

CIRCUMCISION: OF THE FLESH OR OF THE SPIRIT?

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Circumcision of the flesh is an issue that has caused Believers no end of discussion and dissension and has even led to those who believe that it is still valid as being labeled as "legalists." The purpose of this article is to lay out, from a Scriptural perspective, the validity of circumcision of the flesh and exactly what is meant by circumcision of the heart verses circumcision of the flesh.

The first thing that we need to understand is that if the Torah is indeed valid for us as Believers today then that means that everything that is contained within the Torah, that is possible to follow, is valid.

Genesis 17:10-14: This is My covenant which you shall keep between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. 11 You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you. 12 At the age of eight days every male among you shall be circumcised, throughout your generations—he that is born in the household or purchased with money from any stranger who is not of your offspring. 13 He that is born in your household or purchased with your money shall surely be circumcised. Thus, My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. 14 An uncircumcised male who will not circumcise the flesh of his foreskin—that soul shall be cut off from its people; he has invalidated My covenant.”

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long duration, antiquity, futurity, for ever, ever, everlasting, evermore, perpetual, old, ancient, world, ancient time, long time (of past) (of future), always, continuous existence, indefinite or unending future, eternity

The first thing that we should take notice of is that it was God who instituted the covenant of circumcision with Abraham and his descendants. Now we, who are Believers, track our faith to Abraham so then are we not under the same requirements as

Abraham was? Abraham is not just the father of the Jewish people as many imply. He was the father of the forerunners of the Children of Israel who would descend from his son Isaac and then from his grandson Jacob who would become Israel in the same way that Abram became Abraham.

We can not opt out of a covenant that God made with His people just because we don't like it or do not agree with it. This applies to any and all covenants that God made with His people, all the way from Adam and Chava, down to our day and age and beyond. How can we say that the covenant of circumcision no longer is required when that covenant was made between God and Abraham, who was not a Jew but a Hebrew and is acknowledged as being the father of the faithful.

The fact that Judaism performs this rite of passage on the child's eighth day of life or that it is done when one "converts" to Judaism does not make this covenant solely the province of Judaism. This covenant is a universal covenant for all of God's children.

Genesis 17:23-27: Then Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those servants born in his household and all those he had purchased for money—all the male members of Abraham's house—and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskin on that very day as God had spoken with him. 24 Abraham was ninety-nine when he was circumcised on the flesh of his foreskin; 25 and his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised on the flesh of his foreskin. 26 On that very day was Abraham circumcised with Ishmael his son, 27 and all the people of his household, born in his household and purchased for money from a stranger, were circumcised with him.

Genesis 21:4: Abraham circumcised his son Isaac at the age of eight days as God had commanded him.

First we see Abraham and his son Ishmael and all the male members of his household being circumcised in obedience to God's command and then we see this followed up by Abraham circumcising Isaac at the age of eight days old in obedience to God's instructions regarding the covenant of circumcision.

But as much as we see Abraham's physical fulfillment of this covenant there is much more taking place here than a mere physical action. This is preparing the heart of Abraham to walk an even deeper walk with his God. While Abraham circumcised his flesh and that of his household it is apparent that God is preparing Abraham's heart for

something even greater to come. While circumcision of the flesh preceded Abraham's final surrendering of all of himself to God it would be in that first act of circumcising his flesh that would lead to Abraham's final act of circumcising his heart in total surrender to his God.

Deuteronomy 10:16: You shall cut away the barrier of your heart and no longer stiffen your neck.

Many Believers, whether Messianic or Christian, believe that the circumcision of the heart that Shaul/Paul speaks about is something brand new that he, Shaul, came up with. But when one understands who Shaul was, how he was raised and how he was taught, we come to realize that he was a Torah observant Believer and that when he makes his comments about the Torah all he is doing is trying to cut through the 'fences' that have been built up around the various Torah commands and that he taught in the same way that rabbis have been teaching for millennia.

So when Shaul is speaking about the circumcision of the heart he is quoting not only from the book of Jeremiah but his teaching finds its basis in the Torah as shown above.

Exodus 12:43-44; 48-49: The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the decree of the pesach-offering: no alienated person may eat from it. 44 Every slave of a man, who was bought for money, you shall circumcise him; then he may eat of it. 48 "When a 'God-fearer' sojourns among you he shall make the pesach-offering for the Lord, each of his males shall be circumcised, and then he may draw near to perform it and he shall be like the native of the land; no uncircumcised male may eat of it. 49 One Torah shall there be for the native and the 'God-fearer' who lives among you.

