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# The Mark of Community - Circumcision

## Philippians 3:2-3

*Greg Cook*

**Introduction** God has called us out of the world to become a gathered people, a community, a kingdom for His Name. This month we are devoting both the morning and evening messages to teach the foundations, the importance, and the implementation of being that community of God here at Clearcreek Chapel in Springboro, Ohio. The first week Pastor Russ placed before us the challenge of building community in the ministry year before us. In the evening he reminded us of the Covenant that we have made to each other and what that looks like in this community. Last week Pastor Mark challenged us to work to pattern our community after the Trinity. In the evening Pastor Dan helped us to understand the importance of reaching out to the lost to gather those that are being saved into the community. This morning Pastor Mark helped us understand that the believing community has always been the plan of God.

Tonight, I am planning on accomplishing two goals. The first is to explain and illustrate how we make the connections Biblically between topics that range over both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The second is to teach how one of those topics, circumcision, should be correctly understood and how it relates to our community life here at the Chapel as being the mark of community.

I would be presumptuous to believe that I could do this without the enabling work of the Spirit of God, so let's seek His help for our time together tonight. <PRAY>

### From Old Covenant to New Covenant

As I mentioned, one of the great challenges we all face in thinking through topics that range over both the Old Testament and the New Testament is how to make the connections between the two Biblically. I would like to start by using my personal journey along the highways of theology and Biblical interpretation.

I was introduced to God's sovereign grace and dispensationalism in my high school years. When I made the decision to go to Bible college, I was directed to a Bible college that taught these systems of thought. As I progressed through the classes, I became more and more convinced that God's sovereign grace and dispensationalism were the correct way to approach the Scriptures. For those of you that believe I am speaking a foreign language, dispensationalism teaches that God has worked through the ages in seven different ways or dispensations. The bottom line is that the Old Testament has little to do with us, the church. It is basically a history of Israel, who were God's people during the Old Testament days until Christ came. There is limited use for the Old Testament including character studies and background on Christ. It has prophecy that concerns the coming of Christ and the re-establishment of Israel in the last days. I never preached from the Old Testament since it didn't directly pertain to us. It was for Israel. Israel and the church were separate and never were related. The Gospels are a recounting of Christ and what He accomplished for us. The main reason for the Gospels were the history of Christ and what the future kingdom was going to be like when the Jews were once again His people at the end of time. One of the best treatments of the Gos-

pels was a book entitled, *The Life of Christ in Stereo* where the author attempted to put together a chronology of Christ's life using the four Gospels. Once again, the Gospels weren't for us, so I never preached or taught from them. The book of Acts was a transitional book that, once again, was nothing that we, the church, could put any stock in, other than history. It was how the dispensation of the church came into existence. But it did not have any authoritative teaching for us, the church. It was transitional. The book of the Revelation was a mystery, but most of the interpretations that I was exposed to treated the book as the prophecy of the re-establishment of Israel as God's people and the final state of all believers – the final dispensation. The only dispensation that had any authority for us was the current dispensation of the church – the epistles and letters of the New Testament.

Now don't think that this system of interpretation is so foreign. I believe that most of you that have been raised in Bible believing churches have been taught the same way. It's just that it wasn't explained as bluntly as I have done it just now. <Sentence removed at speaker's request>

Anyone who seeks to understand and interpret the Scriptures puts on their pair of theological glasses in order to seek to understand. I had my glasses continually adjusted to improve my vision in Bible college. Part of that adjustment process was putting on filters in order to see more clearly. I'm sure some of you have used sunglasses that are blue blockers. They filter out the blue rays so that you can see things better. They are great for fishing. You can see through the water better with the blue rays blocked. I had seven years of Bible college plus three years on the administration of that college that enabled me to refine my theological glasses so I could see very plainly the concepts of Scripture. In fact, I was very smug about my understanding of Scripture and whenever I talked with anyone who disagreed, I pitied them. They needed to get the correct glasses in order to understand Scripture correctly. After all, when you take the Scriptures literally through dispensationalism, they make complete and perfect sense. Why confuse things by using some other glasses.

