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Circumcision - The Eternal Sign: Part 1

It must be understood that this teaching is NOT designed to persuade but rather to inform for discussion amongst believers. So one can make the proper decision in their choosing.

We want to make it clear from the start that we do not believe circumcision is a requirement for salvation. For even Abraham was considered righteous when this sign of the covenant was given to him. *...while he was still uncircumcised.*

Romans 4:10-11

“...We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness.
¹⁰Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.”

If we consider Abraham our father in the faith, then we should walk out our faith in obedience as Abraham did as well. In so doing, our faith will be made complete as his was.

James 2:21-24

²¹ Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

This is why Paul says in Romans Chapter 3, just before he refers to Abraham in Chapter 4...

Romans 3:31

Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

The law (Torah) is our instructions for life. As we always say ...The Word is the seed, our faith is the

roots and our Obedience is the fruit. And so, like Abraham, no matter where our faith may start, may it be made complete through obedience as Abraham's was. Let it be known that*we believe the Word of God does not change.*

Second, this is a topic that many use the writings of Paul to defend their view in showing that God's word has indeed changed.

Third, Peter tells us that many distort Paul's writings to be that of lawlessness. Any time you believe that Paul's view says that ANY of the law has been done away with, then we believe your perspective of Paul needs to be changed. Paul never went against the words of Yeshua, *the Word of God*. If he did he would have been a hypocrite, as we know that Paul lived according to the law...

Acts 21:24

Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.

And also ...

Acts 24:14

However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets,

Again, if your perspective of Paul has him opposing any of Yahweh's instructions, we believe you need to consider changing your perspective because Paul didn't oppose any of Yahweh's instructions but rather pointed us to them.

And knowing that not one prophet ever mentions a word about ANY of Yahweh's instructions being done away with for today, we must move forward in the understanding that His word is the same yesterday, today and forever.

So the problem is understanding Paul.....that's truly the issue on this topic. Consider the *false* report given about Paul

Acts 21:21

They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to **circumcise** their children or live according to our customs.

It was a *false* report. Yet this report is still believed today by many. A report that said Paul taught against the Law of Yahweh, Yahweh's instructions. And remember, in case you haven't seen any of our teachings before,...salvation comes first, then obedience. Just like at the exodus from Egypt. Salvation provided at Passover, THEN the instructions were given afterward. As we always say, ... obeying the law is the fruit of our salvation, not the root of our salvation.

And so it should be that any gentile coming into the faith was always intended to adopt the same law as the natural born Israelite. There is no difference between an Israelite and an Egyptian, Moabite, Greek,

etc. in the faith.

In fact, this is why Paul says in Colossians...

Colossians 3:11

Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

It's all about coming to the Messiah on level ground, (our need for a savior) and GROWING from there. We are all at different levels, if you will, in our walk. Yet it's our faith that is the level ground for all of us.

Paul was getting this from Numbers 15.

Numbers 15:15 -16

15 The community is to have the same rules for you and for the alien living among you; this is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. You and the alien shall be the same before the YHVH:

16 The same laws and regulations will apply both to you and to the alien living among you.”

Israel was not chosen for salvation. Meaning that they would be the only ones chosen to be saved. They were chosen to shine the light of God's ways to the nations. So that all can know His ways.

Deuteronomy 4:6

Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, that shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

So, let us begin on this topic that has so many divided and pray we can at least begin a process of getting us on a path to reconciliation.

I remember sitting in church one day and hearing that circumcision today is all about circumcision of the heart, that the OT was about the physical and the NT is all about the spiritual. I remember hearing that and thinking to myself that something just didn't seem right with that thought. Yet, like all the others, I just went with it. But is the NT the only place we find circumcision of the heart? No. Actually, it's not.

Deuteronomy 10:12-16

¹² And now, O Israel, what does the YHVH your God ask of you but to fear the YHVH your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the YHVH your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to observe the YHVH's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? ¹⁴ To the YHVH your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. ¹⁵ Yet the YHVH set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. ¹⁶ Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.