So what are we seeing in this passage of Scripture? That there were two instances of the act of circumcision being required by God. The first act is the one that we are most familiar with and that is the Abrahamic covenant of the eighth day. Now we see the requirement for all those who wanted to participate in the Passover Seder. It is evident that circumcision was the physical sign of the covenant that God had made with Abraham and which covenant was passed on down and re-affirmed by God with Isaac and Jacob and ultimately the Children of Israel. It is a personal belief that one would not have entered into the covenant of circumcision even for Passover if the individual did not fully understand what it was that they were getting themselves into. Because once the act of

circumcision is done one is now part of the covenant of Abraham, one that entails faith and obedience to the Word of God—the Torah!

Deuteronomy 30:6: The Lord, your God, will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, to love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Incorporated into this passage of Scripture is the teaching from the Torah that it is our hearts that ultimately must be circumcised along with the flesh. The circumcision of the flesh is an act that one does out of obedience to God. But unlike the circumcision of the flesh the circumcision of the heart is an act done out of obedience to internalizing the Torah or Word of God. Tied into that command is part of the Shema, the heart of Jewish prayer today, that tells us to love God with all your heart and with all your soul. So the circumcision of the heart runs much deeper than the circumcision of the flesh but yet both acts, while different, are yet joined together in that they are both out of submission to God with one showing outward obedience and one showing inward obedience.

Leviticus 12:3: On the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.

Joshua 5:2-7: At that time the Lord said to Joshua, “Make sharp knives for yourself and circumcise the Children of Israel again, a second time.”³ So Joshua made sharp knives for himself and circumcised the Children of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth [the hill of the foreskins].⁴ This is the reason why Joshua circumcised [them]: The entire people that had gone forth from Egypt—the males, all the men of war—had died in the Wilderness on the way, after they went forth from Egypt.⁵ All the people that went forth were circumcised, but all the people that were born in the Wilderness on the way, after they went forth from Egypt, were not circumcised,⁶ because for forty years the Children of Israel journeyed in the Wilderness until the demise of the entire nation—the men of war—who went forth from Egypt and had not heeded the voice of the Lord, about whom the Lord had sworn not to show them the land that the Lord had sworn to their forefathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey.⁷ But He raised their children in their stead—they Joshua circumcised, for they were uncircumcised since they did not circumcise them on the way.

Why weren't the Children of Israel who were born in the Wilderness not circumcised according to the Abrahamic covenant? It does not appear that it was because of

disobedience to the Word of God but it appears that God Himself did not allow the Children of Israel to enter into the covenant of circumcision. He apparently made the generation born in the Wilderness wait until they were ready to enter into the Promised Land. It appears that also tied to this was that the generation who had come up out of Egypt also had to die off.

It seems that God in His infinite wisdom and understanding would not allow the cursed generation to come into a covenant that was based not only on physical obedience but spiritual obedience as well. The Israelites were not living as Children of faith but were hardening their hearts to God.

Jeremiah 4:4: Circumcise yourselves unto the Lord—remove the barriers of your hearts—O people of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to extinguish [it], because of the wickedness of your deeds.

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to circumcise, let oneself be circumcised, cut, be cut off, to be circumcised, circumcise oneself, to cause to be circumcised, of destruction, cut down

The act of circumcision is to commit oneself to God. So in essence we are tied to God physically and spiritually by opening up our hearts to allow the Ruach HaKodesh/the Holy Spirit to come in and take up residence within us.

So apart from circumcision being a physical act that displays outwardly our tie to God's covenant it is the inward circumcision of our hearts that is the true display of our faith and walk with God through redemption through the act of sacrifice of Yeshua and the Ruach HaKodesh coming to live within us.

Jeremiah 9:25: ...for all the nations are uncircumcised, and the House of Israel is of uncircumcised heart.

Interesting play on words here. The nations are the goyim who are not part of God's covenant with Israel not just because they are of the nations but because of the condition of their hearts which cause them to act as being uncircumcised which should be taken as meaning that they have chosen not to follow the ways of the Creator. Then Jeremiah goes on to describe the hearts of Israel and he includes them in the same classification as the

nations even though they have the physical circumcision. Outward and inward must go hand in hand.

Yochanan 7:22-23: Because of this, Moshe gave you circumcision, not because it was from the fathers, and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man. 23 If a man is circumcised on the day of the Sabbath that the Torah of Moshe be not loosed, do you murmur against me because I have healed the whole man on the day of the Sabbath?

The Pharisees were coming against Yeshua for healing on the Sabbath and yet in comparison He brought up that the Israelites circumcised their new born male infants on the eighth day according to Torah even if the eighth day fell on the Sabbath. If they do that on the Sabbath which would be considered work under their interpretation of the Torah and yet they say that is alright to do then how could it be that Yeshua's healing, which is one of the signs of the ministry of the Messiah, and which does good according to Torah be bad?

He was revealing the true hearts and intentions of the leaders of Judah. The House of Judah had lost sight of living out the Torah through their actions and instead had replaced a heart of flesh with a heart of stone much as their ancestors had done in disobeying God in the Wilderness.