In fact, when Becky and I came back to our home church after Bible college, Chad Bresson was a young man. When we left the church ten years before, he was still a struggling teen that we married people didn't take much notice of. But 10 years later, he was talking about this way of looking at the Scriptures that was so radically different, I couldn't imagine where he got his pair of glasses. In fact, and I don't know if I've ever told you this Chad, but I thought that you were some kind of heretic. But then, I attributed that to going to Cedarville, that liberal school.

I was exposed to people that I thought highly of who wore different glasses, like Jay Adams. I had read about 35 of his almost 100 books before I became aware of Clearcreek. He was using parts of the Old Testament and the Psalms and the Gospels as part of his counseling. And I could overlook his error in order to pick out the good that he had. After all, he was a Presbyterian and I knew Presbyterians wore a different pair of glasses.

But in God's providential care, we came to Clearcreek. It was at the time that John Street was leaving. I was told that he had just finished preaching through the Gospel of John and it took him seventy plus to get through. I knew that he had to be using that Gospel to preach what was in the rest of the New Testament, especially since it took seven years to get through! So I knew he wore the same glasses that I did. John invited me to Grace Partners

meetings, and there was one Tuesday that Becky and I could go. Little did I know that this was going to be the first of two events, using two passages of Scripture, that God would use to remove my finely fitted pair of glasses.

It didn't have anything to do with what anyone had said during the discussion that day. It had everything to do with the Spirit of God. There was some sort of discussion about looking at the Old Testament and the New Testament. I wasn't that engaged, because I didn't see the purpose for wasting time talking about something that was already decided and that fit the Scriptures so well as dispensationalism. During that discussion, my mind wondered until someone said something about 2 Timothy 3:16. That was one of Jay Adams familiar texts that he pounded home about how people change. That got my attention and I began to think about that verse. I began quoting it to myself when it suddenly dawned on me – ALL SCRIPTURE is profitable! Was profitable for what? “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”. For the first time it dawned on me that ALL SCRIPTURE included Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21! That meant all of the Old Testament, the Gospels, Acts, the Epistles and Letters, and Revelation – ALL SCRIPTURE was profitable! POW! There went one of the lenses in my pair of glasses. It was shattered! Well, I still had the other lens, but it was difficult to see clearly with one lens covered with shards of broken glass.

The second passage of Scripture was Luke 24:13-27. Please turn there. <READ>

<sup>13</sup>That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, <sup>14</sup>and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. <sup>15</sup>While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. <sup>16</sup>But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. <sup>17</sup>And he said to them, “What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?” And they stood still, looking sad. <sup>18</sup>Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” <sup>19</sup>And he said to them, “What things?” And they said to him, “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, <sup>20</sup>and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. <sup>21</sup>But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. <sup>22</sup>Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, <sup>23</sup>and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. <sup>24</sup>Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.” <sup>25</sup>And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup>Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” <sup>27</sup>And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”

Did you see it there in verse 27 – He used the Old Testament, the entire Old Testament, to teach them about Himself – His life, death, burial, and resurrection! From the Old Testament. That Testament that I had never preached from! That Testament that had nothing to do with us New Testament believers. In fact, I recognized for the first time, that the Apostles, who wrote the Epistles and the Letters, had nothing to teach and preach from but the Old Testament! When David wrote in the Psalms that God's word was something that he medi-

ated on day and night, that was the first 5 books of the Old Testament. Those very same Scriptures were what we should be mediating on as well! POW! There went the other lens in my theological glasses. It wasn't so cut and dry as I thought. Chad Bresson wasn't such a heretic as I thought. In fact, I was probably the heretic! I was the one who had the wrong glasses on. I was very uneasy about the situation in which I found myself. My theological underpinnings had been kicked out from under me. Where am I going to get new glasses that are going to replace the ones that were broken? Who was right? Where do I turn?

