

## The Truth About Circumcision

(From a talk given at the 2004 Feast of Unleavened Bread by Frank Brown, and revised in May, 2004)

Those of us who have come out of Christianity, with its no-law teachings, often have a hard time determining just what of TORAH was changed and what was not. Seems we're just sure that SOME things were changed or done away.

Here is a good guideline to remember: Things that had to do with animal sacrifices and/or temple rituals, and/or the Levitical priesthood, while not "done away," are now **suspended** until those things are reinstated, at some future time (Zech. 14).

Paul's writings have been wrested and twisted, just as Kepha (Peter) wrote, to the destruction of those who do it, AND ALSO TO THE DESTRUCTION OF THE UNWARY WHO MAY BE DECEIVED INTO FOLLOWING THEIR WAYS. THAT MAY INCLUDE A LARGE NUMBER OF US "YAHWISTS." I know it did me for a long time. I just recently had my eyes opened to some additional truth, and that's what I want to bring you today.

First, a little background. Yahshua said He came NOT to destroy the Law (the TORAH) or the Prophets: **(Mat 5:17 NRSV) "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."** Notice that He was not ONLY recognizing the Torah, but ALSO, He was authenticating the writings of the prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Malachi, etc. He was putting the stamp of approval on their authenticity – that they ALSO were inspired of Yahweh, just as was the Torah itself through Moses.

The question before us today is about circumcision, and circumcision of the flesh versus circumcision of the heart in this New Covenant, post-Messianic age. I believed and taught for many years that we, in this dispensation, are circumcised in HEART, when we repent and are baptized. In other words, I thought that the act of baptism, NOW, is equivalent to Old Testament physical circumcision.

The Apostle Shaul (Paul) was my authority in such places as 1 Cor. 7:18-19, Col. 2, Gal. 5:1-6. Let's look at that one:

(Gal 5:1-6 KJV) *"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith the Messiah hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. {2} Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, the Messiah shall profit you nothing. {3} For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. {4} the Messiah is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. {5} For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. {6} For in Yahshua the Messiah neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."*

It certainly sounds like Paul was "doing away with" the circumcision requirement, doesn't it? But is Paul a law-giver? Did he have authority to do something that even Yahshua the Messiah did not? The authority to change Yahweh's Laws? No, of course not! So we need to compare what he DID, with what he supposedly said. Let's establish some things. Is circumcision part of Torah?

For this, we need to go back to the first five books of the Old Testament, called, "the Torah," or "the teaching," or, as some refer to it, "the Law."

(Gen 17:9-14 NRSV) *"Elohim said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. {10} This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. {11} You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. {12} Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring. {13} Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. {14} 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."*

(Gen 17:23-27 NRSV) *"Then Abraham took his son Ishmael and all the slaves born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as Elohim had said to him. {24} Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the*

flesh of his foreskin. {25} And his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. {26} That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised; {27} and all the men of his house, slaves born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him."

(Gen 21:4 NRSV) "And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as Elohim had commanded him."

(Exo 12:43-44 NRSV) "Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron: This is the ordinance for the passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, {44} but any slave who has been purchased may eat of it after he has been circumcised;"

(Exo 12:48-50 NRSV) "If an alien who resides with you wants to celebrate the passover to Yahweh, all his males shall be circumcised; then he may draw near to celebrate it; he shall be regarded as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it; {49} there shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you. {50} All the Israelites did just as Yahweh had commanded Moses and Aaron."

(Lev 12:1-3 NRSV) "Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: {2} Speak to the people of Israel, saying: If a woman conceives and bears a male child, she shall be ceremonially unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. {3} On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised."

Question: Was Abraham circumcised in the flesh **before**, or **after** he was circumcised in heart - in other words, before or after his conversion?

Answer: After. He was justified by FAITH. He believed Yahweh.

(Rom 4:1-14 NRSV) "What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? {2} For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before Yahweh. {3} For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed Yahweh, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'" {4} Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. {5} But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the unrighteous, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. {6} So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom Yahweh

reckons righteousness apart from works: {7} "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; {8} blessed is the one against whom Yahweh will not reckon sin." {9} Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, "Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness." {10} How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. {11} 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 ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, {12} and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised. {13} For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. {14} If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void."

We find the same thing with Cornelius and his household in the Book of Acts of the Apostles:

(Acts 10:34-35 NRSV) "Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that Yahweh shows no partiality, {35} but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

(Acts 11:1-18 NRSV) "Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of Yahweh. {2} So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, {3} saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" {4} Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, {5} "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me. {6} As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air. {7} I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' {8} But I replied, 'By no means, Master; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' {9} But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What Yahweh has made clean, you must not call profane.'

