



CIRCUMCISION & BAPTISM

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

Aim

- ❖ Provide knowledge about biblical circumcision and baptism; to deepen understanding of these church rites, through a brief historical overview of OT circumcision and NT baptism; and the parallels between both rites.
- ❖ To explore the two levels of circumcision and baptism: (1) the physical act & (2) the spiritual sacrament.
- ❖ To explain and show the clear correlation between OT circumcision and NT baptism and how they both refer to a circumcision made without hands, that is the circumcision of the heart (Deut. 30:6; Ezek.36: 26; Rom. 2:29) accomplished through the washing of regeneration (Tit. 3: 5) proclaimed by Christ.

Key verses

Colossians 2:11-15 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. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the un-circumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

Overview

- ✓ Read - as a class Colossians 2: 11-15
- ✓ Definitions - ask students if they know the meanings of ‘circumcision’ and ‘baptism’
- ✓ Talk – give students the historical background about circumcision and its parallels with baptism
- ✓ Questions – check they have understood the main points through questions

Lesson

What is circumcision? (Merriam-Webster Medical Dictionary)

CIRCUM = AROUND

CISION = CUT

CIRCUMCISION: the act of circumcising is the cutting off of the foreskin of the penis that is practiced as a religious rite or medical procedure.



CIRCUMCISION & BAPTISM

What is baptism? (Dictionary.com)

BAPTISM: *Ecclesiastical.* 1. A ceremonial immersion in water, or application of water, as an initiatory rite or sacrament of the Christian church. 2. Any similar ceremony or action of initiation, dedication, etc. 3. Trying or purifying experience or initiation. 4. *Christian Science;* Purification of thought and character.

Why did the Jews of the OT practice circumcision?

Historical Overview (Easton's 1897 Bible Dictionary)

(NB. Only the highlighted should be given as background material.)

The Jews believed they were God's 'Chosen People' – God's Covenant People. As a Jew, in order to receive God's promise, you needed to be circumcised. This rite of circumcision was hence appointed by God as the special mark of his chosen people, an abiding sign of their dedication to Him. It was established as a national ordinance (Gen. 17:10, 11). In compliance with the divine command, Abraham, though ninety-nine years of age, was circumcised on the same day with Ishmael, who was thirteen years old (17:24-27).

Slaves, whether home-born or purchased, were circumcised (17:12, 13); and all foreigners must have their males circumcised before they could enjoy the privileges of Jewish citizenship (Ex. 12:48).

During the journey through the wilderness, the practice of circumcision fell into disuse, but was resumed by the command of Joshua before they entered the Promised Land (Josh. 5:2-9). It was observed always afterwards among the tribes of Israel, although it is not expressly mentioned from the time of the settlement in Canaan till the time of Christ, about 1450 years. The Jews prided themselves in the possession of this covenant distinction (Jud14:3; 15:18; 1Sam. 14:6; 17:26; 2Sam. 1:20; Ezek. 31:18). As a rite of the church it ceased when the New Testament times began (Gal. 6:15; Col. 3:11). Some Jewish Christians sought to impose it, however, on the Gentile converts; but this the apostles resolutely resisted (Acts 15:1; Gal. 6:12). **Our Lord was circumcised, for it "became him to fulfill all righteousness," as of the seed of Abraham, according to the flesh;** and St Paul "took and circumcised" St Timothy (Acts 16:3), to avoid giving offence to the Jews. It would render St Timothy's labors more acceptable to the Jews. But St Paul would by no means consent to the demand that St Titus should be circumcised (Gal. 2:3-5). **The great point for which he contended was the free admission of uncircumcised Gentiles into the church.** He contended successfully in behalf of St Titus, even in Jerusalem.

Under the Jewish dispensation, church and state were identical. No one could be a member of the one without also being a member of the other. Circumcision was a sign and seal of membership in both. Every circumcised person bore thereby evidence that he was one of the chosen people, a member of the church of God as it then existed, and consequently also a member of the Jewish commonwealth. **It was a sign and seal of the covenant of grace as well as of the national covenant between God and the Hebrews.**



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How is baptism equivalent to circumcision?

Comparative Table

CIRCUMCISION	BAPTISM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical purification on the body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spiritual purification of the body
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cut & removal of unwanted skin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Death & resurrection with Christ.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rite of initiation into the Jewish community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rite of initiation into the Christian community

The covenant with Abraham was a covenant of grace, and circumcision was a sign and seal of that covenant. It had a spiritual meaning. It signified purification of the heart, inward circumcision effected by the Spirit (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Ezek. 44:7; Acts 7:51; Rom. 2:28; Col. 2:11). Circumcision as a symbol of sanctification in the OT became, with the coming of Christ, through the Holy Spirit is now embodied in the rite of baptism. **The truth embodied in both rites is ever the same, the removal of sin, the sanctifying effects of grace in the heart.**

Circumcision and Baptism as a spiritual rite

(The Gift of the Holy Spirit, by Fr Tadros Y. Malaty)

With the sacrament of baptism, the believer attains:

1. Regeneration of rebirth (John 3: 5)
2. Remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Joel 2: 28)
3. Illumination of the mind (Heb. 6:2; 10: 32)
4. Spiritual circumcision of the heart, by which we put off our old man and attain the new one. (Col. 3: 9, 10)
5. Spiritual membership of the Church as the Body of Christ

With the rite of circumcision, the believer attained similar things also of a spiritual nature.

It was the symbol of purity (Is 52:1). We read of uncircumcised lips (Ex. 6:12, 30), ears (Jer. 6:10), hearts (Lev. 26:41). The fruit of a tree that is unclean is spoken of as uncircumcised (Lev. 19:23). **The important point is that they both convey the same reality and the same salvation.**

Glory is to God, forever. Amen.