Circumcise your hearts, that's in the Old Testament! The TANAKH!

There are two end time prophecies regarding this instruction to circumcise our hearts as given from Yahweh here in Deuteronomy 10. We encourage you to read the surrounding verses for the context of these passages.

First...

Jeremiah 4:4

Circumcise yourselves to the YHVH, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done — burn with no one to quench it.

“Circumcise your hearts.” *Identical to Deuteronomy chapter 10.*

And Second...

Deut. 30:6-8

⁶ *YHVH your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.* ⁷ *YHVH your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate and persecute you.* ⁸ *You will again obey YHVH and follow all his commands I am giving you today.*

Consider verse 8 again...

Deuteronomy 30:8

You will again obey YHVH and follow all his commands I am giving you today.

“You will again obey...” When? When your hearts are circumcised. Obey what though? ... *“...YHVH and follow all his commands I am giving you today.”*

“all his commands”

So when our hearts are circumcised as Paul refers to in Romans 2. We will **begin** obeying YHVH as HE said we would be in Deuteronomy 30:8.

Compare Paul’s words in Romans 2...

Romans 2:29

No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and **circumcision** is **circumcision** of the **heart**, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.

Let us not forget, Paul was accused of teaching against circumcision in Acts ...

Acts 21:21

They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to **circumcise** their children or live according to our customs.

This accusation could very well have stemmed from these words written by Paul here in Romans 2. And we can understand the confusion. But is Paul preaching against the Word of God. Or is he simply *preaching* the Word of God?

Paul said this because one can be circumcised physically and not spiritually. But if one is truly circumcised of the heart he will eventually become circumcised in the physical. This is the desire of the Father. It always has been. The physical is to be the evidence of the spiritual. *The outward expression of the inward conversion.*

Following the written code by itself does not dictate that one is in the faith. Following the written code from the heart is to be the *fruit* that they are in the faith. We need to understand that circumcision is intended to initially be done on the eighth day after birth.

One might say then, how can this show the outward expression of the inward conversion since the individual was circumcised on the eighth day? What choice did they have of this outward expression? And this is a good question. However this is for the parents as a reminder of the command given to them.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9

⁶ “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

If the parents truly do as the Father instructs the child’s heart will be cut out for YHVH from birth. Thus the instruction for circumcision on the eighth day.

Leviticus 12:3

On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised.

This represents the eighth day after the millennium and the great white throne judgment. Where only those who have their hearts circumcised enter into eternity with the Lord and the second death has no power over them.

But what of those who are not circumcised on the eighth day? Compare those who were with Joshua immediately after Moses died. This is the generation that was raised under those who were not allowed to enter into the Promised Land because of their rebellion.

Like the first generation, the second generation had the law given to them as well. Yet they were not allowed to move forward until they were circumcised. Compare ...

Joshua 5:3-8

³ So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Gibeath Haaraloth. ⁴ Now this is why he did so: All those who came out of Egypt — all the men of military age — died in the

desert on the way after leaving Egypt. ⁵ All the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the desert during the journey from Egypt had not. ⁶ The Israelites had moved about in the desert forty years until all the men who were of military age when they left Egypt had died, since they had not obeyed YHVH. For YHVH had sworn to them that they would not see the land that he had solemnly promised their fathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁷ So he raised up their sons in their place, and these were the ones Joshua circumcised. They were still uncircumcised because they had not been circumcised on the way. ⁸ And after the whole nation had been circumcised, they remained where they were in camp until they were healed.

This is also representative of only those with circumcised hearts and they will enter into the Promised Land on the eighth day...*eternity*.

And here we are in the New Testament where people were coming to the faith later in life and had no knowledge of the Scriptures. Thus, they had to grow in the faith and learn the ways of the Father. Being in the faith is determined by the heart and **ONLY** the Father knows the hearts of men.