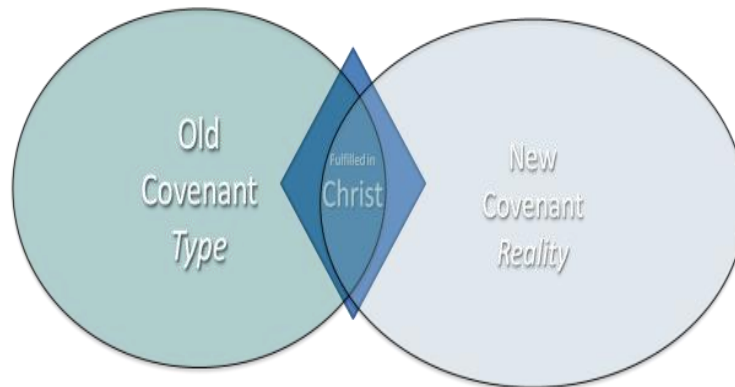
This is where Pastor Russ, Pastor Chad, Dale Evans, and others come in. And I imagine that there are those of you who have been feeling a bit uneasy about what you have been hearing from this pulpit for the last several years. It is so different than what you have been taught in the past. You were like me – you trusted those who were teaching you here at the Chapel, but it is so different. And how do they get there. This series on community is a great example of going from Old to New. Is this right? If so, how is it done?

For most of us, the Canonical or Biblical Theology that is shaping us here at the Chapel is new. It has challenged us to rethink how we approach the Bible and how we connect the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. Pastor Russ has a giftedness for being able to put together visual models to help us understand complex concepts. He has developed the following two diagrams as a way to help us work through the Bible to connect the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. I want us to understand these models as a foundation, the new pair of glasses, before we talk specifically about circumcision.

There is the Old Covenant type or symbol.

In Christ we have those types or symbols fulfilled.

We, the New Covenant church, are the reality, the anti-type which the Old Covenant is pointing to.



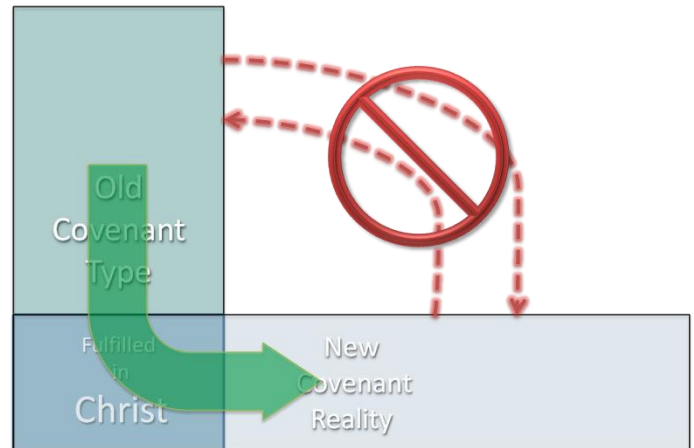
This is the way the Bible designs and develops the types and symbols of the Old Covenant. They point to Christ who fulfills them and who is their substance and reality. And then in Christ, those Old Covenant types and symbols now point to New Covenant realities.

But there is a distinct way the Bible works through these with an accompanying misuse and danger.

There is the Old Covenant type which is fulfilled in Christ. In Christ the New Covenant reality unfolds.

The path of Scripture is from the Old Covenant *always* through Christ into the New Covenant reality.

But there are two common mistakes that have led to misunderstanding, misuse, and misapplication of the Old Covenant types.



One is to try to move directly from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. Another is to try to move directly from the New Covenant to the Old Covenant. We must not do this – we must follow the path of Scripture at all times. Why do these two direct movements happen? Because Bible students and theologians see a similarity between the types or symbols in the Old and New Covenants, maybe in function or in allusion, and thus want to connect them directly. This is the temptation with our subject for tonight – circumcision. When you move directly from the Old Covenant to the New, you equate the function of circumcision with the function of baptism and you baptize babies. When you move directly from the New Covenant to the Old, you equate keeping the Law with sanctification for believers.