The outside actions must mirror the inner intent or belief. If bad fruit comes from the external actions then the inside condition must be a mirror image of the outer form so the fruit of the tree must be rotten to the core! Harsh words, I know, but if our actions speak louder than our words and they do not bring glory to God then we must have hearts of stone and the Holy Spirit is not operating within us.

Acts 7:8: And He gave him the covenant of circumcision. And then he begat Yitzchak, and circumcised him on the eighth day. And Yitzchak begat Ya'akov and Ya'akov begat our twelve fathers.

God gave the covenant of circumcision to Abraham and then so on and so forth. If God gave the covenant of circumcision and He called this covenant eternal then why do we try to say otherwise? Why do we always try to do away with the physical aspects of God's covenants by saying that they are only valid on a spiritual level now? If the physical and the spiritual both exist then why can there not be a place for both planes to exist? Is everything that God gives ultimately to be phased out from the physical plane of

existence and then only to exist on the spiritual? If this were to be true then why the need for a resurrected body as Yeshua was given if we are all meant to exist for eternity as wisps of the wind?

Acts 15:1: And men came down from Y'hudah and were teaching the brothers, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of the Torah, you are not able to have life [eternal].

Acts 15:5: And men stood up, those from the teaching of the Parushim who had believed, and were saying, It is necessary for you to circumcise them and you should command them to observe the Torah of Moshe.

Acts 15:24: It has been heard by us that men from us have gone out and disturbed you with words and have upset your nefeshot while saying that you must be circumcised and observe the Torah, which we did not command them.

In these three passages of Scripture we see the crux of the matter that plagued Shaul. Pharisaical Believers—yes I said Believers—had come to some of the congregations that Shaul and Barnabas had planted and were teaching the non-Jews that they had to be circumcised in the flesh before they would be allowed to enter into worship of Yeshua. In other words the Pharisees wanted the men to be bound to the covenant of Torah which is what circumcision represented to them. Circumcision represented a step in one's walk with God.

The men of the nations—goyim—did not fully understand what it was that the Pharisaical Believers were trying to get them into. If the Pharisees had their way those of the nations would be brought into the covenant of Torah through the act of circumcision without a clue as to what it was that they were being required to do. Now we need to understand that the key words here were without a clue. How can you make someone do something that they don't understand? This was the bottom line decision that the Acts 15 Council made. They agreed with Shaul who was backed up by testimony from Kefa-Peter. But apparently this was not the decision that the Pharisees wanted to hear and we see time and time again their attempts to subvert what Shaul was teaching by their trying to bring in the legalistic or ritualistic observance of Torah and probably the Talmud-Oral Torah.

But we should not take this as evidence that Shaul was against the Torah or its requirements. Circumcision was one of the requirements of Torah. All Shaul was saying is that let's put the covenant of circumcision in its proper place in our walk the same as Torah. It was not that they would never follow Torah but when!

Acts 16:3: Paul wanted to take this [Timothy] with him, so he took [and] circumcised him because of the [unbelieving] Jews that were in the place, for all of them knew his father who was an Aramean.

If Shaul was against Torah and circumcision as many in Christianity believe then why did he circumcise Timothy? And would have Timothy have allowed or agreed to be circumcised if he did not believe that it was a valid command or requirement from God? Now remember what we just saw Shaul doing in Acts 16:3 and now let's take a look at another passage of Scripture where the opposite is implied on Shaul's part.

Acts 21:21: But it was told to them concerning you, that you are teaching that all of the Jews who are with the Nations should depart from Moshe, as you are saying that they should not circumcise their children and they should not walk in the customs of the Torah.

Now this verse does not make any sense in light of what we have just read in Acts 16:3. Why would Shaul be doing one thing and then something else entirely opposite of what he first had done? If he circumcised Timothy why would he be teaching against circumcision and the Torah? If we would take this at face value then Shaul was one very unstable individual who did not know who he was and what he was doing. The problem is that we try to explain Shaul by quoting only part of what he said. When we take his actions and his words out of context then we wind up with confusion about what Shaul was really teaching.

Romans 4:9-12: [Is] this blessing therefore upon the Circumcision or upon the uncircumcision? For we say that trust was reckoned to Avraham for righteousness [Gen. 15:6]. 10 How then was it reckoned to him, in circumcision or in uncircumcision? It was not in circumcision but in uncircumcision. 11 For he received circumcision [Gen. 17], the sign and the seal of righteousness of his trust that was in uncircumcision [Gen. 15:6], that he might become the father to all those who believe from the uncircumcision, that it might be reckoned also to them for righteousness, 12 and the father to the Circumcision,

not to those who are from the Circumcision only, But even to those who follow in the footsteps of the trust of the uncircumcision of our father Avraham.

