

Verse 11: 'And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased.'

Paul is saying, the reason the Judiazers are saying that a Christian must adhere to circumcision and all the requirements of the Law, is that their false teaching accomplishes, for them, a shield against persecution because of the offensive nature of embracing the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on the Cross. The Cross is offensive; among modern entertainment figures, you often see tattoos and jewelry of upside down crosses, a satanic symbol. On the back of the Pope's 'throne,' there is an upside down cross. They claim that it's in honor of Peter, who, according to 'tradition,' was crucified upside down, but even if that were true, the question is, 'by whose cross are we saved? Peter's or that of the Lord Jesus Christ with Whom, and upon which, we were crucified. It's just one more example of the ridiculousness of that, along with so many other false 'christianities.'

The Cross upon which the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, on which He paid the full penalty for all the sins of all His Elect, is an offense. Peter's cross, even if the story is true, is of no offense, to the World, at all.

Again, so many celebrities, Hollywood, music, etc., wear countless crosses in the form of jewelry and tattoos, many of which are upside down; it's just one of the ways in which the kingdom of darkness attempts to nullify the power of the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Paul says, the true Cross is offensive to the World and a source of persecution; if he would but preach circumcision and keeping the Law, his persecution would cease but, he says, he'll never cease preaching the Lord Jesus Christ and Him Crucified.

'For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.' 1 Cor 2:2

As we've studied together over the past few weeks, we've seen quite a bit about circumcision which has always been an integral part of God's overall prophetic picture and yet, many of us have given it little thought. God's promises to Abraham and his descendants were without any requirements; Abraham was given no Laws to keep in order to receive God's promises; they were given freely by God and He did and will, in the future, fulfill every one to the letter. Abraham simply believed God, that He was able and trustworthy to fulfill all His promises, no matter how impossible they might seem, and his belief was accounted to him as righteousness: faith resulting in righteousness... it's been always the same, from Creation through the final Judgment: either one has faith in God and His Word, resulting in righteousness and eternal glory or one has faith in his own works, resulting in condemnation and eternal punishment.

God's choosing of Abraham, His promises to him and their complete fulfillment are all God's work, from beginning to completion but God did give Abraham a sign of His promises which was circumcision. Every male must be circumcised as a sign and seal of their inclusion in God's chosen people and His promises.

Circumcision represented the cutting away of the sinful flesh; for some, it meant nothing, just like to many today, baptism or communion mean nothing; they just go through the motions but in those Israelites who were people of faith, believing God's promises, there was also, in their hearts, a desire to walk in a manner worthy of God.

Eventually, God gave the Law to Moses. Its purpose was to display God's righteousness and man's sinfulness; the Law was never an avenue to righteousness; that has always been only according to belief in God's Word.

Now... let's look at what God really meant through circumcision for Israel, the *Earthly* people of God and also for us, the True Church, the *Heavenly* people of God.

In Deuteronomy 10, while Israel was still wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, God said: *'Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the LORD your God, also the earth with all that is in it. The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day. Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.'* (stiff-necked, refusing to bow in submission to God and His will.

God always intended for circumcision to be a physical symbol of what He planned to do in the hearts of His own, chosen people, those chosen from Adam and Eve on through the Millennium.

'For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: "Break up your fallow ground (of your heart), and do not sow among thorns. ⁴ Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings." Jer 4:3

Just like God's Word today: when most of Israel heard that Word, 'take away the foreskins of your hearts, they thought, 'What in the World... I don't get it!' But others, His Elect, heard it and in faith, bowed before God in humble submission. Today, when most hear, 'You must be born again,' they think, 'What? I don't get it!' But those whom God is drawing, bow and pray in faith unto Salvation.

The Israelites had already been circumcised physically, now God was commanding that they **circumcise their hearts**, a work which they must choose to do. Obviously, God knew that many would never do so but there was always a remnant whose hearts belonged to God: Joshua and Caleb, Moses and many others, those who sought to walk worthy of the Lord.

