

CIRCUMCISION - A PICTURE OF BAPTISM?

God commanded the Jews to have their males circumcised to make them part of the covenant to inherit the Holy Land. This is not seen as spiritual but as cultural and political and yet Christians like to imagine that God replaced circumcision with baptism. Even if he abrogated circumcision, that does not mean that baptism is its replacement.

Many point to Paul's assertion that the Jewish sacrament of circumcision was unnecessary for salvation in Romans 4 as proof that it is the same with water baptism. Paul never mentioned water baptism in Romans 4 but that makes no difference – we are concerned about the principle here. He said later in Romans 6 that in baptism you die and are buried with Christ and rise again with him which is like what happens in baptism by total immersion in water. But he could speak that way even of Spiritual Baptism for in it you die as a bad person and rise as a good and saved person.

Catholic theologians will say that what Paul wrote about circumcision being useless for salvation fails to rule out water baptism having power to save. "Circumcision was necessary for inheriting the MATERIAL blessings promised to Abraham (Genesis 17) but not for salvation which is SPIRITUAL salvation from sin and Hell and fits one for Heaven like water baptism does. Baptism was different so Paul's stance with relation to circumcision cannot be taken as a refutation of baptismal regeneration. If Paul had understood baptism as a replacement for circumcision and both as mere symbolic rites then neither would be essential."

Here is something to close them up, "Circumcision does indeed profit if you keep the Law; but if you habitually transgress the Law, your circumcision is made uncircumcision. So if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be credited to him as [equivalent to] circumcision? Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the Law will condemn you who, although you have the code in writing and have circumcision, break the Law. For he is not a [real] Jew who is only one outwardly and publicly, nor is [true] circumcision something external and physical. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and [true] circumcision is of the heart, a spiritual and not a literal [matter]. His praise is not from men but from God" (Romans 2:25-29).

If you break the law your circumcision doesn't mean a thing because circumcision requires you to be spiritually right with God or as it is put here circumcised in heart.

A man who is uncircumcised but who obeys the will of God is circumcised. Despite the fact that this doctrine completely contradicts the Old Testament where God is strict about physical circumcision we will go on. Paul means that physical circumcision is just a sign of spiritual circumcision – in other words, cutting yourself away from evil and sin. He said physical circumcision profits if you keep the Law so how then does it profit if the real thing is what happens inside not what happens outside? The answer must be that circumcision was indeed a spiritual sacrament. Paul by saying physical circumcision of male babies couldn't save by itself was certainly denying that baptising babies in water was any good. He was certainly denying that baptism is needed for anybody.

Its interesting what happens when you use the same passage but put water baptism or baptism in for circumcision and unbaptism for uncircumcision.

"Water Baptism does indeed profit if you keep the Law; but if you habitually transgress the Law, your water baptism is made unbaptism. So if a man who is unbaptised keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his unbaptism be credited to him as [equivalent to] water baptism? Then those who are physically unbaptised but keep the Law will condemn you who, although you have the code in writing and have water baptism, break the Law. For he is not a [real] Jew who is only one outwardly and publicly, nor is [true] water baptism something external and physical. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and [true] baptism is of the heart, a spiritual and not a literal [matter]. His praise is not from men but from God".

Would Paul have agreed that baptism was a sacrament? Would he have agreed that water baptism profits if you keep the Law of God? No for he never even said it was obligatory. The baptism he did regard as a sacrament was one administered by God himself, spirit baptism. It's a sacrament, a sign that does what it symbolises, invisible to us but a sacrament all the same for its not invisible to God.

CIRCUMCISION AND INFANT BAPTISM

Some Christians endeavour to sustain the view that the Bible is amenable to the idea of infant baptism for it requires infant circumcision.

The theologians' view is that circumcision and baptism are signs of the removal of sin by Jesus Christ. They say that the only difference between the two signs was that the first pictured salvation through the future blood of Christ and the second pictured salvation that did not need blood any more for it resulted from the once for all bloody death of Jesus. Circumcision and baptism would be seen as the one sacrament except that the outward sign was altered but the grace is the same. If baptism was a sign that there was no more need for blood then there is a problem. Why would God want to picture the fact that there was to be no more blood spilled for sins instead of the fact that blood has saved us from sin and made us righteous? It makes more sense to retain the bloody rite of circumcision for it is a more appropriate picture of salvation by the blood of Jesus. Not, it needs to be said, that the doctrine that the circumcision pictures anything to do with the blood of Christ. It is just one of the Christian lies and fantasies.