Is Shaul saying that circumcision has no value? No! Of course not! What he is saying is that righteousness is not dependent upon the physical act of circumcision and that Abraham was the father of all who trust in God and it was not because of his circumcision that he was declared righteous but because of his faith. Once again the outward act had to be completed by the inward actions. Circumcision as an outward sign was a sign of the covenant that God had made with Abraham and Abraham in turn passed this on to Isaac and Isaac in turn passed it on down to Jacob and Jacob to his sons. But in coming into the covenant that circumcision represented one had to complete this covenant by having their hearts circumcised. This was not something promised in the Renewed Testament but is a foundational principle of Torah.

Luke 2:21: And when eight days had passed so that the boy could be circumcised, his name was called Yeshua as he had been called by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

If we accept the idea that physical circumcision was invalid according to Shaul then why are we told here in Luke that Yeshua the Messiah, the Son of God, was circumcised according to the Torah under the covenant given to Abraham revealed to us in the Torah. Does it make sense that Yeshua would receive the covenant of circumcision if it was not necessary? And if we are called to imitate Yeshua as the church always says, then why are we not doing as Yeshua did? We are not to follow Yeshua in just spiritual ways but we are called to follow Him in His physical actions as well.

Our heavenly Father gave us His Torah which contained all of His covenants. Now if God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow and Yeshua is the Son of God, God Himself, then Yeshua as the Living Word of Yahweh is the embodiment of not just the words of the Torah but the covenants, the promises, the blessings and the prophecies contained therein.

Acts 10:45: And the circumcised brothers who had come with him were amazed and astonished that the gift of the Ruach HaKodesh was also poured out upon the Nations.

What is amazing is that today we do not see that it was Judah who was amazed. Jews! These early Believers were Jews and converts to Judaism or God-fearers, who had not

undergone conversion to Judaism, and that they were amazed when people of the Nations-Goyim received the power of the Ruach HaKodesh that they believed was only for those of the circumcision. The physical act alone does not guarantee a place at the table. It is what is in the heart that counts most. This is what Shaul was trying to teach and share with his brethren from Judah. This is what Shaul was trying to teach to Ephraim. Not that the act of circumcision was not needed but that it was the condition of the heart that counted most as taught in the Torah. Then as one who accepted Yeshua as Messiah would be immersed as an outward sign of their inner change so too would the act of circumcision show and outward sign of an inner change when the individual understood what it was they were doing.

Acts 11:2-3: And when Shim'on went up to Yerushalayim those who were from the Circumcision were contending with him, 3 while saying that he had entered with uncircumcised men and eaten with them.

It is very clear from this passage of Scripture that Shaul/Paul was not the only one who had problems with the Pharisaical Believers. Shimon Kefa/Simon Peter also had run-ins with this group as well. Here the problem was with Shimon going into the home of Cornelius, who though an apparent God-fearer, was not a convert to Judaism so therefore he and his household were not up to the requirements of the Pharisaical Believers. But their requirements were not dependent on belief in Yeshua as Messiah but according to the dictates of the rabbis.

I find this situation funny in a sad way. Why you might ask? Because the situation described here is connected to the situation that is prevalent in the Church today where if one believes in Yeshua yet follows the Torah they are not considered to be Christian, but under the 'Law', and not under grace as the Church teaches it. Reverse circumstances yet linked in the extremes that both groups go to with one group enforcing the Torah beyond Biblical guidelines and the other saying that the Torah has been done away with and grace alone abounds.

The truth of the matter is that grace has always been since before we were even created as shown us in the Book of Revelation Chapter 13 verse 8. Grace is revealed to us through the sacrifice of Yeshua. Torah leads us to Him and shows us how to relate to God and to one another.

Romans 2:25-29: For circumcision is beneficial if you perform the Torah, but if you transgress the Torah, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. 26 Now if the uncircumcision keeps the commandments of the Torah, should not the uncircumcision be reckoned circumcision? 27 And the uncircumcision, which from its nature fulfills the Torah, will judge you who with the scripture and with circumcision transgress against the Torah. 28 For he is not a Jew who is one in appearance [only], also what is made visible in the flesh [alone] is not circumcision. 29 But that one is a Jew who [is one] secretly, and circumcision is that of the heart [Deu. 10:16] by the spirit and not by the letter [only], whose praise is not from men but from Eloah.

So what is Shaul saying? Is he saying that circumcision of the flesh is done away with? It may seem that way from a cursory reading of the text. But when one takes a closer look at the verses in question we see that what Shaul is actually saying is that just because one has the sign of the physical circumcision which would indicate that the person is possibly of Jewish lineage this does not guarantee that the individual is following the Torah because there are those who are not circumcised, this would refer to non-Jews, who unknowingly follow the Torah without the benefit of the sign of circumcision. Being circumcised does not guarantee one a place in the Kingdom of God if that person is disobeying the Torah.

