

# The Sign of the Covenant

Genesis 17:9-14

*Halifax: 11 October 2009*

## **Introduction:**

Today I am going to break from our regular sermon series because:

- Today we have the privilege of witnessing the baptism of a covenant child.
  
- And not only that,
  - but we also have the joy of welcoming three young men to the Lord's Supper...
    - three young men who were also baptised into God's covenant as children and who are now coming forth to confess that by the grace of God, they believe the precious promises of this covenant and are committed to walk in the new life that God gives to those who believe.
  
- And not only that,
  - but we also have the encouragement of welcoming a young woman into membership who has moved to Halifax to study at Dalhousie University,
    - and who made it a point before she came to find a church with which she could be a part, and who comes to us reaffirming her faith in Jesus Christ.

And so instead of continuing our series from Isaiah today,

- I am going to preach from Genesis 17 on the institution of circumcision.
  - Some of you may remember that this is a series (a really spread out three part series) that I began when Faith Kubik was baptised—on December 28...
    - And I told you that time that I would continue this series whenever we had a baptism.
  
  - In the first message, I focused especially on Genesis 17:1-8...
    - And today, I am going move on to verses 9-14 where the focus is on the institution of circumcision.

Now perhaps some of you will say,

- "What a curious thing!
  - Why would a Christian church talk about an ancient Jewish rite that was instituted 4000 years ago that was discontinued 2000 years ago when Christ came?
    - What could this possibly have to do with Christians baptising a baby, receiving three young men to communion, and welcoming a new member in Halifax in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?"

- Indeed,
  - What does circumcision have to do with us as Christians today?
  - I will answer that question in just a little later in the sermon, but first, I want to show you what circumcision is...so...

## **I. What is circumcision?**

### **A. Circumcision is the cutting away of the flesh of the male foreskin.**

1. Interestingly, it was practiced by many nations in antiquity...
  - The Moabites, Edomites, and Ammonites practiced it because of their relationship to Israel...
  - But so also did the Egyptians, at least as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> century BC,
    - and the Eastern Semitic people of Mesopotamia and even the South American Indians.
  - This suggests the possibility that circumcision was instituted by God *before* the time of Abraham for those who embraced His covenant...
    - This may be the reason why, at least as far as what is recorded in Genesis,
      - there is very little explanation of circumcision and its meaning to Abraham when it is first instituted.
      - It may be that he was already familiar with it.
2. But whether or not that is the case,
  - we know from God's holy word given to us in Gen 17 that God commanded Abraham to be circumcised.
    - And we are told plainly that circumcision was given to him as the sign of the covenant between him and God:
    - In Gen 17:11, the LORD says:
      - Gen 17:11: and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.

### **B. But in what way was circumcision a sign of God's covenant?**

- Well I want to show you that there are two ways that this is so...
  1. First, it was a sign in that it marked out those who had entered into God's gracious covenant.
    - a. Signs identify things...
      - When you look for a Canadian Tire, you look for the sign.
      - Circumcision was a sign of one who had entered into God's covenant.

- b. It was a covenant in which God promised to be the God of those who trusted in Him to give them life.
  - A covenant is a relationship that is established by solemn promises—like marriage.
  - We looked at this covenant in Genesis 17 last time...
    - We saw how Abram (or Abraham) was from one of those families that had gathered together at Babel (as recorded in Genesis 11) to build a tower to heaven and to make a great name for themselves lest they should be scattered.
    - There is no record that these people were being immoral or violent or anything like that—we are not told...
      - but we are told that God was very displeased with what they were doing.
      - He said that nothing would be restrained from them if they were left to continue their building project undisturbed...
  - And so He purposed to come down and put a stop to their little project—to confuse their language—and to scatter them over the face of the earth.
    - But what was the problem?
      - Why was God so displeased with them?
      - It was because they were trying to make a great name for themselves apart from God.
        - They were, as so many nations do today, trying to move forward without their Creator—as if they could get along without Him.
      - Like all human beings since they fall,
        - they were sinful and offensive to God and desperately needed to repent and be reconciled to Him.
      - But they acted as if this was unimportant.
        - They acted as if the thing that mattered most about them was irrelevant.
      - If left to prosper, they would have gone on indefinitely without ever seeking God!
        - And so the Lord confused their language and scattered them in order that, as Paul says in Acts 14, they might seek Him.
        - It was, in one way, an expression of His grace and an integral part of His plan to save the world.

- And God's grace is seen in that he comes to come of those 70 families mentioned in Genesis 10 that He has humbled and scattered.
  - In Genesis 12, God comes to Abram and promises to Him that He will do for Abram what the united nations were trying to do for themselves!
    - He says:
      - Gen 12:2-3: "I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.""
- To have God bless you and to make you a blessing is to have a complete turn around in things!
  - Because Abraham, and all of us since the fall, are sinners who are sentenced to eternal death.
    - That is what the men at Babel were ignoring when they were trying to prosper without bothering to be reconciled to God.
      - You see how foolish they were to ignore this.
      - As long as you are not reconciled to God, everything is desperately hopeless because you are destined at last to go to Hell because of your sin.
  - But when God comes to you and says He is going to bless you...and make you... you... a sinner... to be a blessing...
    - That means that He is going to do something radical for you and in you.
  - When God blesses you, He does it right!
    - Jesus explains that when God claimed to be the God of Abraham, it meant that Abraham had eternal life—
      - because God is not the God of dead but of the living.
    - His blessing in the covenant means that He is going to do all that has to be done to give you eternal life—
      - You will have life with God, life from God, life for God, life in God, life to God, life by God!
      - He will do all that is required to make you holy and blameless before Him forever!
        - All that must happen if God is going to be your God.
  - And so you see that when you get to chapter 17,

- God tells Abram to do what Abram cannot possibly do by his own efforts...
    - He says in verse 1, “What before me and be blameless!”
      - How could Abraham make Himself blameless before God?
      - How could he remove the guilt of His sin?
      - How could he change his sinful heart?
  - Only God can do this...
    - God Almighty must purify him and cleanse him of his sin...
    - And so in Gen 17, the gracious LORD makes a covenant in which He promises that He will be Abraham’s God to bless him and to make him a blessing.
- c. And Abraham is commanded to enter into this covenant by receiving the sign of circumcision in the flesh of his foreskin.
- It is what he is to do as one who believes what God has promised—
    - who believes that God will bless him who was once cursed and will make him a blessing who was once not a blessing...
    - who believes that God will make him righteous so that God will dwell with him and his descendents in land that is promised...
    - and forever...
  - By receiving circumcision, Abraham is identifying himself as one who believes God’s promise to make him acceptable to God.
    - Circumcision is to him a seal of the righteousness of the faith that he had before he was circumcised...
      - A seal is that which attests to the authenticity of something...
        - and in this case, it is the authenticity of Abraham’s righteousness that he had by trusting in God.
      - He was circumcised because he believed God for righteousness:
        - Romans 4:11 declares exactly this:
          - Rom 4:11-12: And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe,
        - This is what we might call “creedo-circumcision.”
          - All missionary circumcision was by profession of faith in the man—
            - and then his sons were included...
            - I will show you more about this later.