*{10} This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven. {11} At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. {12} The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. {13} He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter; {14} he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.' {15} And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. {16} And I remembered the word of the Messiah, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' {17} If then Yahweh gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Sovereign Yahshua the Messiah, who was I that I could hinder Yahweh?' {18} When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised Yahweh, saying, "Then Yahweh has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.""*

Their conversion came first. In this case, even the receiving of the Holy Spirit came before baptism.

Now, let's consider Acts 15, the famous Jerusalem Conference. You all know the background. Certain Jewish teachers were insisting that the Gentile converts be circumcised before being admitted to fellowship with the other Believers.

*(Acts 15:1-10 NRSV) "Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." {2} And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders. {3} So they were sent on their way by the assembly, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers. {4} When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the assembly and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that Yahweh had done with them. {5} But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, "It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses."*

Please understand that Paul and Barnabas were not against physical circumcision in obedience to Yahweh's command in the Torah – it is just that they were against the false idea that salvation comes as a result of one's own righteousness – in other words, salvation by our own works, apart from faith in Yahshua.

Here is what the conference had to consider: the reconciling of the Torah and the Prophets, such as Ezekiel 44:9, in which only those circumcised in **both** heart AND flesh could enter the Temple, with the situation in Acts 10, Cornelius and his family, who were circumcised in heart, but not yet in the flesh.

Let's read on in Acts 15:

*{6} The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. {7} After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "My brothers, you know that in the early days Yahweh made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. {8} And Yahweh, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; {9} and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. {10} Now therefore **why are you putting Yahweh to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?"***

What was this yoke that none of them could bear? The Ten Commandments? No, they are called a joy and a blessing. They are NOT grievous, as we see in 1 John 5:3. David declared, "O how love I Thy law!" John the Baptist's parents kept the law perfectly (Luke 1:6).

Was it circumcision? No, they were all circumcised. So what was it? It was the ADDED "traditions of men" that the Jewish hierarchy had added to the Law – those traditions that Yahshua spoke against in Matthew 15:1-3, Mark 7:7-9, and that Paul wrote of in Colossians 2 and other places (Please read Colossians 2 with special attention to these verses which speak of letting some "man" lead you astray: verses 4, 8, 16, 18, 20, and 22.) This has been a stumbling block to Christians for 2,000 years now – confusing the "yoke" of man's tradition with Yahweh's holy, righteous Commandments, His Torah.

These were Jews who still believed in Judaism with all its traditions and unscriptural rules and regulations – “THE Circumcision” versus the Gentiles. The Judaizers were teaching salvation by WORKS. Many references to “circumcision” by Paul and others should be seen as referring to THE Circumcision, meaning the followers of Judaism, who believed in salvation by their own works, as opposed to salvation by FAITH in Yahshua. They thought that these new converts should be required to be circumcised, and learn all the Torah **and** the traditions BEFORE being allowed to be baptized and brought into the fellowship.

Now let’s read some more in Acts 15, this time verses 11 through 20:

(Acts 15:11-20 NRSV) *"On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Master Yahshua, just as they will." {12} The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that Yahweh had done through them among the Gentiles. {13} After they finished speaking, James replied, "My brothers, listen to me. {14} Simeon has related how Yahweh first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. {15} This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written, {16} 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, {17} so that all other peoples may seek Yahweh - even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says Yahweh, who has been making these things {18} known from long ago.' {19} Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to Yahweh, {20} but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood."*

Notice these things closely. No mention of Sabbath-keeping, or of using Yahweh’s Name, or of honoring parents, or of not murdering, lying, stealing, or lusting after your neighbor’s wife. So, is this ALL that new converts have to do today, as some teach? No, of course not! Let’s get “the rest of the story:”

(Acts 15:21 NRSV) *"For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues.""*

Of course! They would learn the rest of Yahweh’s requirements in Sabbath services, and begin to obey as they were taught “new” things.

So, what was the meaning of the decree of the Jerusalem Council? The four things they were to stop doing **before being baptized** were the four things most abominable and offensive to Yahweh, namely:

**That they abstain from things polluted by idols, and from fornication (sex sins), and from things strangled, and from blood (drinking blood). The pagans did these four things in their religious rites, and these were particularly obnoxious to Yahweh.**

Then, AFTER they were baptized, v. 21, they would learn the rest of Yahweh’s requirements in Sabbath services, where the Torah was read every Sabbath day. These four things were only the first step.