Now this is not saying that circumcision has no value. Rather, like many other things that are of God, it is an outward sign of an inner change. In this case the change is one of the circumcision of the heart which is found in the Book of Jeremiah Chapter 31 which all Christians claim as the 'New' Covenant. Yet in reality this teaching has its roots in the Torah in Deuteronomy 10:16.

So like so many other things that God has instructed us to do on the outside they have inner spiritual meaning.

Romans 3:1-2: Therefore, what is the advantage of the Jew? Or what [is] the profit of circumcision? 2 Much in everything, first, that they were entrusted with the words of God.

Is it by circumcision that one receives salvation or is made righteous in the eyes of God? Of course not! It is by faith. So what did the physical act of circumcision mean then? It set apart the House of Judah as the keeper of the Torah in the meaning that it was Judah's

responsibility to keep the Torah alive for all the generations of Judah to come and for the House of Ephraim. Because how would Ephraim know what the Torah was and what it taught if there was no one who had this knowledge?

Romans 3:30-31: Because that God is one [Deu. 6:4] who justifies the Circumcision by trust, [and] also the uncircumcision by the same trust. 31 Therefore, do we make the Torah of no effect by trust? Absolutely not! On the contrary, we uphold the Torah [Deu. 10:16; 11:1, 18].

Why is it that Christians never quote this passage by Shaul/Paul when they indiscriminately claim that Shaul did away with the Torah? Now if the Torah is valid as it appears that Shaul is saying here then circumcision must be valid as that command appears in the Torah, the first five books of our Bible, whether the Hebrew Tanach or the Christian Bible.

But what Shaul is saying is that whether one is circumcised or uncircumcised in the flesh it is by trust or faith that we make the Torah valid. In this case if one does not have the physical sign of the covenant—circumcision—then when the uncircumcised party comes to a knowledge of the truth of Torah then that party will be in a position to make the decision to enter into the covenant of circumcision as a Believer because it will now be an outward sign of an inner change.

Romans 15:8-9: Now I say that Yeshua the Messiah served the Circumcision on behalf of the truth of God, that he might confirm the promise of the fathers 9 and [that] the Goyim/Nations might glorify God for the mercy, which came to them. As it is written, I will confess you among the Goyim/Nations and I will sing to your name [2 Sam. 22:50; Psalm 18:50 (49)].

Those of the circumcision and the uncircumcision are joined together as one people—one goy/nation—called Israel. The mercy of the Father is extended to both Houses of Israel, Judah and Ephraim, and the Father does not exclude anyone from Israel based on whether they are circumcised or not. Now while circumcision is done on the eighth day in Judaism today and on the eighth day in Israel of long ago Yahweh gave the covenant to Abraham and included in this covenant was his son, at that moment in time, Ishmael. So what we see despite what we want to see is that the descendants of Ishmael can become part of the covenant of God and enter into Israel but they must come to it through faith and

belief in Yeshua. They must turn from their god allah and turn to the God of their father Abraham—God! Jew, Arab and all mankind must accept that Yeshua is the Son of God and the mediator between man and God of the covenant promised and signed, sealed and delivered with the death and resurrection of Yeshua.

Circumcision alone cannot bring one to faith or obedience to Torah. Even the Muslims practice circumcision and some of the dietary laws. Are they saved by this alone? No! Salvation is based on faith and faith alone and maturity on your walk according to Torah guided by the Ruach HaKodesh.

1 Corinthians 7:18-19: If a man was called while circumcised, he should not return to un-circumcision. And if he was called in un-circumcision, he should not be circumcised. 19 For circumcision is not anything, neither un-circumcision, but the observances of the commandments of God.

So is Shaul saying once again that circumcision is not necessary? No! Because that would go against the Torah and we have already seen elsewhere that Shaul is not against the Torah but upholds the Torah. What Shaul is saying is that whether one is circumcised or not this will not bring you salvation. Only your heart attitude towards God will bring you the mercy and grace that God offers to each one of His children. It is not the state of your physical being that counts but what is in your heart or inside your spiritual state.

For one could be circumcised and act like one of the uncircumcised and yet the reverse could be true. One could be un-circumcised and yet be behaving like one of the circumcised. Because while a child of the covenant might be circumcised on the eighth day until he grows and comes into an appreciation of the covenant that he has been called into his circumcision will mean nothing if he blindly follows the Torah without the heart intent or he may reject the Torah because of the hardening of his heart. This is why we are told that our hearts of stone must be circumcised and be made into hearts of flesh so that God can write His Torah on our hearts and that we will turn our hearts towards Him who created us and redeemed us from the pit.

Galatians 2:7-9: But on the contrary, for they saw that I had been entrusted with the B'sar of the Un-Circumcision like Kefa had been entrusted by the Circumcision. 8 For he who worked in Kefa in the emissaryship of the Circumcision, also worked in me in the emissaryship of the Goyim 9 and when they knew the favor that was given to me,

Ya'akov and Kefa and Yochanan, those who were considered to be pillars gave the right hand of fellowship to me and to Bar Nabba that we {proclaim} among the Goyim and they among the Circumcision.