Let's look at some examples to help us adjust our new glasses for a more comfortable fit and get a better prescription to help us see more clearly. I am going to cover these examples quickly, since I am still on my first purpose. So I am only going to mention the Scripture verses. You can notate them or get the manuscript off the web this week.

The tabernacle and the temple are very prominent in the Old Covenant. These symbols point to their fulfillment in Christ, who is the temple of God, the chief cornerstone (John 2:19) . We are the temple of God by the Holy Spirit and this temple is made up of living stones (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19; Ephesians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:5). When you move between the Old and New without going through Christ, who is the fulfillment of the temple, then you will be expecting a literal rebuilding of the physical temple in the future instead of realizing that the temple has already been completely built in Christ and His church.

The Old Covenant has detailed instructions on sacrifices. These sacrifices pointed to Christ, Who was the ultimate sacrifice offered once for all time Who satisfied the demands of God (Hebrews 9:26; 10:12). The church is to be a living sacrifice offering up holy lives that have been crucified to this world and sin (Romans 12:1-2; Hebrews 13:15; Philippians 4:18). When you move between the Old and New without going through Christ, Who is the ultimate and only sacrifice, then you have people who believe that they must punish their bodies and do some sort of penance in order to be acceptable to God.

The Sabbath was prominent in the Old Covenant which pointed to the Sabbath rest that Christ's work on the cross provided (Matthew 2:28; 12:8; Luke 6:5). The church finds its rest in the finished work of Christ and we are resting in Christ while we anticipate our eternal rest (Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 4:9). When you move between the Old and New without going through Christ, then the church should be keeping that Sabbath by meeting on Saturday and resting by doing no work like the Seventh Day Adventists.

The last example I want to use in this first section is the eating and dietary directives of the Old Covenant. These types and symbols pointed to Christ Who gave ultimate fulfillment as the bread of life that sustains like manna and perfectly fulfilled all of the Law given by God (John 6:31-35, 48-51). The church finds its satisfaction and sustenance in this Bread of Life Who is the manna from heaven and commemorates this Bread offered through our observance of the communion table (Luke 22:14-20, 28-30). When we move between the Old and the New without going through Christ, then we can go into a religious bookstore and find shelves filled with books extolling the reasons why the church should be following the Old Covenant eating and dietary directives because they contain the perfect diet given by God to attain health and well being. To not do so is sinful, or damaging to our bodies.

I hope that this very quick overview through the lenses of these new glasses has been helpful to help remove the old glasses and get more comfortable with the new ones.

## The Old Covenant Type – Circumcision

I knew that this first objective would take some time, but now I want to go into some detail of one more example of moving from Old Covenant type or symbol, through the perfect and complete fulfillment in Christ, to the New Covenant reality found in the church. That type is circumcision, the mark of community. (I am indebted to Pastor Russ for his work in preparing most of what follows. I have not been mentally sharp enough recently to have done this on my own. Thank you Russ.) So let's see about this Old Covenant type, the mark of community called circumcision, the top part of our model.

### The Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant

### Genesis 17:9-14

<sup>9</sup> And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. <sup>10</sup> This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup> You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup> He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, <sup>13</sup> both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup> Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

God enters into different kinds of relationships with people down through history. As redemptive history unfolds, God moves to create and mark out a people group. This people group will be given their identity. We know them now as Jews. But early on, the Jews would primarily be a household. Later they would become tribes. Finally, they would become a nation. Here at the center of this text, circumcision becomes a mark of identity. It is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. It identifies them as covenanted to God and as being in relationship to one another. God changes them from being a family to a people group through this rite.