For example, if I walked into a corporate headquarters that deals with stocks, wearing a nice suit and carrying a brief case, one might think that's the business that I specialize in. The problem is that I know very little on that topic. I can look the part... but that doesn't put it in my heart. Again, if I put on a white coat with a stethoscope around my neck and begin walking through the hallways of a major hospital, some might think I'm a doctor. While the truth is, I know nothing about being a doctor. I can look the part... but that doesn't put it in my heart.

However, if I had studied in those trades and practiced in those trades, it would be expected and it would actually come natural for me to walk the steps of those trades accordingly. Likewise, anyone who is circumcised in the heart, will follow suit in the physical. But the appearance in the physical does not prove the spiritual.

To further the point that the Father was focused on the hearts of His people being circumcised, please consider...

Leviticus 26:40-42

⁴⁰ “But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers — their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, ⁴¹ which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies — then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, ⁴² I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

And so we see that circumcision of the heart was what the Father desired. For if ones heart is truly circumcised, the rest will follow.

Many have used Romans chapter 2 to say that **NOW** the Spirit circumcises our hearts. Let's read it again...

Rom. 2:29

No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and **circumcision** is **circumcision** of the **heart**, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

Thus, the argument is that the Spirit NOW circumcises our hearts but He didn't before. But if the Spirit did not do so in the Old Testament, how could Steven say to the Pharisees...

Acts 7:51

“You stiff-necked people, with **uncircumcised hearts** and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!

What does this tell us? It tells us they and their fathers resisted the Spirit. They allowed their hearts to become uncircumcised. This parallels even that which is written in 1 Maccabees. Though not considered a canonical book by most, it still gives good historical reference. Consider what is said in chapter 1.

1 Maccabees

¹⁴. Whereupon they built a place of exercise at Jerusalem according to the customs of the heathen: ¹⁵. And made themselves uncircumcised, and forsook the holy covenant, and joined themselves to the heathen, and were sold to mischief.

Physically speaking, you *can't* make yourself “uncircumcised”. Thus, this is obviously speaking of their hearts. Their hearts were no longer fully devoted to the Father. Were they Israelites? Yes. Were they circumcised? Most likely. Were they accepted by the Father? No. Their hearts were no longer circumcised.

This is what the sign of circumcision is to represent: the outward expression of the willingness in our heart to follow after Him and His ways as given in His instructions, the Torah. It literally means that our heart is “cut out” for God.

Some would respond here that the Law was only given to the Jews and that is not for the church today. To which I would suggest watching our teachings titled “*What is Grafted in?*” and “*The Lost Sheep*”.

Circumcision is the sign of the covenant, and it was given to Abraham. Many today claim Abraham as the father of the faith. Thus implying that it's all about the faith. But what did Yeshua say to those who claimed Abraham as their “Father”?

John 8:39

“Abraham is our father,” they answered. “If you were Abraham's children,” said Yeshua, “then you would do the things **Abraham did**.”

Again, circumcision was given as a sign to Abraham. Showing forth his circumcised heart. His heart was “cut out” for God.

Genesis 17:9-11

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your

descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

This understanding was given to Abraham and to those who would follow after his ways. Thus, Abraham is the father of the Faith...

Romans 4:16

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring — not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of **Abraham**. He is the **father** of us all.

Yet if one does not walk in obedience to the Father, that sign is useless. This is why Paul said...

1 Corinthians 7:19

Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts.

Paul is NOT saying that circumcision is a command that we do not need to be concerned with. He's saying that desiring to obey all of God's commands (circumcision of the heart) is what counts. This is because one focused on obeying will get circumcised. Just because one gets circumcised does not mean he is focused on living a life of obedience.

So if we want to claim Abraham as our Father in the faith, ... according to Yeshua, we should do what Abraham did as mentioned in John 8. What did Abraham do?

Genesis 26:5

...because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.”

So Abraham followed the law. Yet it was in faith. Simply walking in obedience to the Father. Following the law FOR salvation will get you nowhere. In fact, following the law out of ritual is not much different from that of the Pharisees; a list of “Do's and Don'ts” and not out of a relationship with the Father. A circumcised heart is one that pursues after the ways of the Father, as explained by Deuteronomy 30:6-8. A heart that truly yearns to please Him.