TRANS> But for now I want you to see that circumcision was a sign, marking Abraham out as one who had come to God for righteousness.

- But circumcision was also a sign in another way.
- 2. Circumcision was also a sign in what the action itself (the cutting away of the flesh) symbolised...
  - It was a symbol of the purification or cleansing that every human being must have if we are going to be reconciled to God.
    - The circumcision of the flesh of the foreskin was given to represent the purification of the person from sin—from the core of their being or the heart.
      - The action itself represented the cutting away of sin.
  - This meaning of circumcision is implied in Genesis 17, but if there is any doubt, it is expressly stated in scripture later.
    - In Deuteronomy 10:16, the Lord calls the people to circumcise their hearts:
      - Deut 10:16: Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.
    - And in Deuteronomy 30, shows that this circumcision of the heart is something He must do if they are to be His people:
      - Deut 30:6-7: ""And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.
  - And because the circumcision of the flesh is only a symbol of the circumcision of the heart,
    - Paul explains in Romans 2 that **real circumcision** is the purification of the heart by God...
      - In Romans 2:28-29, he says:
        - Rom 2:28-29: For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

TRANS> And so from this, it is easy to see how circumcision pertains to us a Christians.

- So let us now turn to look at that topic...

## II. What does circumcision have to do with us as Christians?

- It has a whole lot to do with us...

A. Not the physical sign itself, but the circumcision of the heart—of the whole person from within.

1. The physical sign itself was terminated in the New Testament.

- There was a big controversy about it because some of the Jews who had trusted in Christ did not see how the sign could be dispensed with.
- But in Acts 15, the conclusion is given that it is not necessary to circumcise the Gentiles who came to believe in Christ.

TRANS> I will say more about why the sign was dispensed with later,

- but first, I want to show you that:

2. The circumcision of the heart that is symbolised by the circumcision of the flesh is as necessary in the New Testament as it was in the Old.

a. In the New Testament the sign is said to be unimportant as long as a person has the thing signified...but we must have the thing signified—the new heart!

1) We just looked at Rom 2:28-29, but I want you to consider it again:

- Rom 2:28-29: For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.
- The Christian is still supposed to have circumcision—not of the flesh but of the heart.

2) In Gal 6:15, the circumcision of the heart is referred to as a new creation...

- Ga 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

3) In 1 Cor 7:19, Paul says,

- 1 Cor 7:19: “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters.*”
- It is the new life that results when the heart is circumcised.

b. And in Philippians 3:3, Paul, irritated with those who were insisting on physical circumcision,

- explains that Christian believers are the true circumcision...
- He says:
  - Phil 3:3: For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

- We do not take confidence in what is done to the body, but in what God has done to purify our hearts.
    - Circumcision is the purification that God gives to us through Jesus Christ,
      - it is not some supposed purification that comes by the circumcision of the cutting away of the flesh of the foreskin.
3. So we conclude from this that believers are very much in need of the circumcision of the heart...
- the circumcision of the heart that comes through faith in Jesus Christ...
    - You cannot purify your own heart, but you must look to Christ who was crucified to cleanse you by His blood.
  - Let me tell each and every one you who hear my voice...
    - You are a sinner.
      - Unless your heart is circumcised by God, you are dead in your trespasses and sins and you will be condemned forever on the day of judgement.
        - It is not something to mess around with!
        - You must be circumcised in heart (not in flesh) or you cannot be saved!

B. But why did God dispense with the sign if we are still in need of the thing signified?

- He dispensed with the sign because now that Jesus has come,
    - circumcision is fulfilled by baptism into Jesus Christ.
1. Circumcision showed that for our purification to occur, there must be the shedding of blood.
- It was a bloody rite that very much involved the shedding of blood.
    - By this God showed that there must be death for our cleansing.
  - But the blood that was shed in the act of physical circumcision was only symbolic of the blood that was required,
    - for God had sentenced us with rejection and death under His curse for our sins.
      - For justice to occur, not just the foreskin, but the whole of us must be cut off from God and cast away!
    - Not just one member of the body must bleed and be cast away to atone for our sin,
      - but the part represented the whole!

- The whole person was sentenced to be cut off and cast away—to die under the curse of God.
  - And because Christ had not yet come to die in our place, the whole Old Testament system was designed to testify to the need of His death.
    - There was the altar where thousands of sacrifices were offered in the place of guilty sinners—to atone for their sins...
    - The necessity of death was constantly presented to them, and in circumcision it was symbolically presented in their own bodies.
      - But the death that was required was only symbolised—it was never provided...
        - not until Jesus Christ came!
2. But when He came, He circumcised us by the shedding of His blood!
- What I mean is, He purified or cleansed us by His death on the cross where He was given as a sacrifice for us and became a curse for us.
    - By the shedding of His blood, we are completely forgiven and we are given a new heart that loves God.
      - The new heart could not be given, however, until atonement was made.
  - Now that Jesus has come, He has done all that was required for us to obtain eternal life!
    - We had to be cut off because of our sin, and He has been cut off for us!
      - He is the circumcision—not a symbolic piece of skin, but a whole person—even the person of the Son of God—
        - He was cut off for us...
        - Isaiah 53:8 says,
          - “He was cut off from the land of the living, for the transgression of my people He was stricken.”
        - And Daniel 9:26 says,
          - “After the sixty-two weeks, the Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself.”
            - It was not because **He** was unclean, but it was because His people were unclean that He was cut off!
  - And so now that Jesus has come and has fulfilled circumcision—has been cut off for us—you can see how inappropriate it would be to continue the rite.
    - We no longer focus on the blood that **must be shed** with bloody rites and ceremonies...