Circumcision was a common practice in the culture. God took a familiar practice and invested it with theological meaning. Circumcision in the culture was most often done just before marriage to indicate a change in relationship and status. It was a mark of being separated from one family and united to another to begin a new family. This cultural significance, somewhat lost on us today, would have been familiar to Abram and Sarai.

Circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, just as the Sabbath is the sign of the Mosaic Covenant. All males were to be circumcised so as to be included in the promises. Only males were to be circumcised pointing us to Christ who is our circumcision. It was done on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, which has both health significance and resurrection significance. Any one who was not circumcised was not a part of the covenant community.

I call your attention to an important item in this and many Old Testament texts. Both Abraham the believer and Ishmael the unbeliever *are both circumcised* (v.22-27). Circumcision has nothing to do with the faith of the person being circumcised. Paul's point in Romans and Galatians, which we will look at later, is not to say that Abraham is circumcised **because** he believed, but rather **after** he believed. Paul is arguing that Abraham is a believer **as a Gentile**. Abraham is unique in that he receives circumcision as a seal of a righteousness *he already has by faith*. Nothing like this is said of any other person who is circumcised. (Romans 4:9-12). The Biblical Theological purpose for this was to clearly establish a line of faith between Abraham and those who believe regardless of the rite of circumcision (Romans 4:11-12).

All through the Old Testament, every infant who is circumcised has not believed. Every slave who was purchased was to be circumcised. Nothing is said about they are to be circumcised *because they have believed*. In other words, it is a serious mistake in theological studies to make circumcision a sign of faith. It is not. It is a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, period. Most people who were circumcised under the Old Testament and were under the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants, died and went to hell.

However, Abraham receives this covenant as a believer to mark him and his household as a Jew, as being a **physical** recipient of the **physical** promises. You can see then that drawing a straight line from circumcision in the Old Covenant to baptism in the New Covenant is going to be a real problem given the New Testament's teaching on baptism.

### Required to Participate in Passover

### Exodus 12:43-51

<sup>43</sup> And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, <sup>44</sup> but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. <sup>45</sup> No for-

eigner or hired servant may eat of it. <sup>46</sup> It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. <sup>47</sup> All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. <sup>48</sup> If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. ***But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it.*** <sup>49</sup> There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.”

<sup>50</sup> All the people of Israel did just as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron. <sup>51</sup> And on that very day the Lord brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.

God gave what was required of those who wanted to participate in the Passover Celebration. The Passover was only for those who were publicly identified as being a part of Israel. In the Old Covenant, this was signified by the rite of circumcision. Only those who had publicly entered the covenant could partake of the memorial meal. It was exclusively for those who had been circumcised and were a part of a covenant household. Though they were celebrating the Passover as individuals, this was a celebration of a community deliverance from Egypt. Not every individual who was “redeemed” from Egypt was saved from hell.

This has been a source of much confusion for many, even for good theologians. The types and symbols of deliverance from Egypt, celebrating the Passover, passing through the Red Sea, all point forward to Christ and New Covenant realities. Remember that a great thing about the New Covenant is, unlike the Old Covenant, *every member of the New Covenant is a believer*. So, many unbelievers in the Old Covenant are circumcised, go out of Egypt, pass through the Red Sea, all of which are types of our redemption, yet who themselves were not saved from hell.

### Commanded in the Mosaic Law

### Leviticus 12:3

<sup>3</sup> And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

Circumcision was embedded in the Mosaic Law in this single text. It is not directly commanded any where else. So, God commanded it of those living under the Law. Circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant. The Sabbath is the sign of the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20). Christ is our Sabbath and we enter into our Sabbath rest by faith in Him. We are sons of Abraham by faith and thus receive the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, circumcision, *in our hearts* instead of *in our flesh*. Since Christ has fulfilled the Law, in Christ, what is required by the Law has been put to our account.