Now we have established that the Torah requires circumcision – both of heart and flesh. We see that neither Yahshua nor Paul did away with circumcision nor any of Torah. Now let’s tie up some loose ends. Turn to Galatians 5:1-7:

(Gal 5:1-7 NRSV) *"For freedom the Messiah has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. {2} Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, the Messiah will be of no benefit to you. {3} Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law. {4} **You who want to be justified by the law** have cut yourselves off from the Messiah; you have fallen away from grace. {5} For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. {6} For in the Messiah Yahshua neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love. {7} You were running well; who prevented you from obeying the truth?"*

This certainly sounds like Paul is saying that anyone who allows himself to be circumcised has lost his salvation, doesn’t it? But what did Paul do, immediately after the Jerusalem conference? We will see in just a moment, but first, note the statement that Paul made within the quote above:

**{4} “You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from the Messiah; you have fallen away from grace.”** These Judaizers were teaching salvation by **works**, not by grace. This is

hard for some to understand. We cannot work for our salvation, yet we cannot be saved without “works.”. Commandment-keeping alone will not bring salvation. We must also have Yahshua’s “grace” to forgive us of PAST sins. It takes **both** – obedience AND Yahshua’s grace. Now, back to what Paul did just after the Jerusalem Conference:

(Acts 16:1-3 NRSV) *"Paul went on also to Derbe and to Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. {2} He was well spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium. {3} Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and had him **circumcised** because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek."*

Now, I don’t know anyone who seriously thinks that Paul caused Timothy to lose his salvation. Far from being opposed to circumcision, Paul actually upheld it.

(Rom 2:29 KJV) *"But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of Yahweh."*

(Rom 3:1-2 KJV) *"What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? {2} Much every way: chiefly, because that unto **them** were committed the oracles of Yahweh."*

Here is an example of usage of “Circumcision” to refer to the Jews – “THE Circumcision.”

Remember that Paul’s writings concerning circumcision have been misconstrued and misunderstood, and taken out of context, giving him “powers” that Yahweh never intended him to have – that of lawgiver. We find the same thing being done by the “lawless” or no-law teachers with Paul’s writings about the Sabbath, clean and unclean meats, the annual Holy Days, etc. etc. He never once spoke against Torah on any of these subjects, despite unlearned arguments to the contrary.

And what about “circumcision of the heart,” as opposed to “circumcision of the flesh”? Isn’t “of the heart” of the New Testament, and “of the flesh” of the Old Testament? Well, let’s see:

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

Deuteronomy 30:6 - *And Yahweh thy El will circumcise thine **heart**, and the heart of thy seed, to love Yahweh thy El with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.*

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

Jeremiah 9:26 - *Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are **uncircumcised in the heart**.*

Ezekiel 44:1 - *Then he brought me back the way of the gate of the outward sanctuary which looketh toward the east; and it was shut. Ezek 44:2 Then said Yahweh unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because Yahweh, the El of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut. Ezek 44:3 It is for the **prince**; the prince, he shall sit in it to eat bread before Yahweh; he shall enter by the way of the porch of that gate, and shall go out by the way of the same.*

Ezek 44:4 *Then brought he me the way of the north gate before the house: and I looked, and, behold, the glory of Yahweh filled the house of Yahweh: and I fell upon my face. Ezek 44:5 And Yahweh said unto me, Son of man, mark well, and behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears all that I say unto thee concerning all the ordinances of the house of Yahweh, and all the laws thereof; and mark well the entering in of the house, with every going forth of the sanctuary. Ezek 44:6 And thou shalt say to the rebellious, even to the house of Israel, Thus saith Adonai Yahweh; O ye house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations,*

Ezek 44:7 ***In that ye have brought into my sanctuary strangers, uncircumcised in heart, and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in my sanctuary, to pollute it, even my house, when ye offer my bread, the fat and the blood, and they have broken my covenant because of all your abominations.***

Ezek 44:8 *And ye have not kept the charge of mine holy things: but ye have set keepers of my charge in my sanctuary for yourselves.*

***Ezek 44:9 Thus saith Adonai Yahweh ; No stranger, uncircumcised in heart, nor uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into my sanctuary, of any stranger that is among the children of Israel.***

This quote from Ezekiel should give us pause. It is an end-time prophecy, and a scary one at that. If we think we are circumcised in heart, and refuse to be circumcised in the flesh, is that not rebellion? Can we truly have a circumcised heart, and yet refuse His commandment for a fleshly one, too? It is just a matter of which comes first. We have seen that Abraham was circumcised in heart, first. His obedience and faith in Yahweh preceded his fleshly circumcision.

But, when Yahweh gave him that requirement – when He said, “cut off your foreskin, you and all your males for all generations, Abraham didn’t quibble. He just said, “Yes, Sir,” then went and did it, that very day (Gen. 17:23-27).

May Yahweh open our hearts and minds so that we would be as meek and yielded to Yahweh’s instructions as our father Abraham was.

Remember this Scripture: Galatians 3:29 “***And if ye be the Messiah’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.***”

That’s OUR promise. May we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Hallelu YAH! ~

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