- but now we focus on the blood that **has been shed** for us by Jesus Christ.
  - We come not with faith in the blood that **will be shed** for our cleansing,
    - represented by circumcision,
    - but with faith in the blood that **has been shed** by Jesus Christ on the cross who then baptises us with the Holy Spirit to purify our hearts.
      - Baptism with the Spirit could not occur until we were first purified by His blood.
  - It is still the cleansing that God gives that we trust in—
    - just as it always was...
      - but now it is the cleansing that has been accomplished by Jesus Christ!
3. Now that Christ has come, you can see how inappropriate it would be to continue circumcision!
- a. To do so would be to act as if Christ had not yet come and made an atonement for us—
    - It would be to say that we were still looking for blood to be shed to cleanse us from our sins—to purify our hearts!
    - It is for this reason that Paul spoke so strongly to the Galatians who were insisting on circumcision...
      - Gal 5:2-4: Indeed, I Paul say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.
    - He is saying,
      - Look people, if you still think blood needs to be shed for your sins then you are responsible to keep the whole law—on your own!
        - If you do not rest in the purification that Christ accomplished, then you are going to have to come up with your own atonement.
          - You are cut off from Christ and you will have to do it all yourself!
          - **You** will have to go the cross and **you** will have bear the curse for yourself and **you** will have to change your own heart.

- Either stop this nonsense and rely on Christ,
- or provide your own sacrifice for sin and purify yourself!

TRANS> Now my brothers and sisters,

b. You must see that circumcision is fulfilled by baptism!

- Let me put it like this,
  - In circumcision, the person being circumcised attested that he was looking to God to provide the cleansing and new life that was promised.
  - In baptism, the person being baptised attests that he is looking to Christ to give him the cleansing and new life that has now been provided by Jesus Christ who was crucified.
- Baptism is the sign that is given to those who enter into God's covenant to attest that they are looking to Christ to cleanse them from their sins.
  - Baptism is also a symbol of cleansing that points to inward cleansing—the new heart, cleansed by Christ.
    - And, like circumcision, it is an empty sign unless it is accompanied by the inward cleansing that is obtained through faith.
- John baptised with water, and so do I as a minister of the gospel,
  - that is the outward ceremony that God commanded in the NT...
    - but Jesus baptises with the Holy Spirit.
    - That is the inward cleansing by His blood that brings about a new life with God, from God, for God, in God, to God, and by God.
- This is what Colossians 2 refers to as the “circumcision made without hands.”
  - Col 2:11: In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,
    - Christ Himself was cut off for us in order to take away our sins.
      - That is the fulfillment of circumcision...
        - That is “the circumcision of Christ.”
  - And that is now symbolised by baptism:
    - See how verse 11 flows into verse 12 about baptism:
      - Col 2:11-13: In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins

of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, (v. 12) **buried with Him in baptism**, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,

- Do you see?
  - In baptism, you attest that you are looking to Jesus Christ for the cleansing that He gives you by being cut off for you.
    - And by that faith, you are made alive together with Him, all your trespasses having been forgiven!

TRANS> So we have seen what circumcision is and we have seen how it applies to us

- Now I want you to take a look at a third question:

### **III. Who is entitled to receive circumcision?**

A. The physical sign was given to men who entered into the covenant God made with Abraham.

1. By receiving circumcision, they professed that the God of Abraham was their God,

- they committed themselves to walk before Him...
  - and they looked to Him for the cleansing that gives us new life as a new creation.
- a. Circumcision was not meant to be an empty sign.
  - It is true that many received it who were not really looking to the LORD for their cleansing—
    - and in such cases the outward sign was given without the inward reality...
    - but that was not because the LORD designed it to be an empty sign...
      - that was because of the unbelief of those who were circumcised.
      - Such persons entered into this covenant falsely.
  - Such persons were in the covenant, but they broke the covenant by unbelief.
    - And because they broke the covenant, they were to be cut off.
      - The Old Testament is full of things that a person might do for which they were to be cut off by the ministers of the Old Covenant.
        - Offenses include: eating leaven (Ex. 12:15-19); misuse of anointing oil (Ex. 30:31-33); profaning the Sabbath (Ex. 31:14); eating blood (Lev. 7:27); immorality including incest,

menstrual, homosexual, molech, bestiality (Lev. 18:29 summary); sacrifice to Molech (Lev. 19-20), irreverence on the day of atonement (Lev. 23:29); presumptuous sins (Num. 15:30-31).

- And when they were not cut off by the ministers of covenant,
  - either because of the slackness of the ministers or because the unbelief was hidden under a veil of hypocrisy,
    - God declared that He would Himself would cut off those who broke His covenant.
- So even though there were some who were circumcised who did not have the inward circumcision of the heart,
  - they would soon be cut off.
  - Psalm 1 is an example of how God will cut off the ungodly in the day of judgement.

TRANS> So circumcision was only to be given to adults when they confessed God to be their God, committed to live a new life in obedience to Him, and confessed that they were looking to Him to cleanse them.

- b. And on this basis, it was given to Abraham, his servants, and to others who wished to enter into God's covenant.
  - This is stated in Gen 17:13:
    - Gen 17:13: He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.
  - If such persons refused to enter into God's covenant, they were not to be forcibly given the sign, but excluded from the house.
    - This is obvious because of the fact that covenant breakers were to be cut off even if they had already been circumcised.
      - It would not make sense to receive someone forcibly who would then immediately have to be cut off because of their unbelief.
  - Gen 17 does not refer to other persons who might want to enter into God's covenant, but Exodus 12 does.
    - It says that when they came and wanted to participate with Israel in the Passover, they must not do so until they had first been circumcised.
      - Exodus 12:48-49: "And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For

no uncircumcised person shall eat it. One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you."

- This shows that foreigners, besides Abraham's servants, were admitted to the covenant and circumcised upon profession of faith.
  - And again, they were under the same requirements as Israel and so were to be cut off if they broke the covenant.
  - They were only to be brought in when they made a credible profession of faith.
  