Is it any wonder as to why David prayed

Psalms 51:9-11

⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

A pure heart, a heart that pursues after the ways of the Father, a circumcised heart. And notice how he even concludes with the Spirit. The source of the circumcised heart. That's the O.T. the TANAKH...

Now, let's consider a verse that is often referred to for the New Covenant, or what some refer to as the renewed covenant...

Ezekiel 36:26-27

²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

In essence, our heart is cut out, it is circumcised and then replaced. We are given a new heart. A heart of flesh. Following His decrees and laws by way of the Spirit. Compare that now to what we already read...

Deuteronomy 30:6-8

⁶ YHVH your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live. ⁷ YHVH your God will put all these curses on your enemies who hate and persecute you. ⁸ You will again obey YHVH and follow all his commands I am giving you today.

It's all about following all of His commands through the Spirit, which we know by Steven that the forefathers did not do. The new covenant or renewed covenant, is all about getting rid of our hearts of stone so we can follow the Spirit in pursuing the instructions of the Father.

It's NOT about following the instructions so you can have a circumcised heart, as the Pharisees assumed. They had it backwards. They thought that if they did the physical, it meant something spiritual. This is why we see what appears to be confusion from Paul regarding the circumcision group. He opposed them, which in turn many take as Paul opposing circumcision.

The first time we see this battle with the circumcision group is found in Acts 15. This is where many find their support for the doctrine that teaches parts of God's law has been abolished. It is taught by most that the Jerusalem council concluded that all converted Gentiles are *not* to be taught obedience to God's law as written by Moses.

However, is that really what Acts 15 teaches us? In just reading verse 1 we learn that the debate is centered around a "works based" salvation, starting with circumcision. Compare...

Acts 15:1

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

But what about those in verse 5? What is their opposing position?

Acts 15:5

But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

Does verse 5 suggest that the gentiles should still be obedient to God's law? Actually, yes. So neither

side of this debate is saying the law is not needed for the gentile converts. The debate is about keeping God's law for salvation or keeping God's law simply out of obedience in the faith.

Most do not examine the context of those verses as it relates to the council's decision. Plus, what is the meaning and purpose of the four commands given by the council, after their decision was made, in verse 20?

Acts 15:20

but that we write unto them, that they abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood.

Also, why is Acts 15:21 always ignored as part of the decree in mainstream commentaries?

Acts 15:21

For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

What is the purpose of Acts 15:21 in James' decision? We need to study to show ourselves approved and test all things to Scripture. Since Acts 15 is used by so many to say that circumcision or the law is no longer for today, let's read the first 21 verses of Acts 15 to get a foundation established so we can break it down.

Acts 15:1-21

¹ And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." ² Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. ³ So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. ⁴ And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. ⁵ But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." ⁶ Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. ⁷ And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸ So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, ⁹ and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. ¹⁰ Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹ But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Messiah Yeshua we shall be saved in the same manner as they." ¹² Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles. ¹³ And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: ¹⁴ Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. ¹⁵ And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:

¹⁶ After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; ¹⁷ So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the Lord who does all these things ¹⁸ Known to God from eternity are all His works.

¹⁹ Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, ²⁰ but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. ²¹ For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

We need to understand what groups are involved. First is the *Jerusalem Council*. This is the first century church leadership – They are overseeing the debate at hand to deliver a decision to the Gentiles.

Next is the *Circumcision Party*. They believe that circumcision is necessary for salvation (legalistic) and they are teaching the Gentile converts this doctrine. This group is also found in Galatians 2:12 and Acts 10.

Then *the believing sect of the Pharisees*, defined as valid believers, they are of course saved by faith and thus they know they cannot be saved by keeping the law. But they still keep the law out of obedience - just like Paul. He was also a Pharisee. This is very important to understand. Scripture is calling this group *valid believers in the faith*, AND they are teaching that the law of God, as written by Moses, IS VALID.