So what is Shaul trying to say here? Is he saying that he is entrusted with a different message for the non-Jews than what Kefa had been given to the Jews? Of course not! The bottom line is that the message that Shaul had been given was the same one that Kefa had been given. This message is that salvation is through Yeshua the Messiah and that forgiveness for one's sins was a free gift from God given through Yeshua His Son and His Mediator.

Many in Christianity imply that Shaul/Paul brought a different gospel to the non-Jew than the gospel that was being brought to the Jews. But nothing could be further from the truth! In fact while thousands of Jews were accepting Yeshua as Messiah there were many Gerim or God-fearers, those who had embraced the God and ways of Israel, also accepting Yeshua as Messiah and following the ways of the Torah. Ya'akov/James goes to great pains to convey this to Shaul in the Book of Acts.

So if we have all of these Gerim, which accurately translated is stranger or sojourner, coming to a knowledge of Torah and the One True God and hearing the message about Yeshua and accepting Him then how can it be that the message being proclaimed by Shaul is somehow different than the message that the rest of the Shalichim/Apostles are sharing? This would imply two different gospels and that the majority of the Shalchim are proclaiming something different than what Shaul is, which would tell us that Shaul is in the minority, and that everyone else is heading in a different direction. Not true!

They were all on the same page but that the other Shalichim were being fed erroneous reports about what it was that Shaul was teaching. We know from reading Shaul's letters that he was constantly contending with those of the Circumcision who were trying to push Torah observance before salvation. This was one of the main items that Shaul had to deal with his entire ministry. He was trying to put salvation and the following of the Torah into its proper place for those of the Un-Circumcision. His argument had always been that how could Judah force Torah and Torah obedience on those who had never heard nor understood Torah before they could be permitted to worship Yeshua as Messiah and accept Him as the source of their redemption when those of Judah could not follow the Torah completely.

Why throw roadblocks up in the way to the Un-Circumcised? Would it not be better to set some ground rules for Circumcised and Un-Circumcised so that they could fellowship together and Judah could share Torah with Ephraim? Then to ground them in their new faith they would be schooled in the Torah, Prophets and the Writings—the Tanach. This would be how they would grow in their understanding of Yeshua and their new walk.

Yet somehow, somewhere along the line the Church has reversed this and thrown out the Torah and teaches that all one has to follow is the writings of Shaul because apparently if you interpret Shaul ‘correctly’ there is a ‘new torah’ in town. This torah is now called ‘not under Law but under grace.’ But grace and mercy are spoken about more in the Tanach than in the “Re-newed Testament. The concept of grace and mercy and loving kindness are rolled up into Yeshua and that somewhere between the Testaments God had an attitude adjustment.

I don’t mean to sound flippant towards Christianity as if it were not for a Christian I would never have heard about Yeshua and started searching for the truth about Him. But at the point that we see Yeshua and that He is our source for redemption we begin to diverge and follow different roads. The key to re-uniting Judah and Ephraim is for both Houses to chuck their baggage and get on the same page together.

Galatians 2:12 Before men came from toward Ya’akov, he ate with the Goyim, but when they came he withdrew his nefesh and separated because of fear from those that were from the Circumcision.

In this passage we see a problem arose between Kefa and Shaul. Apparently some Pharisaical Believers arrived from Ya’akov/James and that Kefa and the others of Judah who were with him separated themselves from the non-Jews because of these Pharisaical Believers. We do know from Church history that Ya’akov was called a tzaddik or righteous because he was devoted to prayer and the Torah. I also am of the belief that Ya’akov was or had become a Pharisee because when he was killed it was non-believing Pharisees who complained the loudest. I do believe that Ya’akov understood that it was not through the keeping of Torah that he had earned his salvation. But he followed the Torah and probably some of the rabbinical teachings as an outgrowth of his desire to please God and walk a more righteous path. Remember that Ya’akov writes that while some may try to prove their faith by their faith alone, in other words by what they said they believed, Ya’akov said that he would show his faith through his actions or works.

This is not works based salvation as many Christians believe. This is an action follows words faith. Instead of just talking the talk James was walking the walk.

Galatians 5:2-3: Behold, I Paul say to you that if you were circumcised, [then] The Messiah is a thing, which does not profit you, 3 now I testify again to every son of man that is circumcised that he is a debtor to do all the Torah.

Galatians 5:6: For in The Messiah Yeshua neither is circumcision anything nor un-circumcision, but trust which is perfected by love.

Galatians 5:11: Now my brothers, if I was still proclaiming circumcision, why am I persecuted? Has the offense of the gallows ceased?