- 2. But now I want you to see further in our text in Gen 17 that the infant sons of professing believers were also given the covenant sign of circumcision—on the eighth day of life!
  - Obviously, these babes were not old enough to profess faith in God who promised to be their God and to cleanse them.
    - They were not even old enough to talk!
    - But it is quite clear that their parents were to present their sons to the Lord for circumcision.
      - This was no humanly devised "dedication!"
      - It was a fully authorised application of God's covenant sign given to professing adults that God commanded to be applied to infants.
        - It showed that God accepted the children of believers into His covenant from birth!
  
  - This was a tremendous encouragement to the parents!
    - Otherwise there would be no way to know what God thought of our children—
      - really, we would have to assume that they were cut off until they were old enough to understand and believe!
  
    - By giving them the sign of the covenant from birth,
      - the LORD shows that His cleansing reaches to children.
        - God does not appoint signs that have no meaning or reality!
  
  - With their inclusion into the covenant,
    - These little children were to be brought up as those who belong to the LORD...
      - The promises of the covenant were theirs...
      - The commandments of the covenant were theirs...
      - The warnings of the covenant were theirs...

- They were to be brought up in the gracious nurture and discipline of the LORD.
- Because they had the sign, their parents could look to God in faith to give them the cleansing of the heart that was signified.

3. But what about females?

- They were not circumcised.
- Does that mean that they were excluded from the covenant?
- No, it does not.
  - Women and girls of all ages were part of the covenant community and so they were included in the circumcision of the men.
  - They were to seek the new heart from God that was signified in the men's circumcision and were to rest in God's promises.
- This is not a mistake or an oversight—it is actually quite meaningful!
- Even as sin entered into the world through the man Adam as the head of the human family,
  - so the cleansing was also to come through one man, even through Jesus Christ.
  - Until Christ came, the women were to be comforted in the sign that was applied to the fathers and their husbands,
    - through whom the transgression was passed along to them...
    - knowing that cleansing would also come through the men who represented them (and at last through the one man in whom we all have true circumcision).
      - Through faith, the women personally and individually received the cleansing represented in circumcision.

TRANS> So you see that the physical sign of circumcision was applied to all men who desired to enter God's covenant along with their sons,

- but the circumcision of the heart that was represented by the sign was given to all who believed and to children even before they believed.

B. What about in the New Testament? Who is entitled to receive circumcision?

- Of course we have seen that after Christ came, no one was to receive physical circumcision...
    - but...
1. As in the Old Testament, persons receive circumcision of the heart by faith.

- Then as now, we must look to God to cleanse us and transform us...
    - Only now, we focus our faith in particular on Jesus Christ and on what He has done to atone for our sins, and on His promise to baptise us with the Holy Spirit.
  - And now we enter into the covenant not by circumcision but by baptism in the name of Jesus.
    - which symbolises the washing or cleansing of us by His blood and Spirit.
2. And to whom is the sign of baptism to be given?
- a. It is to be given to all who profess faith in Jesus Christ crucified.
- A person who is baptised identifies himself as one who is looking to Christ for cleansing that leads to eternal life—
    - life with God, life from God, life for God, life in God, life to God, life by God!
    - The sign of baptism is given to both men and women who profess to be those who are looking to Jesus Christ for salvation.
      - By baptism they are united to Christ who has taken all their sins upon Himself and been cut off and cast away...
      - And who has risen with new life that He gives us by His Spirit.
  - Gal 3:13-14 says:
    - Gal 3:13-14: Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.
      - In this passage, you see that atonement had to come first—then the gift of the Spirit!
      - You see also that this is not anything different than what Abraham had—it is:
        - “the blessing of Abraham that has come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus.”
      - We are heirs of the promise made to Abraham through baptism.
        - That is what it says in Gal 3:26-29.
        - We have the same inheritance in the same covenant, only now the promise has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
- b. But what about the children of those who believe?

- Are parents still permitted to bring their children to God for cleansing as they were in the Old Testament?
  - Are they allowed to present them to Jesus who was crucified that He might cleanse them and give them new life?
  - Or are parents now commanded to wait until their children are old enough to confess their own faith—
    - Are they excluded from Jesus until they are more mature?
- The answer is that no such exclusion is to be found anywhere in the New Testament.
  - It is the same blessing that Abraham sought, and it is still a blessing that is received by faith...
    - But just because the one God sent to obtain that blessing for us has now come is no reason to suppose that children are now to be excluded.
- Furthermore, if the parents of the Old Testament were permitted (and even commanded) to give the covenant sign of righteousness that comes by faith to their children before the children could have faith,
  - on what grounds is the New Testament sign of righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus to be withheld from them?
  - If God received them before on their basis of their parent's faith,
    - on what theory are they now rejected?
    - They are not to be rejected.
- The New Testament everywhere assumes their inclusion.
  - In 1 Cor 7, Paul declares that even if one parent does not believe, the unbeliever cannot undo the holiness of the household—the children are considered to be clean...
  - And in the gospels, we have our Lord Jesus, not refusing to bless infants (Luke uses the word for infants) who are brought to Him by their parents,
    - but rather encouraging the children to be brought to him—because of such is the kingdom of God.
      - Jesus is not interested in pronouncing meaningless blessings on people.
  - And so as would be expected,
    - the pattern throughout the New Testament is the pattern of household baptisms—the children are included with their parents.

- When Peter first announced baptism, he declared that the promise is still to you and to your children—
    - a phrase that is packed with meaning from the covenant promise of the Old Testament on which it is founded.
  - And in Ephesians 6 when Paul writes to the “saints at Ephesus,”
    - he addresses part of his letter to the children, bringing to them the promise of the covenant, and commanding their parents to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the LORD.
      - The children are seen to be “in the LORD.”
- c. But what if these children grow up and rebel?
- What if they reject God’s covenant?
    - Isn’t this a real danger?
  - Yes, of course it is!
    - But there was the same danger in the Old Testament.
  - And the same sanction applies.
    - If anyone enters into God’s covenant, whether as a child or an adult, and then breaks the covenant by manifest unbelief of impenitence,
      - that person is to be cut off from the covenant people—excluded from the number of the saints.
      - If the officers of the church are either too slack to remove them or if the apostasy is hidden from them by hypocrisy,
        - Jesus assures us that He Himself will cut them off at the last day, declaring the fearful words,
          - “Depart from, I never knew you!”
  - And this warning pertains to all of you here who have been baptised in the name of Jesus Christ!
    - Your baptism is of no benefit to you unless you are actively looking to Jesus Christ to cleanse you from your sins by His blood and to grant to you new life in the Spirit.
      - I say, if the new life is not in you—a life that sets you on the pathway of God’s commandments—
        - then you do not belong to Christ at all.
        - You have the sign on your body,

- but you do not have the cleansing of the heart—the true baptism that water baptism is only a symbol of.
- You need to repent and turn to Jesus at once!