And lastly, the *New Gentile converts*. This group has recently come into the faith but many are still deep into their pagan worship and traditions – such as drinking blood, temple prostitution, eating unclean/strangled animals, and worshiping false gods.

We basically find that there are two groups debating here in Acts 15.

First the *Circumcision Party* believes the law of Moses should be kept as a requirement of salvation. The "*Circumcision Party*" –as this particular Jewish denomination was called- began teaching the new converts outside of Jerusalem that the Law of Moses -starting with circumcision- is **a must** for salvation. It was this group that caused Paul and Barnabus to travel to Jerusalem to settle this matter as revealed in Galatians Chapter 2.

And then we have those who believe first in faith and then still keep the law of Moses out of obedience: This group in verse 5 is stated to be *believers*, which means they have faith in Yeshua and they understand this is the only way to salvation.

It is important to note that the group in **verse 1** is **not** noted as believers. They believed salvation came from keeping the law (legalism) and not through faith, as was established through Abraham.

These are clearly *two different groups with two different doctrines...* and are both interested in having their position projected on the Gentile converts. This is why it is necessary to look into both positions the Jerusalem Council was considering in the matter. We now have our two arguments in the debate.

One of these positions will be accepted and the other will be rejected.

In summary, the debate is about whether the Gentiles should be keeping the law of Moses as a means to salvation or be keeping the law of Moses as a matter of obedience as a result of faith. The debate is between one of these two choices. No one suggests anywhere in this debate that there is a third option in which the law of Moses has been abolished, in whole or in part. It's simply not a part of the debate.

The Jerusalem council came together to discuss the doctrine found in verse 1 and the doctrine found in verse 5. Those are the only choices. That is very critical to understand, because many choose to ignore the debate at hand and invent a new debate all together. One the context simply does not support. Verses 1-5 set the context and set details of the debate at hand. That being...*obeying the law gives salvation vs. salvation produces the fruit of obedience to the law.*

The converted Gentiles were obviously not keeping the Law of Moses very well or there would not have been a cause for either side of the debate. In verse 6, we learn that The Jerusalem Council came together to discuss the matter. In verses 7-12 several things take place.

Peter stood up and gave testimony proving that the Gentiles could be saved... through faith. His reference was to that which took place in Cornelius' house where we read...

Acts 10:45

The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.

This is direct evidence against the position held by the Circumcision Party in verse 1.

In verse 10, Peter appeals to Scripture and notes that no one in Scripture has ever been able to keep the law perfectly to yield salvation. When adding commands to the Law, such as saying it is required for salvation, we make it a yoke. A burden.

We know that simple obedience to God's law is not an unreasonable or difficult yoke. For God Himself declares His law to be easy and light in Deuteronomy and 1 John. If God says His law, as written by Moses, is easy, then we can not have Peter saying it is bondage or an unreasonable yoke.

What Peter is referring to as a yoke that we are unable to bear must relate to those in verse 1 in some way, but not against what God said. The yoke, that is unreasonable, is a doctrine that teaches that we are to be saved **through** God's law and the commandments of men. Salvation through the law was and is indeed impossible, which is why God's grace is necessary, as *it always has been.*

Peter is clearly taking the position of the only remaining debate in Acts 15. Which is keeping the Law of Moses in obedience. Not for salvation, but because of salvation. Notice Peter does not say anything against the position of those in verse 5. Peter goes on to state that this faith of the Gentiles is demonstrated by the new Gentile converts by grace in Yeshua.

This prompted Paul and Barnabas to provide even further evidence that the Gentiles were not saved through the law, but through faith. It should be noted that the debate in progress is still consistent with

the debates established in verse 1 and verse 5.

There is no new debate as to whether any of God's law has been abolished. This is still all about the debates presented in verse 1 and in verse 5, either keeping the Law of Moses for salvation, or keeping the law of Moses as believers in the faith.

