

The Children of Abraham

In John 8, Jesus was in the midst of speaking to the Pharisees, seeking with all the love of God to open the door of their hearts to the truth. They had just brought to Him a woman who was caught in the act of adultery. Instead of condemning or excusing her, He bent down and wrote the sins of her accusers in the dirt. He had sent her away without condemnation and with the command to cease from her sins.

Jesus had continued teaching; and, after a time, He called Himself the light of the world. The Pharisees immediately pounced on this statement, essentially calling Him a liar because He bore witness of Himself. As He sought to open the doors of their hearts, they reminded Him of His parentage, indirectly calling Him fatherless and His mother an adulteress. In John 8:39-41, it is recorded:

“They answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill Me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God; this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then they said to Him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God.”

In one sentence, they condemned Jesus as a sinner by parentage; and, by their own standard, they condemned themselves.

By saying God was their Father, the Pharisees made themselves equal with God by their own estimation (*John 5:18*); thus they were guilty of blasphemy. Turning from the sins and hypocrisy of the religious leaders, let us focus on the statement of Jesus:

“If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham.”—
John 8:39.

A child does the works of their father. Jesus was the Son of God, not only by blood but also by works.

What kind of works was Abraham famous for? works of faith.

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”—Hebrews 11:8.

Those who do the works of Abraham are accounted children of Abraham. The children of Abraham were required to do something as a sign that they are in a covenant (a solemn, binding agreement) with God.

“This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you.”—Genesis 17:10-11. (Betwixt: archaic word for “between”)

Just a few verses later, God states the consequences of not being circumcised:

“And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken My covenant.”—Genesis 17:14.

We are not living under the covenant of Abraham; Christ established a new covenant with us. The Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul to the Romans, states:

“For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”—Romans 2:28-29.

Circumcision was a sign of the old covenant; it was not what made Abraham righteous. Abraham was already righteous, “even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.... So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (Galatians 3:6-7, 9). Circumcision is no longer required in order to be a child of Abraham; and, yet behind this reality, there lurks a deeper truth: God still requires a spiritual circumcision. Those who do not receive this are cut off from God’s people.

What is the spiritual circumcision? We

read in Romans 4:11:

“And he [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised.”

We see here that circumcision was a seal of the righteousness of faith. A seal was often placed on important letters. Wax was heated until it could be impressed with a signet. (In biblical times, kings would use hot wax and a signet ring worn on a finger, with raised letters or a symbol, to seal vital items. The seal carried the authority and validity of the king. Anyone who viewed that seal knew the king had authorized the document or was guarding the contents within.) It held a letter closed in order to indicate it was authentic, unchanged, and unopened.

So what is this seal in the new covenant?

“Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle [letter] of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God: not on tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart.”—2 Corinthians 3:3.

This is new covenant language, what is written with the spirit of God upon hearts?

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind[s], and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people.”—Hebrews 8:10.

We are letters to the world, written by the Spirit of God. The letter is written upon the heart, something that only God can see, to prove our hearts are a sincere message from God there must be outward evidence.

As circumcision was “a seal of the

righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised” (Romans 4:11), so also obedience to the law of God is a seal of righteousness by faith. In 1 Timothy 1:5, the Bible records:

“Now the end [the purpose] of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned [genuine, not hypocritical].”

The purpose of the Ten Commandments is to authenticate faith; it assures the world that our faith is unfeigned.

“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God [is everything].”—1 Corinthians 7:19.

Abraham’s seal of circumcision was given to demonstrate that his faith was genuine. We are given spiritual circumcision, to demonstrate that our faith is genuine. Abraham obeyed God by severing his own foreskin under excruciating pain during a time in which we understand that painkillers and anesthesia did not exist. He possibly did it with a handcrafted blade of stone sharpened to a fine point. Modern medicine helps us perform this ritual today, with as little pain as possible, by using anesthesia.

“My covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year. And He [God] left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

“And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham’s house; and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him.

“And Abraham was ninety years old and nine, when he was circumcised in

the flesh of his foreskin. And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old, when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son. And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him.”—Genesis 17:21-27.

The letter to the Colossians tells us plainly what spiritual circumcision is: “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.”—Colossians 2:11.

In the new covenant, cutting away the sins of the flesh is an equally painful experience. Yet we are to place no trust in spiritual circumcision. Notice what Peter says:

“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”—1 Peter 3:21.

We see that salvation is not through obedience to the law of God, not through the “putting away of the filth of the flesh.” Salvation is through the answer of a clean conscience, through the forgiveness of Christ that He purchased for us at the cross by paying the price of disobedience. Since Christ rose from the dead, all those who come to Him confessing their sins in sincerity receive a clean conscience and salvation. However, under the new covenant, the “putting off the body of the sins of the flesh” (Colossians 2:11) through Christ is necessary to authenticate faith, just as circumcision was necessary under the old covenant. He who does not allow Christ to circumcise his heart is none of His. We are

saved by faith, but the circumcision of Christ is a seal of our salvation.

This idea is repeated with the armor of God. Christ clothes us with righteousness; He gives us the armor of righteousness. This righteousness is fulfilled in obedience to the Ten Commandments:

“For all Thy commandments are righteousness.”—Psalm 119:172.

And again:

“But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.”—1 Thessalonians 5:8.

The Bible records the end of the commandments as being faith and love; and the commandments are righteousness. We do not fashion the armor ourselves. It is given to us when we enlist under the blood-stained banner of Prince Emmanuel. The armor shows whose side we are on as a seal shows who the letter comes from: Circumcision shows the faith and acceptance of the covenant of Abraham: Our works show our hearts thus turning from sins shows the law is written in our hearts. If our armor is damaged in our fight of faith, we can take it to the blacksmith in 1 John 1:9, to get it repaired. Our foe is the carnal nature with its lusts and temptations. If we properly use our shield of faith, our breastplate will never be damaged.

Here is the beauty of the message; the fight is not to obtain righteousness, but to maintain it:

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”—James 1:27.

God calls us to keep our robes unspotted; and, if we understand that righteousness has been restored and that we have been given armor, like every good soldier, we will

each make efforts to keep our armor clean. (Robes: character; see *Christian Education*, 237.3.)

“At this time the rite of circumcision was given to Abraham.... It was to be observed by the patriarch and his descendants as a token [an outward sign, expression, symbol] that they were devoted to the service of God and thus separated from idolaters, and that God accepted them as His peculiar treasure. By this rite they were pledged to fulfill, on their part, the conditions of the covenant made with Abraham. They were not to contract marriages with the heathen; for, by so doing, they would lose their reverence for God and His holy law; they would be tempted to engage in the sinful practices of other nations, and would be seduced into idolatry.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 138.1.

Circumcision is a sign of the covenant—both in the old and the new covenants; but it's only a sign. God wanted the hearts of those in Israel—their minds, their affections, their love. The stiff-necked image clearly showed how stubborn they were in their unwillingness to obey the Lord. And the Lord was basically telling them to stop their divided loyalties and serve Him with all their hearts and souls. The covenant that God made with Abraham has never been canceled. It is the covenant of salvation. The outward sign of that covenant, circumcision of the flesh is no longer necessary. The external circumcision has passed away, but not its covenant as Paul said in Romans 2:28-29. The teachings of spiritual circumcision of the heart help individuals focus on their own personal commitment to God that underlies all the thoughts and acts of God's people. Through this we may know who the children of God are. —**Jon**