### 3. But you parents—

- You are commanded to present your children to the Lord for the cleansing they need and for the cleansing He promises in His covenant.
  - And your earnest prayer must be that they do not depart from Him.
  - Like Abraham, you are to command them to keep the way of the LORD in order that God may bring upon them what He has spoken.
- Today, the Poulins present their son Isaiah to Jesus for baptism...
  - We will baptise him with water,
    - but in doing so, we present him to Jesus Christ to baptise him with the Holy Spirit.
      - otherwise, he is dead in his sin
      - We must plead with our Lord in faith to baptise him...
        - And we must instruct him in what Christ has done for us—in giving himself as a sacrifice for our sins...
        - And we must instruct him in the promise of cleansing and of eternal life,
        - And we must instruct him to live in that new life by the grace of God and pray that he will not depart from it.
- And today there are three young men...
  - three young men who were presented to Jesus for cleansing by their parents...
    - that He would baptise them with His Spirit,
      - that Jesus would circumcise them with the true circumcision that is made without hands.
    - And now these young men have come forth to declare to us that they are looking to Jesus by faith for that promised cleansing,
      - and for the new life with Christ, from Christ, for Christ, in Christ, to Christ, and by Christ!
        - They were presented to Him for cleansing by their parents,
          - and now they are coming to Him as those who are looking to His broken body and shed blood for their cleansing.
        - We welcome them!

- And today there is a young woman who has already confessed her faith,
  - but who is renewing her confession as she comes to partake of Christ with us in this congregation.
    - We rejoice that the Lord has kept her and she is one who joins with us to seek our dear Lord Jesus in whom we have eternal life.
    - Please stand and let us give thanks to the Lord for His abundant mercy to us.

# The Sign of the Covenant

Genesis 17:9-14

*Halifax: 11 March 2001*

Php 3:3: “For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,”

Col 2:11-12: “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”

## BACKGROUND re. Circumcision

- In biblical times it was practised by West Semites (Hebrews, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites), South American Indians, Africans, but was unknown among the Eastern Semitic peoples of Mesopotamia. In Egypt, as indeed generally in the ancient world, circumcision was a rite performed either at puberty or in preparation for marriage.
- The Philistines are an exception in their non-adherence.
- Gen. 17 is not about the origin of the rite, but about its special meaning and restructuring for the Hebrews. Circumcision on the eighth day seems to have been an innovation, and the significance of the rite as marking out those in covenant with God was certainly unique.
- In Ex. 4:24ff, why did Jehovah attack Moses and why does the rite seem to have vicarious significance? It is because the boy needed to be dedicated to God if Moses was to be dedicated to God, and because circumcision points to the cutting away of uncleanness which was accomplished by Jesus in His bloody sacrifice.
- Joshua 5:2-9—the men were circumcised after the rite had been neglected for some time in order that they might eat the Passover.
- Never was the rite meant to be merely external but as a matter of the heart (Jer. 4:4, Deut. 10:16); for it was practised by the Egyptians, Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites; a people who were circumcised yet uncircumcised according to Jer. 9:25. And the apostle speaks of those circumcised outwardly but not in heart and uses the term “mutilation” to describe this outward circumcision unaccompanied by any spiritual change (Phil 3:2).
- It is not a matter of circumcision or uncircumcision, but of keeping the commandments of God (1Cor 7:19, Col. 2:11ff).
  - “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters.*” (1 Corinthians 7:19 NKJV)

In Genesis 17, God tells us very plainly that little babies like Lauren whose parents belong to God also belong to Him.

God has gone so far as to make covenant in which He says:

- “I will be God to you and your descendants after you.”
- Do you see that at the end of verse 7?

This is such an amazing, wonderful thing—that God Himself would claim to be the God of sinful human beings whom He made from the dust of the ground.

- It is such an amazing, unexpected thing that God thought it necessary to assure us that it was true by making a covenant with us.
  - A covenant in which He declares to us, “I will be your God.”
- And in the same way that man gives a woman a ring when he says to her, “I will be your husband,” as a sign of the covenant...
  - So God appointed a covenant sign to be applied to those to whom He declares, “I will be your God.”
  - Circumcision is the covenant sign.
  - It is the seal of God’s acceptance of His people that was appointed until the time that Christ came.
    - It was a bloody sign that showed us that there had to be a cutting away of our sin so that we might be cleansed from defilement.
    - When Christ came, He took all of our sin upon His own person and was cut off and cast away as an unclean thing so that all the rest of His people might be cleansed.
    - God accepted His sacrifice in our place, and demonstrated this by raising Him from the dead!
    - From that time on, the bloody sign of circumcision was no longer needed because Christ had fulfilled the circumcision that God promised for His people.
    - Jesus gave us a new sign, baptism, to take the place of circumcision.
      - Baptism emphasises union with Christ-
        - The emphasis is not on immersion, but mersion.
        - Believers are joined together with Christ in spiritual baptism so that we die with Him and are raised with Him to walk in new life by the power of the Spirit.

**9. And God said to Abraham: "As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.**

*As for you*

- God has told us what He would do (vs. 4 "As for me..."); now He tells Abraham what He must do.
- POOLE: The agreement is mutual: my part was expressed before; now follows thy part, and the condition to which my promise and blessing is annexed.

*Keep covenants*

- expresses careful attention to be paid to the obligations of a covenant, to laws, statutes, etc.
- HENRY: Those who will have the Lord to be to them a God, must resolve to be to Him a people.

**10. "This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised;**

**11. "and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.**

Note that the covenant is clearly made with the unborn "me and you and your descendants after you."

Circumcision was to be the badge of the covenant. It was God's way of marking out those that belonged to Him. By the sign, they were to be blameless- they were to serve, trust, and obey God alone.

1Co 7:19: "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God *is what matters.*"

Gal. 5:1-6: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed, I Paul say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love."

- Is this saying that to be circumcised was to place oneself before Messiah as if looking for Him and therefore ignoring the fact that He has come?
- And if one ignores the fact that Messiah has come and been cut off for him, he has only his own righteousness to fall back on and must perfectly keep the law, which no man can do.