Then, in Deut. 30, regarding His future work in Israel, a work which He, Himself would do during the Kingdom Age, of which, the True Church is a spiritual picture, God said: *'Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. ⁶ 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.'*

Obviously God knew that would never describe Israel before the return of their Messiah for the Kingdom Age; He was speaking prophetically.

Then, Paul tells us that we are true descendants of Abraham in whom God really has done that work: *'Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! ³ For **we are the circumcision**, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,'* Phpp 3:2

*'For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹ 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.'* Rom 2:28

All along, circumcision was a spiritual picture of what God would do, first in us, the True Church, the Heavenly people of God and then, finally, in Israel, the Earthly people of God when their Messiah returns.

Jesus said to Nicodemus, *'Most assuredly, I say to you, **unless one is born again**, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'* ⁴ *Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"* ⁵ *Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'*

God is Tripartite: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; He created man in His Image, also tripartite; we are a living Soul within a Spiritual body within a Physical body. In Adam, all died spiritually but in Christ, we are made alive, our spirits are created new; we are crucified, buried, resurrected, circumcised in the heart and seated with Him in Heavenly places: *'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.'* Our physical bodies were not made new at salvation; they won't be completely 'reborn' like our spiritual bodies until the moment of the Rapture but what is different regarding our physical bodies is that now, we are no longer slaves to our flesh. Because God's Spirit lives within us as One with our newly created spirits, we can choose to walk in a manner worthy of our calling; we can walk worthy of the Lord; we can say no to our flesh. Our spirits were recreated new and they are one with the Holy Spirit. This is the **circumcision of the heart** that God has done for us: our spirits are now, like Deut. 30: *'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.'* That is speaking of us, now, and of Israel later.

This is the importance of circumcision of the flesh, a work of the flesh, vs circumcision of the heart/spirit, which is a work of God. When the Judaizers preached circumcision of the flesh for salvation, it made a mockery of Christ's finished Work and the true circumcision of the heart which is also the work of God.

This is the whole point of circumcision and true Salvation: either are we saved by works of the flesh and self effort or are we saved by the Work of God and His completed effort.

'Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.' Rom 3:28

That verse caught my attention: 'God who will justify the circumcised **by faith** and the uncircumcised **through faith**.' See the difference? God will justify and save the Jews **by** faith and the Gentiles **through** faith. In the Greek, Paul uses two different prepositions: Ek and Dia. Ek means, 'out of, away from, a point of separation. It is the same word Jesus used when speaking to the Church of Philadelphia, 'I will keep you **from** the hour of temptation (the Tribulation) which shall come upon all the World...', whereas Dia means 'through, with, by means of...'

He is saying, when we, the true Church, are saved, it's because God chose us, individually, before the foundation of the World. Then He gave us the faith to believe; we are saved by His Grace through that gift of faith and Jews are saved the same way, today, as they individually come to faith in Jesus Christ but when God finally saves the entire nation of Israel, at Jesus Christ's return, it will be according to God's promise, according to His faithfulness to Abraham and his descendants; suddenly, when He returns at Armageddon, their eyes will all be opened at the same time; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for an only son; they will be saved because of God's faithfulness to all His promises. No such promises were ever made to the Body and Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ, us; He saves us individually, one at a time through faith and He will save all Israel, together at one time, by His own Faithfulness.

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

The Greek word Paul uses here is: apokopto and, actually, he uses the word twice. The Greek reads, 'I would, opokopto, apokopto: 'I would, cut off, even cut off, they which trouble you.'

The word is used for amputation. Paul is so incensed with this Judiazers that he says, 'If these guys are so sure that circumcision is the thing that will save them, I wish they had the guts to go all the way and castrate themselves! Paul really isn't happy with these guys.

Think of his frustration; he's a thousand miles away, feeling helpless. He has to pray and trust God with the care of his spiritual children. It's like many of us; our children or grandchildren or brothers or sisters or nieces or nephews are not walking with the Lord; we feel helpless, especially if they are far away.