### Obedied by Christ's Parents

### Luke 2:21; Galatians 4:4

<sup>21</sup> And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Jesus was circumcised in obedience to the Law and that identified Him as a part of the Abrahamic Covenant. He was truly a Jew, a son of Abraham and through his parents, obedient to God's commands.



## The New Covenant Reality Anticipated in the Old Covenant

Even in the Old Testament, the New Covenant reality is anticipated. Circumcision is spoken of as a heart work.

### In What God Requires

### Deuteronomy 10:12-22; Jeremiah 4:3-4

(Deuteronomy 10:12-22)<sup>12</sup> “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, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,<sup>13</sup> and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?<sup>14</sup> Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it.<sup>15</sup> Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.<sup>16</sup> **Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.**<sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.<sup>18</sup> He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.<sup>19</sup> Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.<sup>20</sup> You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear.<sup>21</sup> He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen.<sup>22</sup> Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.

(Jeremiah 4:3-4) For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: “Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.<sup>4</sup> Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds.”

God told His people that the physical circumcision was not the only thing He required. He was requiring what Abraham had when he was circumcised – a heart that had the world and the sin of their natures cut away by faith. He was anticipating what Christ was going to do on the cross. He was going to be circumcised for His people.

### In What God Intends

### Deuteronomy 30:6

And **the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring**, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

God’s intention was that His people, who were a part of the community by the outward cutting away of the flesh of the foreskin, would be circumcised in their hearts in order

that they could love the Lord their God with all their hearts and with all their souls in true faith so that they would have eternal life in Him.

### In Whom God Condemns

### Jeremiah 9:25-26

<sup>25</sup> “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh— <sup>26</sup> Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, ***for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.***”

God is very plain in His declaration of what saving faith is. As I said earlier, circumcision was not a new rite. It was practiced in many cultures as a rite of passage. Each culture had their own purpose for circumcision. God lumps the house of Israel in with all the other pagan nations declaring that they will be punished for merely cutting away the flesh, and not cutting away the flesh of their hearts.

### The Fulfillment of Circumcision in Christ

### Isaiah 53

We now move from the top part of the model to the bottom part. We move from the Old Covenant symbol to the perfect fulfillment in Christ. The mark of circumcision given to Abraham and to Moses and to all the children of Israel was pointing to the fulfillment of Christ Who was cut off from the community for those who were not circumcised. Those who were rebellious and broke the Covenant were cut off from the Covenant community. Those who were not circumcised were cut off from the Covenant community. Being cut off was a serious consequence that no Jew wanted and was the punishment that God reserved for those who did not obey Him and sinned grievously.

The whole chapter of Isaiah 53 is speaking of Christ in His being cut off for the sins of others, not His own. Listen especially to verse 8:

<sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away;  
and as for his generation, who considered  
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,  
stricken for the transgression of my people?

Christ was our circumcision. He paid the penalty of being cut off for all those who were not circumcised in heart. Circumcision was perfectly fulfilled by the obedience of Christ being willing to be cut off from His Father for His people. Christ is our circumcision.

### The Reality for the New Covenant Church of Circumcision

Now we make the turn in our model and go from Christ to the New Covenant reality. Circumcision is referred to in the New Testament several times. As we think about this, let's begin by clarifying how we move from the symbol in the Old Covenant to the reality in the New Covenant through Christ.

## The Explanation of its Intention

We need to first see how the New Testament explains the intention of circumcision.

### As Insufficient for Salvation

**Romans 2:25-29**

<sup>25</sup> For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. <sup>26</sup> So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? <sup>27</sup> Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. <sup>28</sup> *For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.* <sup>29</sup> *But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.* His praise is not from man but from God.

Circumcision is an example of a religious rite that is to symbolize a spiritual reality, not procure it. The Jews trusted that being circumcised established their relationship with God and gave that right standing so that they would be accepted. The problem was that disobedience to the rest of the Law undid the obedience to that one aspect of the Law. As we have said before, most of those who were circumcised in their physical bodies were not circumcised in their hearts and thus were not believers nor of God's elect people.