What is Paul trying to say in these passages of Scripture? Is he against circumcision totally? What he is saying is the same thing that he tells us elsewhere in his letters. That whether one is circumcised, which locks them to Torah, or whether one is un-circumcised, which frees them from Torah or whether one is a Jew or a Greek, or a slave or free or male or female, that all of these things mean nothing in Messiah Yeshua. It is our identification with Him and Him alone that should define us. How we walk the walk is our personal choice. I think that Shaul would have liked to see all those he disciplined throughout the years accept the Torah but the one thing that he desired above all else is that those he disciplined would follow Yeshua through faith and that later would come Torah obedience as part of one's walk. The Torah should not become one's primary focus because it could lead into legalism and we see this problem arising in several of Paul's congregations. While we have Christianity rejecting Torah as being legalism today we have legalism pervading the early congregations and turning Believers away from faith and trying to walk out their belief through Torah alone. Torah without faith and spirit brings death. Faith without Torah and spirit alone brings death. Faith with Torah and Spirit bring life everlasting and makes us a fragrance sweet to our God.

I do not believe that Shaul was saying that circumcision was not required. I believe that what he was saying was that those that he was writing to had turned to circumcision and blind obedience to Torah in place of faith and Torah. It is not that circumcision was bad but that it was this issue of Pharisaical Believers pushing circumcision and Torah observance as the way to salvation rather than faith In Yeshua first. It almost seems to me

to be that faith in Yeshua, for these Pharisaical Believers, was a secondary issue to them. Blind obedience to Torah and its requirements were the primary important issue for them.

Galatians 6:12-18: Those who want to boast in the flesh I urge you to be circumcised only so that they might not be persecuted for the Gallows of Messiah. 13 For not even those that are circumcised keep the Torah but they desire you to be circumcised that in your flesh they might boast. 14 But for me I will have not to boast about but in the gallows of our Adon Yeshua the Messiah, that by Him the world was crucified to me and I was crucified to the world. 15 For circumcision is nothing nor un-circumcision, but a new creation. 16 And those who follow this path, Shalom and mercy be concerning them and concerning the Yisrael of God. 17 Thus do not let [any] man pour trouble upon me, for I bear the marks of our Adon Yeshua the Messiah in my body. 18 The favor of our Adon Yeshua the Messiah be with your spirit my brother.

Is Shaul's contention that those of the Circumcision were convincing some of his congregations to become circumcised in the flesh and then become bonded to Torah as a result of being circumcised? No! He makes it clear that those who were responsible for this were doing it for their own egos so that they could brag that they had convinced some of Shaul's congregations to become circumcised and follow the Torah in and by itself. Circumcision and Torah can not save of their own power. Only placing your trust in Yeshua can do this.

How many times have I seen it happen that Christians learn about their Hebraic or Jewish Roots and embrace them. But then as they study the Jewish writings of the rabbis they begin to suspect that something is lacking in their walk so they explore their Hebraic heritage even deeper finding meaning for their lives in the Jewish customs and traditions. As they follow this path they go off down a road that eventually takes them over the line and into Judaism not with faith in Messiah Yeshua, because they are told and convinced that one does not need Yeshua in Judaism, and they forsake their faith in Yeshua and embrace the ways of Judaism.

Now their faith is in the customs and traditions of the Jewish religion rather than it being in Yeshua first. We are told quite clearly in Scripture that it would have been better that one would have never known Yeshua than to know Him and reject Him. This is what, I believe, that Shaul was contending with. His fear was that these non-Jewish believers would go the way of Torah observance counting this as their way to salvation or that they

would go the way Judaism and exclude Yeshua completely. Either way he feared for their salvation. Shaul had tried his entire ministry to balance faith in Yeshua with a Torah observant lifestyle. Many successfully did as he did and many did not.

This is the problem that faces us today as many in Christianity discover the truth of the Torah and their Hebraic or Israelite heritage. How much of this do you enter into and how much do you avoid. I believe that it is up to the individual but that all of us, both Judah and Ephraim, are called to put our faith in Yeshua first and to follow the Torah as God's blueprint for how to grow and mature in our new life as Believers.

Ephesians 2:11: Because of this, remember that you from before were Goyim pertaining to the flesh, and you were called the un-circumcision by that which is called the Circumcision and is the work of the hands in the flesh.

There are two possibilities happening here and in the Scriptures that we quoted to you earlier. The first situation is the one where we were talking about Pharisaical Believers and the second is that these ones that Shaul is talking about being of the Circumcision are Pharisees who are not Believers much in the same way that we have a group known as Jews for Judaism who are Orthodox Jews whose sole purpose in life is to bring Messianic Jews back into the fold of traditional Judaism. And if on this trip they come across any Christians who are asking questions they will do their best to draw them from faith in Yeshua and get them to forsake Christianity and become either Jewish converts or Noahides. Noahides are those who say that non-Jews do not have to burden themselves with following the Torah but only have to follow what are called the seven laws of Noah incumbent only on non-Jews. Many say that the requirements of Acts 15 are based on the seven laws of Noah. But these so called Noahide laws are an invention of the rabbis of Judaism. Because if the Noahide laws are incumbent upon all the descendants of Noah then none of us would have to follow the Torah as we are all descended from Noah and his children.