Now consider ...

Acts 15:13-14

¹³ And after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Brethren, listen to me. ¹⁴
“Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name.

After the testimony of the witnesses has concluded, James brings out the final witness: direct scriptural support. The process James is using is important, because according to God’s Word, God never does anything without revealing it to His prophets beforehand (Amos 3:7). James, of course, knows this and begins teaching what the prophets state on this matter. James proves that it was always God’s plan to graft in the divorced House of Israel back together with the House of Judah in order to save all of Israel.

Watch him pull out prophecy that which agrees with Peter...

Acts 15:15-18

¹⁵ “And with this the words of the Prophets agree, just as it is written,
¹⁶ ‘AFTER THESE THINGS I will return,
AND I WILL REBUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID WHICH HAS FALLEN,
AND I WILL REBUILD ITS RUINS,
AND I WILL RESTORE IT,
¹⁷ IN ORDER THAT THE REST OF MANKIND MAY SEEK THE LORD,
AND ALL THE GENTILES WHO ARE CALLED BY MY NAME,’
¹⁸ SAYS THE LORD, WHO MAKES THESE THINGS KNOWN FROM OF OLD.

The matter has been settled. The group and theological position in verse 1 are rendered in error through the establishment of the two to three witnesses.

The conclusion of the matter is that salvation has nothing to do with the keeping of the law of Moses. The only remaining position as part of the debate is that the Gentiles should pursue the law of Moses as a matter of just obedience. So does this nullify circumcision? Not at all. It nullifies it as a requirement for salvation. Again, no one said anything against the doctrine presented in verse 5. Thus, those in verse 5 are correct.

Consider now the words of James’ in conclusion...

Acts 15:19

“Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles,

So why does James declare we need to make it easy on the converted Gentiles? We already established that God's law is easy as declared in Deuteronomy 30 and 1 John 5.

James knew they could not expect new believers to understand and apply all of God's ways immediately. The converted Gentiles were just getting started in learning God's ways. No one can learn all of God's ways overnight.

No matter where one may be in their walk with the Father, we all have something to learn and grow in. And that is James' point. They're babes in the faith. Don't overwhelm them.

Believers are still expected to apply God's ways, just as those stated in verse 5. But it seemed as if those in verse 5 set the expectation of immediate observation of all of the Law as soon as one became a believer. That would be like trying to learn a new language over night. It's just not possible. Learning God's ways is something we do as we grow in our daily walk with Him.

Again, the group in verse 1 expected others to keep certain commandments for salvation. The believers in verse 5 differed in that they are true believers in the faith, yet expected immediate obedience of the new converts.

If there is at least one important thing to understand in this study, it's that there is a difference between legalism, salvation by works, and obedience to the Word of God because of our faith. The first is an unbiblical process....the latter is how Scripture teaches obedience.

The position of the group in verse 5 is understandable. This is indeed a new situation to the Jews. Gentiles are now coming to the faith. They have to realize that Gentiles were not born and raised in learning God's ways...it simply takes time.

It would be unrealistic, at best, to demand complete obedience to the Law of God overnight when the knowledge is simply not there. Rather than demand such unreasonable expectations on the converted Gentiles, James offers a scriptural process in verses 20-21 to help them in learning God's ways (His law).

We must remember that the Gentiles are coming out of a culture rooted deep into pagan traditions. It's all they've ever known. Their multiple gods, idols, idol worship (which included temple prostitution) and drinking of blood, are all historically known practices that would need to be addressed as brand new believers in the faith.

Acts 15:20

but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.

This directive is straight out of the Law of Moses as given in Leviticus 17:12-16 and Deuteronomy 32:17. Rather than suddenly overwhelm the new believers with all the Law, it was the council's recommendation that they start in dealing with the weightier sins first, that being idolatry, which Paul states in his letters is the same as worshipping demons.

This is how we work with new converts today. Focus on the blatant and weightier sin first. Then, work on the rest as time goes on.