### As Evidence of Faith

**Romans 4:9-12**

<sup>9</sup> Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. <sup>10</sup> How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. <sup>11</sup> He received *the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith* while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, <sup>12</sup> and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

In one sense, we do not feel the impact of this paragraph directly. Probably few of you were brought up to believe that being circumcised brought you into a special relationship with God, making you and identifying you with His people. But many in Rome and all over the world believe this is so. The gospel comes to them to say that you cannot have a right standing before God by circumcision. How do we know this is true? Because Abraham was declared righteous before God by faith *before he was circumcised*.

Circumcision then is a sign of the covenant and given as a seal of faith. God gave him an outward rite that reflected an inward reality. Abraham is saved by faith. So, he is the spiritual father of all who believe. God designed and revealed the timing of Abraham's justification by faith so that all who believe are united in faith. So, Abraham is not merely the father of the Jews, he is the father of all who believe, spiritually.

No religious rite can save. The Jews who depended on obedience to the Law or being circumcised were misinformed and self-deceived. Moderns who believe that any religious rite can save them are in danger of damnation. Abraham was not justified by religious rite. And neither are any of you.

### The Heart Circumcision as its Reality

### Colossians 2:11-14

<sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. <sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

The Old Covenant circumcision of males in their flesh is the type of the circumcision of all believers done by the spirit.

The command to circumcise in the Old Covenant has been fulfilled by Christ at the cross and applied to us by the Spirit at conversion.

What we have here is the way of taking the Old Covenant symbol of circumcision which is completely fulfilled in Christ, and the reality of the symbol of circumcision in the New Covenant which is circumcision of the heart. It is the cutting away of the world and the sinful nature. **Everyone** who is a member of the New Covenant is a believer. This mark of circumcision, the cutting away of the sinful nature, is a mark of every believer. Unlike the Old Covenant those who observed the cutting away of the physical flesh, were not all believers. It was a mark of being a part of that community, but it was not a mark of a believer who was on his way to eternal glory. Thank God that every one who is a member of the New Covenant community has the mark of circumcision of the heart. They are a believer who is living life in fellowship with the Trinity and will ultimately enjoy that community who will for all eternity enjoy the fellowship of that Trinity and that believing community for the glory of God and the joy of his called out ones!

### The Misuse of Circumcision by not Going through Christ

When we move between the two Covenants without going through Christ Who is the complete fulfillment of the type or symbol, we get into trouble. Because circumcision is the physical sign of being a part of the Old Covenant community and baptism is the physical sign of being a part of the New Covenant community, then the two signs are equated. Circumcision was performed at the age of 8 days for entrance into the Old Covenant community, so baptism must be performed on babies in order for their entrance into the New Covenant community. Or because circumcision placed a person into the Covenant community, then baptism places one into the Covenant community. It is the baptism which saves. Both of these views are errors that would be avoided if the model of Old Covenant type which

points to the complete fulfillment in Christ Who brings about the New Covenant reality were followed.

**Conclusion** Let me summarize this mark of circumcision for believers by going to Philippians 3:2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. <sup>3</sup> For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh...

Three evidences that a person has truly received a heart circumcision are highlighted, picking up on New Covenant truths and realities as the basis.

Worship in the Spirit – This phrase points to a walk as well as a worship characterized by a dependence on and walking with the Spirit. The contrast here is to those who are characterized by living by the Law.

Glory in Christ – This phrase points to being Christ-centered in all of life.

Not depend on the flesh – the following verses show that by the flesh here he is referring to the Old Covenant rites and rules. Those who have experienced a true heart circumcision are marked by not depending on religious rules and rites.

This is very important as the mark of a true New Covenant community. What is true here at the individual level will work itself out at the corporate level. Spiritual worship, Christ-centeredness and not depending on religious rules and rites will be the corporate marks of the church community.

Thank you Jesus, for being our circumcision so that we can be your redeemed community forever and forever. Amen.