GENEVA: Circumcision is called the covenant, because it signifies the covenant and has the promise of grace joined to it: a phrase that is common to all ordinances.

WEST: "Circumcision is called the *Covenant*, because it is appointed by God as a Seal of the Covenant, and hath the promise of Grace joined unto it; which is common to all sacraments (Ex. 12:11, Matt 26:18, Luk 22:20, Col 2:12) and as it is performed as a condition of the Covenant enjoined by God, it is a Moral obedience; as exercised through faith in God's promise, it is Sacramental."

POOLE: Circumcision is here called the *covenant* by a usual metonymy, because it is the condition, sign, and seal of the covenant, the pledge of God's promise and man's duty. And upon the same grounds the *cup*, i.e. the wine, is called *the new testament in Christ's blood*, #Lu 22:20; or, which is all one, *Christ's blood in the new testament*, # Mt 26:28.

- Luke 22:20: "Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."

What about the women?

- Women were included with the men in the covenant:
  - Exodus 12:3: "Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth *day* of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of *his* father, a lamb for a household."
  - WEST: Men were chosen because the sin nature is through Adam. Yet, the sign was still a sign to the female sex as well because the woman is from the man (I Cor. 11:8: "For man is not from woman, but woman from man.")). Moreover what matters (and what always mattered) is not the sign, but the thing signified as I Cor. 7:19 states: "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters."
  - POOLE: It is evident that women as well as men were comprehended in this covenant, from #Ge 34:14 Ex 12:3,4 Joe 2:15,16. Yet circumcision is given only to the males, partly, because it could not, at least not conveniently, be administered to females; partly, because man is the principal cause of the propagation of children, and consequently of the propagation of that original corruption which cleaves to them; partly, to signify that all persons begotten by man should be polluted by sin, though not all conceived by a woman, as Christ was; and partly, because man is the head of the woman, and of the family, upon whom all their concerns are devolved, and from whom the distinction of families and people comes.

"And they said to them, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that *would be* a reproach to us." (Ge 34:14 NKJV)

"Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth *day* of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of *his* father, a lamb for a household. 'And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take *it* according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb.'" (Ex 12:3-4 NKJV)

“Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the people, Sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and nursing babes; Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, And the bride from her dressing room.”  
(Joe 2:15-16 NKJV)

*A sign of the covenant* (See Rom 4:11)

- Romans 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,
- Circumcision is a sign and seal of the covenant- it marks Abraham out in the world as one who belongs to God.
- It is both Abraham’s expressed commitment, and it is also God’s express commitment so that we may look on our baptism and give thanks for what God has done.
- POOLE: *It shall be a token of the covenant*, i.e. a sign, evidence, and assurance, both of the blessing promised by that God who appointed this ordinance, and of man’s obligation to the duties required, which is signified by his acceptance of and submission to this ordinance. And here we have the nature and definition of a sacrament, viz. that it is a figure or token of God’s covenant.
- GILL: “Moreover, this was a sign or token of that part of the promise or covenant, which gave to his seed the land of Canaan: this was a seal of the lease of that land, which was made while Abraham was in it, and which the Israelites were obliged to submit to, upon entrance into it in Joshua’s time, as a token of it; and which they were to observe while in it until the Messiah’s coming, and by which they were distinguished from other nations, and kept a distinct nation, that it might appear he came of them: and to use the words of Tacitus *[c]*, this rite was instituted "ut diversitate noscantur", that they might be distinguished and known from others; it was typical of Christ, the end of it, who submitted to it, that it might appear he was really man, a son of Abraham, and a minister of the circumcision, and was made under the law, and so laid under obligation to fulfil it; and that he was to satisfy for the sins of men by the effusion of his blood, and endure pains and sufferings, signified thereby: it was also an emblem of spiritual circumcision, or circumcision of the heart, which ties in the putting off the body of sin, in renouncing man’s own righteousness, and in his being by the grace of God, and blood of Christ, cleansed from the impurity of his nature, propagated by carnal generation, in which the member circumcised has a principal concern.”

*The flesh of the foreskin:*

- The shedding of blood was essential. Blood represented life and was identified with life (Lev 17:11, 14) and so it is difficult to get away from the conviction that when a child was circumcised he was consecrated to God by the fact that his life (under the symbol of blood) was offered to God. The fact of circumcision being called “the sign of the covenant” and the words in the service at a circumcision “from this eighth day

and henceforth may his blood be accepted, and may the Lord his God be with him” supports this view, for no covenant was ratified without the shedding of blood, the symbolic laying down of a life.

- Both circumcision and baptism were a figurative death, by means of which a new spiritual life was reached.
- For Christ, circumcision was also the symbol of a life laid down and may be regarded as a parable of the crucifixion.
- POOLE: This part God singled out for this ordinance, because it is and was a great instrument both in the commission of actual sins, and in the propagation of original sin; and therefore it was very proper to apply to it the seal of God’s gracious covenant for the remission of sins past, and the extirpation of sin for the future.
- WEST> The genital part, as soon as sin appeared, was covered for shame as it became the means of conveying corruption to another. Therefore, in His sacrament, God dignified this shameful member and signified that it as well as its seed is purified by the shedding of blood. God purifies His people by cutting off their sins, and He does this by renewing and cleansing our hearts, and also by cutting off Christ who became sin for us as our representative.

NIV study Bible refers to the self-maledictory oath in Circumcision:

- “If I am not loyal in faith and obedience to the Lord, may the sword of the Lord cut off me and my offspring as I have cut off my foreskin.” Abraham was to consecrate himself and his household to the Lord.
- Something uncircumcised was something that was not set apart to God, not sanctified:
  - Ex. 6:12, Moses says that His lips are not circumcised, so why would the people listen to him (why would they think he had been sent by God?).
  - Lev. 19:23, a fruit tree planted in the land is uncircumcised for three years (not to eat it), the fourth year it is holy (all to be given to God), the fifth year, it may be eaten.
  - Lev. 26:40 ¶ *But* if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, and that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt-- then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land. The land also shall be left empty by them, and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them; they will accept their guilt, because they despised My judgements and because their soul abhorred My statutes. Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. But for their sake I will

- remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the LORD."
- Deut. 10:16- They are commanded to circumcise their hearts.
  - Deut. 30:6-8 gives the promise of Jer. 31:
    - "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. Also the LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. And you will again obey the voice of the LORD and do all His commandments which I command you today."
    - Note the context also: This is what God will do when they repent! This is His promise to those who have gone astray and then return to Him.
  - Jer. 4:4, God calls them to circumcise themselves and their hearts to the Lord... to return to Him as their God in faithful obedience.
  - Jer. 6:10: "To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Indeed their ear *is* uncircumcised, and they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the LORD is a reproach to them; they have no delight in it."
  - Jer. 9:25-26 "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will punish all *who are* circumcised with the uncircumcised-- "Egypt, Judah, Edom, the people of Ammon, Moab, and all *who are* in the farthest corners, who dwell in the wilderness. For all *these* nations *are* uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel *are* uncircumcised in the heart."
    - Yet, note that these nations actually did practice circumcision—yet God was not concerned with the mere act of circumcision, but with it being done as a covenant sign. Anyone may eat bread and wine, but that does not mean they have eaten the Lord's Supper—likewise, anyone can be sprinkled with water, but that does not mean they have been baptised.
  - Ez. 44:7-9: "When you brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary to defile it--My house--and when you offered My food, the fat and the blood, then they broke My covenant because of all your abominations. "And you have not kept charge of My holy things, but you have set *others* to keep charge of My sanctuary for you." `Thus says the Lord GOD: "No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart or uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter My sanctuary, including any foreigner who *is* among the children of Israel.

**12. "He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant.**

This was unusual in their day. Other nations had circumcision as an initiatory rite into manhood, but for Israel, the sign was applied to infants. Ishmael was circumcised at 13 and this is the tradition for the Arabs who consider themselves Ishmael's descendants.

*The eighth day:*

- A very significant day on which offerings became acceptable to present to God:
  - Animals were not accepted for offering until the eighth day
    - Exodus 22:30 "Likewise you shall do with your oxen and your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me.
    - Leviticus 22:27 "When a bull or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall be seven days with its mother; and from the eighth day and thereafter it shall be accepted as an offering made by fire to the LORD.
  - Lepers were cleansed on the eighth day:
    - Leviticus 14:10 "And on the eighth day he shall take two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil.
    - Leviticus 14:23 "He shall bring them to the priest on the eighth day for his cleansing, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, before the LORD.
  - Those with bodily discharges were cleansed on the eighth day
    - Leviticus 15:14 'On the eighth day he shall take for himself two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and come before the LORD, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and give them to the priest.
    - Leviticus 15:29 'And on the eighth day she shall take for herself two turtledoves or two young pigeons, and bring them to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting.
  - The eighth day concluded the feast of tabernacles and was a holy convocation
    - Leviticus 23:36 '*For* seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. It *is* a sacred assembly, *and* you shall do no customary work *on it*.
    - Leviticus 23:39 'Also on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the fruit of the land, you shall keep the feast of the LORD *for* seven days; on the first day *there shall be* a sabbath-*rest*, and on the eighth day a sabbath- *rest*.
  - A Nazirite's cleansing was completed on the eighth day if he had become unclean from contact with a dead body.
    - Numbers 6:10 'Then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting;
  - The dedication of the altar was completed on the eighth day:

- 2 Chronicles 7:9: And on the eighth day they held a sacred assembly, for they observed the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast seven days.
- The altar at the temple will be consecrated on the eighth day after seven days are spent making atonement for it.
  - Ezekiel 43:27 ‘When these days are over it shall be, on the eighth day and thereafter, that the priests shall offer your burnt offerings and your peace offerings on the altar; and I will accept you,’ says the Lord GOD.”
- Jesus met with His disciples on the eighth day:
  - John 20:26: And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"
  - Jesus rose on the first day of the week which is also the eighth day.

*Bought with money of any stranger:*

- POOLE: these were of two sorts.
  1. Children, who being entirely his possession, and having no understanding to discern, nor will to choose or refuse, were to be circumcised.
  2. Grown persons, who were not to be compelled to be circumcised, but if they refused it, were not to be permitted to dwell in his family, lest they should infect others, but were to be sold to strangers, as the Hebrew doctors teach. But as for Abraham’s servants here, they were thoroughly instructed in religion, #Ge 18:19, and doubtless did willingly embrace it, and submit to this sacrament.

**13. "He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.**

*Everlasting:*

- POOLE: So it was, and is properly in regard of the thing signified to all true believers; and for the sign, it is so called because it was to endure through all generations till the coming of the Messiah; the word *olam*, here and elsewhere rendered *everlasting*, or *for ever*, being oft used to express not only simple eternity, but any long continuance, for many ages, yea, sometimes for a man’s life. See #Ex 21:6 De 15:17 1Ki 9:3.
  - Exodus 21:6 “then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever.”

*Born in house (refers to servants)*

- Genesis 14:14: Now when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained *servants* who were born in his own house, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.
- Genesis 15:3: Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"
- Exodus 12:44 "But every man's servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it.

**14. "And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."**

*Cut off- 03772 tɾk karath kaw-rath'*

- Probably refers to the parent (who by wilful neglect refuses to circumcise his child).
  - Ex. 4:24-25
- “and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to offer it to the LORD, that man shall be cut off from among his people. ‘And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people.’” (Leviticus 17:9-10 NKJV)
- Lit. “That soul (nephesh) shall be cut off”
- Many things for which one could be cut off—cannot always tell if exclusion from the community or death is meant. Offenses include: eating leaven (Ex. 12:15-19); misuse of anointing oil (Ex. 30:31-33); profaning the Sabbath (Ex. 31:14); eating blood (Lev. 7:27); immorality including incest, menstrial, homosexual, molech, bestiality (Lev. 18:29 summary); sacrifice to Molech (Lev. 19-20), irreverence on the day of atonement (Lev. 23:29); presumptuous sins (Num. 15:30-31).

Ge 9:11 "Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

Ex 23:23 "For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off.

De 19:1 "When the LORD your God has cut off the nations whose land the LORD your God is giving you, and you dispossess them and dwell in their cities and in their houses,

Isa 53:8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.

Da 9:26 "And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined.

Mal 2:12 May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob The man who does this, being awake and aware, Yet who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts!

Ro 11:22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

Ga 5:12 I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!