The question remains...if the council's final decision on the debate was that of verse 5, then what was the council's plan to help the new converts move toward obedience to the Law of Moses? This leads us to verse 21...

Acts 15:21

“For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

They were to learn and grow in hearing the Law as given through Moses every Sabbath. This is where we all grow.

Just as Yeshua commanded, we are to observe and do what is taught out of Moses' Seat (Law of Moses) as given in Matthew 23 and teach all nations to do so as given in Matthew 28.

And this is how we work with new converts today. We help with the “weightier” sin first, and expect them to pick up the rest in their walk through continued study of God's Word. Nobody can deal with all of his or her sin overnight. In fact, it is an ongoing process throughout all of one's life where we constantly strive to learn so we can "go and sin no more."

What other purpose can we conclude that James intended in making such a statement in verse 21? There is none. Some have read Acts 15 and then concluded that all or at least part of the Law of Moses has been abolished. Especially that of circumcision, since it was the “circumcision party” that was proven wrong. However, as we have shown, this is simply not the case.

The only thing proven in this meeting in Jerusalem was that circumcision and following the law cannot save you. We should be careful not to add or subtract from God's commandments. And we should certainly be careful not to accuse those in the Jerusalem council of doing so either, ESPECIALLY when they cite the reading of Moses every Sabbath as part of the solution for converted Gentiles.

Something that is often overlooked is the following chapter after this decision was made. While Paul was on his journey to deliver the decision of the council to the churches, he meets Timothy. Compare...

Acts 16:1-5

¹ And he came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, ² and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. ³ Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴ Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees, which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. ⁵ So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily.

The problem we have here is that if the message from the council was that the law, or even just circumcision, is no longer something to be concerned with, then why did Paul circumcise Timothy? This would have been hypocritical by Paul and done behind the backs of the elders in Jerusalem, if in fact they had decided it was no longer a concern.

Yet the council clearly displayed that the law was to be learned and followed by the new believers as instructed by Yeshua in Matthew chapter 23 and in Matthew chapter 28.

Though Timothy's father was a Greek, it is clear that Paul knew he had been raised in the faith since birth. So it was obvious that Timothy was not new to the faith. Once the local Jews heard the decision from the council, they would have then questioned as to why Timothy had not yet been circumcised since he was *not* a new believer. But was indeed well known and spoken of highly.

The local Jews could have, and most likely would have, rightfully spoke up and said "If these converted gentiles are to learn and grow in obedience to the law, then why hasn't your partner Timothy submitted after all these years?" Thus following the decrees in Acts 15 Timothy was convicted to be circumcised by Paul. After circumcision they could then deliver the Acts 15 decree without being viewed as hypocrites.

Moving on to the next. While debating if circumcision is not for today, many refer to Galatians chapter 5. It says...

Gal. 5:2

Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.

Here we find Paul saying that if one gets circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit. Yet, now consider what he says to the Romans...

Rom. 3:1-2

¹ Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? ² Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

So, to the Galatians he said if we are circumcised, Christ will be of no value, but to the Romans he says that the benefit of circumcision is great in every respect. Contradiction? Or misunderstanding Paul to be teaching Lawlessness as warned by Peter?

Looking at this one verse in Galatians, one may try and say, "Case closed." If we are to comprehend what is going on here, we need to see Galatians in full context.

Is Paul speaking to all of mankind throughout all generations here? Or is he speaking to a certain group found in Galatia? Galatians 5:2 is a statement being made as a result from a group he is specifically addressing from chapter 4.

Compare...

Galatians 4:21

Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?

Those being addressed in chapter 5 are those here in chapter 4 who are desiring to be under the law.

With 4:21 brought in view for context, it sheds light on exactly who Paul is talking to.

Galatians 5:2

Behold I, Paul, say to you (that desire to be under the law) that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.

This is where many begin to debate the issue of saying that we are no longer “under the law”. So the question becomes “What law is Paul talking about?” It is immediately assumed that it MUST be the Law of God. Yet we know the words Paul said in Romans was that circumcision is a benefit in every respect. And we know that Paul also said in Romans 3...