For that matter the Torah was given not to the Jewish people alone but to all of Israel standing at Mount Sinai and to those generations who were not there that day meaning to all who were part of Israel then and later. Israel is you and me!

Philippians 3:3-5: 3 For we are the Circumcision, who serve God in the spirit, and boast in Yeshua the Messiah and are not confident in the flesh, 4 even though I did have

confidence indeed concerning the flesh. For if anyone thinks that his confidence is in the flesh, I [should think so] more than he. 5 Circumcised at eight days old, for the stock of Israel, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew, the son of Hebrews, in the Torah a Parush.

So by now are you confused just what it is that Shaul is trying to say about circumcision? We, even if we are not physically circumcised, are of the Circumcision through faith in Yeshua in our Spirits. Being physically circumcised does not bring you into the covenant with Yeshua and God. One has to be circumcised in the heart according to Torah and the Prophets and it is only through faith in Yeshua who is our Redeemer.

The physical act of circumcision is not being tossed out but Shaul has been using circumcision and un-circumcision in the same way that food has been used as an example to teach spiritual truths. Have the dietary laws been done away with. Many Christians say that yes they have because of Peter's vision of the clean and unclean foods on the sheet shown to him by God. When you read the passage further you nothing of the sort is being said. What we see is that Peter is being told that he will be going to share about Yeshua with the uncircumcised of the house of Cornelius. It is the non-Jews that are the unclean in this vision and now they were no longer to be called that. It is the same with the issue of circumcision and un-circumcised.

Titus 1:10: For there are many, who [are] not submissive, and their words are empty, and they are deceiving the minds of the sons of men; especially [such] are those from the Circumcision.

When you look at the words of this passage closely you really do get the feeling that Paul is dealing with Pharisaical un-believers who are trying to convert his congregations over to Judaism and bring them into the bondage of Torah without faith in Yeshua.

But how bad is it when you have Believers in Yeshua trying to do the same thing? Except that the bondage they are trying to bring on their brothers and sisters that faith in Yeshua alone cannot bring them salvation but that they need to be obeying the Torah first and worrying about Yeshua afterwards. No! A thousand times no! The issue was settled in Acts 15. Faith in Yeshua was first and foremost and the jot and the tittle would come later. This is how one would come to maturity and grow in their understanding of Yeshua and the ways of God. When one accepts Yeshua as Messiah God gives you the gift of the Ruach HaKodesh—the Holy Spirit. It is through the power of the Spirit that the truth of

the Torah is revealed to us so that we can understand what it is that God expects of us in our walk with Him.

As God walked in the cool of the day with Adam and Chavah in the garden and talked to them of His desires for them and His creation so too through His Ruach we walk and talk with Him today learning what it is that He expects of us.

The day is coming closer when once again we will be able to stand in the presence of God without a cloud shielding us from His presence but we will walk with Him in the cool of the day and listen to Him as He shares His heart with us—His redeemed Children Israel.

Colossians 3:11: Where there is neither Jew nor Greek, and not Circumcision or Uncircumcision, and not Scythian or Barbarian, and not servant or free, but the Messiah is all and in all.

This is the sum total of all of Scripture. While there may and are differences in people the bottom line is that in Yeshua there are no differences. Now some take this to try to prove that we are all Christians since our identity is in Yeshua. But that is not what Shaul is saying here. Our identity is in Yeshua who, though He came from the line of Judah, is the Son of God and therefore He is above labels. We are variously called the Children of Israel, sons and daughters of God, etc. These are titles given by God or by His messengers the prophets but the one true title or description that defines who we are is Israel!

So no matter what you choose to call yourself you are a son and a daughter of the covenant marked with a sign of the circumcision of the heart that can be put upon both men and women. With that circumcision we enter into the covenant that calls for us to follow the Torah, the instruction book from our Creator, given through His Son Yeshua. Do you want to know how to make your Father happy? Read His manual! He gave it to the true Circumcision—those who have placed their faith in Yeshua as Messiah—their Redeemer. Many have been called but only a few have been able to step up and hear the call and even fewer have stepped out in that call.

Many have tried to walk the walk but the Spirit has not been in them enabling them to walk Torah. The Spirit is given to those who have placed their faith in Yeshua and desire

to have a closer walk with Him. The Spirit does many things and one of those jobs is to help us understand the Torah of God. Walk by faith and by the Living Word—Yeshua.?