If circumcision is anything like baptism then why is it that only men receive circumcision? What about women? If circumcision is like baptism enough to mean that if babies are circumcised then babies should be baptised then women cannot be baptised. If anybody tries to baptise women then it is invalid and not a real baptism at all.

Never does the Old Testament claim that circumcision was a sign of salvation. It never says it symbolises the removal of sin. And it is not true that the Old Testament is centred on the Messiah or Christ. The huge emphasis put on Jesus being the Christ in Christianity is not justified by reading the Old Testament. Circumcision is seen in the Old Testament as a sign of becoming part of the divine political and earthly agenda. Deuteronomy 30:6 may be cited against this but it merely says that one must have one's heart circumcised which is a metaphorical way of saying that the badness in it must be cut away. Even Colossians 2:11 does not say that physical circumcision represents salvation for it also speaks of metaphorical circumcision in which badness is cut away from the spirit. Accordingly, if babies were circumcised it does not mean that they can be baptised.

The Catholics say that as the babies in Old Testament times were excluded from the covenant between God and his people if they were not snipped, so too will the baby who is not baptised today be excluded. The choice of the word excluded is interesting. So God says, "You are not baptised you little dribbling brat so I want nothing to do with you." We must remember that the Old Testament exclusion was strict. If a man was not circumcised he was not considered part of God's nation. The Catholics however imagine that the power of baptism is given without the ceremony under certain circumstances. If you are an adult and are not baptised and getting ready for baptism and you die suddenly then God is said to count you baptised. When God is so kind to sinful adults he should have more mercy for a little helpless baby that dies without baptism. Is it really a nice thing to commend a baby that dies that way to such a God? We conclude that the argument that a baby being excluded without baptism is rubbish as God can change the rules. And if he does, the Catholics should not be using circumcision of infants as done in the Old Testament to make the excuse that they have a divine commission to baptise babies.

Old Testament circumcision was inextricably linked to the ideas of including male babies in the Hebrew nation. It was mainly political. The state has the right to declare a child born in it to be one of its people. The Hebrews simply had a different way of determining who belonged to them. It was by circumcision for males and probably birth for females. The Catholics do not understand biblical circumcision properly or they use it to defend the indefensible - infant baptism.

Paul said that true circumcision is in the heart and is not physical and that a real Jew has the circumcision in the heart (Romans 2:28). But even a Catholic who believes that communion puts grace in you would tell you that real communion is in the heart for communion is no good unless you open wide your heart to God. Paul is not saying that circumcision is like baptism or that it is a sacrament or that physical circumcision should be abandoned. He is saying the physical cutting is no good unless it bears fruit in a spiritual circumcision.

We read in the Covenant Reformed News, Volume 7, Number 13 that in Paul's teaching, "To be circumcised is to be baptised!" This is totally wrong.

Circumcision of boys was the initiation rite of the Old Testament and it was done on babies. It made them a part of God's racial segregation system. Paedo-baptists insist that since the initiation of babies was not expressly done away in the New Testament we are to initiate babies into the Church of God by baptism. But the Church isn't a race or a political regime – in theory anyway.

In the Old Testament the circumcised Hebrews made up the chosen people. Since a baby boy was born a member of God's political kingdom he had to be circumcised as a mark of this. He was marked because he was chosen by God. He was chosen to be circumcised. He was not chosen because he was circumcised. Many Christians say that in the New Testament, water baptism is probably the same – if it is commanded in it at all. Nobody knows who God chooses to be among his people now for there are different nations and colours not like Israel so it is wrong to baptise babies. Only those who have given evidence that God has chosen them have the right to be baptised.

The New Testament authors stated that if you are circumcised you have to obey the whole law of Moses. Paul wrote that

you die with Jesus when you become his follower and accept his salvation and the law has no power over somebody that is dead. In Romans 7 he says a saved person has died and risen again spiritually and so is free from the law for the same reason that a person is free to marry again after a spouse dies.

The stress on religious freedom in the New Testament shows that enforced circumcision can tell us nothing about baptism.