Romans 3:31

Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we establish the law.

So what law is Paul saying that we are not to be under here in Galatians? Is it the Law of God? Or another?

Compare Paul’s words in Romans 6...

Romans 6:14

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under law, but under grace.

The whole purpose in the Law of Yahweh was to give blessings.

Compare...

Deuteronomy 11:26-28

²⁶ See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse — ²⁷ the blessings if you obey the commands of the YHVH your God that I am giving you today; ²⁸ the curse if you disobey the commands of the YHVH your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.

In Romans 6:14 Paul is saying that we are not under Law but under grace. This implies that grace and the law are two different things. If one wants to say that the law of Yahweh is opposite of grace, they have an uphill battle ahead of them.

The whole giving of the Law was an act of grace. Think about that for a moment. There was even provisions for forgiveness in the law. That’s grace. So wouldn’t Paul look at the Law of Yahweh as grace? Something that was declared as perfect, holy, righteous and good? He would not have called it sin.

It’s the law of sin and death that we have been delivered from. That which came from our disobedience

to God's law. We are not under the Law of sin and death.

Romans 6:14

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under law, but under grace.

Yeshua did not come to free us from the blessings but rather from the curse. Again, that which came from our disobedience. Walking in any doctrine that added to the Law of God then put you under the law of sin and death.

And that's what the Galatians were trying to do. They were wanting to walk in that which was added by man. This goes back to the debate found in Acts 15. Those who were saying that circumcision was a requirement. This was adding to the law of Yahweh. And if the act of circumcision was followed in that understanding, it would truly have been of no value for it would have been done out of a feeling of obligation and not of loving obedience.

We are told

Deuteronomy 6:5

Love the YHVH your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Just obeying the law doesn't mean you love the Lord. But if you love the Lord, you'll obey the law. Does that make sense? In other words, doing something solely out of obligation does not show love. But if done out of love in obedience, well, that's a different story. It's a matter of the attitude of the heart. Thus, our hearts are to be circumcised. The whole point from the beginning.

Colossians 2:11

*In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the **sinful nature**, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ,*

Obedience from the heart. Not obedience from obligation.

This is why circumcision is a benefit as Paul says in Romans 3. It's a sign and reminder of our loving obedience through our relationship with the loving Father.

Other verses that some struggle with regarding circumcision is found a few verses down in Galatians 5.

Galatians 5:6

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Again, who is Paul talking to? He reminds us just two verses before this...

Galatians 5:4

You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Messiah; you have fallen away from grace.

Those who were trying to be justified ... through the law. With this in mind, let's read verse 6 again.

Galatians 5:6

For in Messiah Yeshua neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Thus, circumcision, in and of itself, does nothing for salvation. The only thing that counts is obedience out of love. He continues in verse 11...

Galatians 5:11

Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished.

Paul USED to teach circumcision FOR salvation. Remember, he USED to be a Pharisee.

Consider his words in chapter 1...

Galatians 1:14

I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

“For the traditions of my fathers”

He wasn't zealous for the Word of God, but rather for the traditions. Recall the words spoken by Yeshua to the Pharisees...

Mark 7:8-9

⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.” ⁹ And he said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!

And ...

Mark 7:13

Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

But Paul no longer holds to these traditions. He preaches the Word of God. Thus, in verse 11 we clearly see Paul showing that circumcision is not a requirement for salvation as he once held to. In fact, he mentions how he is still being persecuted. From who though? Obviously the same group that he opposed in Acts 15. Those that said circumcision is a requirement for salvation.

The very group that he opposed and the Jerusalem council overruled in saying that circumcision is not a requirement for salvation but rather something that the new converts should grow in as they learn the Law as given through Moses.

We hope that part 1 of our teaching on circumcision assisted with answering some common questions on this topic. We realize there are still many unanswered questions but we hope to cover all these and more in part 2 of this teaching.

We hope you have enjoyed this study. Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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