of continuing and progressive renewal.** God gave Abram a new name many years after he had come to faith. '*Your name shall be Abraham*', said God ¹. The new name meant that at this point God was giving Abram an ability he had never had before. He was being given new power to conceive Isaac the miracle child. God was bestowing on him the ability to be 'Abraham' – the father of a multitude. Circumcision spoke of newness of nature, but that new nature could receive deeper and fuller renewals and enablings as time went on.

¹ 17:5

6. Circumcision spoke of **God's willingness to come to the aid of those with a new name and new nature.** 'I am El Shaddai' was a promise accompanying the call to newness of life. God is willing to work in assisting those who are aspiring for high levels of spirituality and faith. When Abraham remembered his circumcision he would remember too the occasion when God promised His assistance in newness of living. The name 'El Shaddai' lets Abraham know that he not only has a new ability; he has the God who is Almighty on behalf of the needy, the God who is powerful to act when extra help is needed.

7. Circumcision was thus a **call to obedience.** Abraham would never be able to forget that God came to him with renewed promises despite the failure of his faith in connection with Hagar. Yet the time with renewed promises was also a time of a new and more explicit call to obedience. Abraham must '*keep the covenant*' ¹. He must be circumcised and remember everything that God laid upon him at this time. Without obedience his circumcision meant nothing. God has clothed him with righteousness, made him a new person, given him new power, but this is all with the intent that Abraham will be responsive to God more than ever.

¹ 17:9,10

8. Circumcision was a sign that salvation was coming through Israel

8. **Circumcision was a sign that salvation was coming through Israel.** Circumcision amongst other things marked out a people and eventually a nation. Abraham's descendants as an earthly people were characterised by circumcision. This pin-pointed the significance of the nation in the history of salvation. Salvation is of the Jews. Abraham was told to circumcise everyone who had a physical or social connection with the family of Abraham. He has to circumcise every male ^{□1}, including slaves and foreigners ^{□2}. Salvation will come in the line of Abraham's descendants. Circumcision marks out Abraham's community. It will be among them that the one will come through whom there will be worldwide blessing. Unlike water-baptism, circumcision was (amongst other things) the sign of membership in an earthly people, the line of Abraham, and later the nation of Israel.

^{□1} 17:10
^{□2} 17:12-13



9. Circumcision was a sign that Abraham's way of salvation was the only way of salvation

9. **Circumcision was a sign that Abraham's way of salvation was the only way of salvation.** It said to anyone who wanted to know, 'What has taken place in Abraham's line is the only way to salvation and renewal and godliness'. It was this that made Abraham the father of all believers. It marked out Abraham as the model of salvation, the model believer. God was in covenant first with Abraham. Others were only in covenant (at one level) if they descended from Abraham or (at another level) if they shared his faith. Circumcision told them all: 'follow Abraham's way'. His way of salvation – by faith and more faith and more faith – was the way of salvation and the way of renewal so as to inherit the promises.

10. Circumcision was a seal to Abraham personally

10. **Circumcision was a seal to Abraham personally.** For Abraham himself it sealed his salvation. It said to Abraham, 'This is a confirmation that what has been happening to you so far is right. This is the way of salvation. Persist in faith and the inheritance will come.' It is no accident that the New Testament says circumcision 'seals' the righteousness Abraham had by faith ^{□1}. In the life of the Christian the 'sealing' is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit ^{□2}. When circumcision was given, that was for Abraham an infallible assurance of his salvation. The equivalent for later believers was not circumcision (for circumcision 'sealed' Abraham's salvation not that of anyone else). It was not water-baptism, which certainly does not 'seal' salvation. The 'seal' is the Spirit Himself. Circumcision is in this respect the equivalent in the life of Abraham of the baptism with the Holy Spirit. When Abraham was given circumcision it sealed his justification, symbolised his new birth, and called him to heights of obedience. The event that does the same thing in the Christian's life is the 'sealing' of the Holy Spirit. The Christian no longer needs circumcision. He has a circumcised heart from Jesus and he has the sealing of the Holy Spirit.

^{□1} Romans 4:11
^{□2} Ephesians 1:13, 14

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