- POOLE: This phrase denotes either,
  - 1. An exclusion from fellowship with God's people, and from all the promises, privileges, and blessings belonging to them, either in this life or that to come. Or rather,
  - 2. An untimely and violent death, as may be gathered from [#Ex 31:14](#), to be inflicted by the magistrate, to whom God committed the execution of this as well as other laws; and in case of his neglect and default, or the secrecy of the fact, by the extraordinary hand of God, who sometimes ascribes this act to himself, as [#Le 17:10](#) [20:6](#).
- GILL> "The simplest and plainest meaning of the phrase seems to be, that such should be cut off, and deprived of all civil and religious privileges with the Israelites in the land of Canaan, and be reckoned as Heathens. Concerning this matter, Maimonides *{o}* thus writes;
  - "a father or a mother that transgress, and circumcise not, make void the affirmative commandment, but are not guilty of cutting off; for no cutting off depends but upon the uncircumcised person himself; and the sanhedrim are commanded to circumcise a son or a servant in its time, that they may not leave an uncircumcised person in Israel, nor among their servants; if the thing is hid from the sanhedrim, and they do not circumcise him, when he is grown up, he is bound to circumcise himself; and every day that passes over him, after he is grown up, and he does not circumcise himself, lo, he maketh the commandment to cease; but he is not guilty of cutting off until he dies, and he is a presumptuous uncircumcised person;"
- and so, according to him, this must respect his punishment after death in another world:
  - [he hath broken my covenant](#); made it null and void, neglecting the token of it, circumcision.

*Broken- 6565 ררפ parar paw-rar'*

- The covenant was broken according to Is. 24:5, 33:8, Jer. 11:10, 31:32, Ez. 17:15-16.

- POOLE- *He hath broken my covenant*, that sacred bond which tied him and me together; and by his neglect and contempt of the condition required on his part, he hath forfeited the blessing promised on my part.

Note that the uncircumcised is said to be cut off from *his* people—in other words, he had a right to be circumcised, but was not; so now he is cut off. Now if this is true for the sign, how much more for the thing signified! If circumcised outwardly, but not in the heart, then what profit is there in the sign? None! If there is a big sign reading, “Holiday Inn” and you pull in where the sign indicates and there is no motel, what good is the sign? It is a sign a falsely applied. So also, if you have the sign of baptism but you are not risen with Christ, what good is to have the sign? But God also says that if one refuses the sign, he is to be cut off from the covenant people. Why would someone refuse to wear the badge of his faith if he has faith?

# The Sign of the Covenant

Genesis 17:9-14

*Halifax: 11 October 2009*

## **Introduction:**

A special sermon for a special event—

- the baptism of Isaiah Poulin,
- the public welcome of three young men who have professed their faith,
- and the public welcome of Chelsea Wichert as a new member.

This is part 2 of a three part series from Gen 17 that we began when Faith Kubik was baptised.

- In this sermon, we will consider Gen 17:9-14 where it speaks about the sign of circumcision.
- We will look at three questions:

## **I. What is circumcision?**

A. Circumcision is the cutting away of the flesh of the male foreskin.

1. Interestingly, it was practiced by many nations in antiquity...
2. It was given to Abraham as a sign of God's covenant with him (Gen 17:11)

B. But in what way was circumcision a sign of God's covenant?

1. First, in that it marked out those who had entered into God's gracious covenant.
  - a. It was a covenant in which God promised to be the God of those who trusted in Him to give them life (Gen 11 & 12)
  - b. Abraham is commanded to enter into this covenant by receiving the sign of circumcision in the flesh of his foreskin.
    - It is a sign of the righteousness he had by faith (Rom 4:11)

TRANS> So Abraham attested to His faith by being circumcised...

- But circumcision is also a sign in another way.
2. Circumcision is also a sign in what the action itself (the cutting away of the flesh) symbolises...
    - a. It is a symbol of the purification or cleansing that every human being must have if we are going to be reconciled to God.
    - b. This meaning is implied in Genesis 17, but it is not expressly stated in scripture until later:
      - Deut 10:16: It is the circumcision of the heart.
      - Deut 30:6-7: It is a cleansing of the heart that God does.
      - Romans 2:28-29: Real circumcision is inward transformation.

## **II. What does circumcision have to do with us as Christians?**

- It has a whole lot to do with us...

A. Not the physical sign itself, but the circumcision of the heart

1. The physical sign itself was terminated in the New Testament (Acts 15)
2. But the circumcision of the heart that is symbolised by the circumcision of the flesh is as necessary in the New Testament as it was in the Old.
  - a. The distinction between the sign and the thing signified is made again and again in the New Testament...(Rom 2:28-29, Gal 6:15, 1 Cor 7:19)
  - b. Paul explains that Christian believers have the true circumcision. (Phil 3:3)
3. So we conclude from this that we are very much in need of the circumcision of the heart...

B. But why did God dispense with the sign if we are still in need of the thing signified?

- Because when Jesus came, circumcision is fulfilled by baptism into Jesus Christ.

1. Circumcision showed that for our purification to occur, there must be the shedding of blood.
2. But when Jesus came, He fulfilled circumcision by the shedding of His blood.
3. How inappropriate it would be to continue circumcision now that Jesus has come.
  - a. To do so would be to act as if Christ had not yet come and made an atonement for us.
  - b. Now that Jesus has come, circumcision is fulfilled by baptism (Col 2:11-13)

## **III. Who is entitled to receive circumcision?**

A. The physical sign was given to men who entered into the covenant God made with Abraham.

1. By receiving circumcision, they professed that the God of Abraham was their God,
  - a. Circumcision was not meant to be an empty sign—it was given only to those who made a credible profession; those who did not continue were to be cut off.
  - b. And on this basis, it was given to Abraham, his servants, and to others who wished to enter into God's covenant upon profession (Gen 17:13, Ex 12:48-49)
2. The infant sons of believers were also entitled to circumcision (Gen 17:9-14)
3. But what about females? They were included under the males.

B. What about in the New Testament? Who is entitled to receive circumcision?

- After Christ came, no one was to receive physical circumcision...but...

1. As in the OT, persons receive circumcision of the heart by faith.
2. And to whom is the sign of baptism to be given?
  - a. It is to be given to all who profess faith in Jesus Christ crucified (Gal 3:13-14, 26-29)
  - b. The children of parents who believe are to be brought as in the OT.
  - c. If children of the covenant grow up and rebel, they are to be cut off.
3. Parents, you are commanded to present your children to Christ for cleansing.