

GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

14 – Circumcision

10/8 @6:30

Grace Group at 3513
Northpointe Dr

~~10/10 @6:00~~

~~Grace Group at
2070 Corley Dr
CANCELED~~

10/10 @6:30

Grace Group at
1710 Mariposa Dr

ICE BREAKER: How do you handle awkward situations?

REVIEW: Was there anything covered or said on Sunday that you had any questions or comments about?

READ: Philippians 3:1-3

Any time you are working your way through the Bible, it is only a matter of time before you run into one of a few... difficult and/or awkward... topics. And here, in the text that we read for today we find one of those: circumcision. Though it is awkward, it is actually a really important thought through all of Scripture (i.e the Old AND the New Testaments). So today we will be spending our time talking about circumcision; what it was, what it should be, and what that all means for us!

To fully understand the controversy that Paul is dealing with, we need to take a step back and see where this originated from. For your own study, you should spend some time in Genesis 17:1-14, but let's cover the *really* quick version here. Genesis 17 is where God does 3 important things. 1) he changes Abram's name to Abraham (which means "father of Nations"), 2) he reiterates his promise to Abraham that he will be "the father of a multitude of nations" AND that he will be "their God" (see 17:5-8) and then 3) he lays out the pattern for the Jewish people of how and when their sons should be circumcised. (in truth there is much, much more to it, but these points suffice for our purposes today!) In other words, the covenant of circumcision has, as its focus, the promises to be a "holy nation" AND to be "God's people". Even if just for these reasons, circumcision was therefore highly important; so important in fact that to NOT be circumcised meant that you would lose all the blessings, rights and privileges that come with both those titles (see Genesis 17:14).

DISCUSS: What does it mean to be "a holy nation"? How about "God's people"? Why would it be important to have a way to mark these lines more clearly?

With this understanding it makes sense that there would be those who would want to make sure to keep this going. So this is why there arose a sect within the early church called the Judiazers. Their belief was that gentiles *could* come into the community of God's people, so long as they became Jews, in particular through the act of circumcision. Though certainly they are "dogs" and "mutilators" we should at least be able to understand where they are coming from. To them it was not just some ceremony, but rather it was a way to ensure that they were still keeping hold of the promises of God. So this leads us to an important question: why were they so wrong? Here we can look at it from not just a negative way (why they are wrong) but also by making a positive case for the truths that they missed.

The short answer to why they are wrong is that even in the Old Testament, it was actually never about the act of circumcision. This is why Paul can later say in Romans 9:6-7 "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring." There is more than bloodlines and rites of circumcision that make one the people of God, as David taught us "For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Psalm 51:16-17). They are wrong because (to say it bluntly) the skin (or lack thereof) on a man's genitalia is not what makes someone part of a holy nation, and certainly that is not what makes them one of God's people. Rather these come from love, devotion and importantly obedience to God. So how do we get *there*? It's all about Jesus.

To say it in the way the book of Philippians has been saying, the reason that we no longer need the rite of circumcision to mark us as "God's people" is because there is another, more important mark: being "*in Christ Jesus*." The "dogs" and "evildoers" deserve these names because they are replacing the truth of freedom and new life in Christ with "confidence in the flesh". In fact, for all those in Christ "we are the circumcision". In other words, we are the ones who claim the blessings, rights and privileges of being God's people because we have all the promises of God in Christ Jesus! Praise be to God for that!

DISCUSS:

1. In what ways might we be guilty of replacing the truth of what Christ has done with “rites and ceremonies”?
2. How can we foster a heart that is filled with “love, devotion and obedience to God?”
3. Why is it important to remember the freedom we have in Christ? What does this mean? What, if any, are the limits to this?