All we can do is all Paul could do... speak, call, write but then trust God to save and keep.

Verse 13: 'For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

God has saved us and made us sons of God, His children forever and we walk in complete liberty and freedom; we can do whatever we want to do but since He has circumcised our hearts and given us His Spirit, we also have the freedom and liberty to not indulge our flesh and all its desires. We have the freedom and liberty to walk in a manner worthy of our calling and worthy of the Lord and to love each other. Do we love each other enough to not use our liberty and freedom if it would cause someone else to stumble?

'All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. ¹³ Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them.' 1 Cpr 6:12

'So then each of us shall give account of himself to God. ¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in *our* brother's way.' Rom 14:12

Verse 14: 'For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Paul is challenging the Judaizers who were demanding that, to be saved, Christians must be circumcised and obey all the Law of Moses. Paul has told us, we are in Jesus Christ. John told us that God is Love. All of God's Word tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ is God and when He died on the Cross, He said, 'It is fulfilled,' meaning, He had fulfilled, according to prophecy, all the Law and Prophets. When we are faithful to love, to put the needs of other believers ahead of our own, we are truly loving and we are fulfilling all the Law.

But I thought, Jesus, on the Cross, said, 'It is finished.'

Let's look at that: 'After this, Jesus, knowing that **all things were now accomplished**, that the **Scripture might be fulfilled**, said, "I thirst!"²⁹ Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put *it* on hyssop, and put *it* to His mouth.³⁰ So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "**It is finished!**" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.' John 19: 28

Accomplished, fulfilled, finished... they are all the same Greek word: Teleo. That it '**might be fulfilled**' is the same word but simply a different tense: Teleioo. Both are from the root word, Teleios, meaning to be fulfilled, completed, brought to perfection, wanting nothing necessary to completeness. That is what Jesus and the Word say. Now look at this: 'For in Him dwells all the **fullness** of the Godhead bodily;¹⁰ and **you are complete in Him**, who is the head of all principality and power.' Col 2:9

Here, Paul uses a different Greek word: Pleroo. Again, this word also means completed and perfect.

But look at this: 'For by one offering **He has perfected forever** those (us) who are being sanctified.' Heb 10:14 That is of us, we have been perfected forever by His one offering on the Cross and guess the Greek word: Teleioo, the same word, just a different tense: to make perfect or complete; to carry through completely, to accomplish, finish, bring to an end.

We are perfect and complete in Him but we are still being sanctified, an ongoing process which will continue until death or the Rapture.

All that to say, the whole Law has been completed for us and we live out that completed Law by loving each other. 'By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another' John 13:35. But loving each other is not how we are saved, any more than keeping the Law. We are saved, so we can love.

Verse 15: 'But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!'

Paul is speaking of the mouth, the tongue. James wrote, 'For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body... even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!⁶ And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.⁷ For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.⁸ But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.⁹ With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.¹⁰ Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.' James 3

Our mouths are the primary vehicle through which we love or hate, build up or tear down, encourage or discourage, help or hinder, speak life or death.

Verse 16: 'I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.'

Again, we, created in God's Image, are, like Him, tripartite: we are spirit, flesh and soul; our spirit is one with God's Holy Spirit; that part of us always pulls us to do God's will. Our flesh remains unredeemed until the Rapture; that part of us always pulls us away from God, seeking to fulfill its own lusts and desires. Our soul, the essence of us, who we are... our soul is in the middle, between our ever-warring spirit and flesh... our soul is the part of us who makes every decision deciding, day by day, moment by moment, whether we will *walk in the Spirit* or *fulfill the lust of the flesh*. Satan has no power to make us follow our flesh and God will exert no power to force us to follow our spirit, to follow His Spirit. We must always choose and eventually, we will give an account of every choice. God has set us free; we are at liberty to choose whatever we desire.