

## **CIRCUMCISION**

THE Most High God having purposed to distinguish His people who worshipped Him from those who did not, instituted circumcision as a token of the covenant between Him and Abraham – the father of the Jewish nation. In process of time the gentile nations made inroad into this erstwhile exclusive custom of the Jews and corrupted it. And so, Christianity, which is practised by spiritual Jews, does not lay emphasis on the physical circumcision but on the spiritual one.

Circumcision is the act of cutting off the foreskin of a man. It is a practice which the Almighty God enjoined upon Abraham and his descendants. The rule was that a male child should be circumcised when he was eight days old. To Abraham, God said: "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. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations..." – Genesis 17: 10-12.

God was so strict about it that He ruled that every uncircumcised male child should be cut off from his people for having broken His covenant. – Genesis 17: 14.

On the selfsame day that God spoke to Abraham, he took Ishmael, his son, who was 13 years old and all other males in his household and circumcised them. Also, he, who was then 99 years old, had himself circumcised in obedience to the Lord's instruction. – Genesis 17: 23-27.

Since that time of Abraham, circumcision has not only become a necessary condition of Jewish nationality but also an act in which the Hebrews take particular glory. When Jesus Christ was born, he too was circumcised the eighth day. (Luke 2: 21) Other nations whose males were not circumcised were regarded by the Jews as unclean people otherwise known as the gentiles. Thus uncircumcision became synonymous, by implication, with heathenism, paganism or infidelity.

### **Women Circumcision**

As time went on, certain other nations borrowed the Jewish custom of circumcision and so corrupted it that even their women were circumcised contrary to God's ordinance.

In this country, it is a common practice among certain ethnic groups or tribes to circumcise their female children. Some do it at a very early age and others circumcise their daughters at their adolescence or when they have attained their majority. So, the custom varies from tribe to tribe.

There are some tribes that attach more importance to the circumcision of women than they attach to that of men. They have a set time when girls who have attained a certain standard of age are circumcised every year. It is an occasion that is associated with heathenish ceremonies including the worship of ancestors and the appeasing of the "gods" by way of offering sacrifices so that any danger may be averted during the circumcision of the girls.

At this time whole towns are set in festive mood. The rich parents spend more than enough on the circumcision of their daughters only to demonstrate that the families are well-to-do.

Some poor parents have to owe debts in order to make sure that their families, too, 'do not fall below the average mark. On the part of the husbands of some of the circumcised girls, they also make a show of their affluence – which is to be assessed by the number of pieces of cloths, blouses, headaddresses, chemise, shoes, trinkets of jewels, gold or silver, cosmetics, utensils and everything else one can think of for the use of women. Extravagance is even too mild a word fit to be used in describing what the people do on that occasion.

But on the whole, what do they gain? Nothing, but vainglory! No wonder that some families are gripped with sorrow because of financial entanglements after all the hilarious enjoyments.

There is a common belief among some of the pagans that a woman cannot be productive except she is circumcised. This springs from superstition, and it is a lie. It accounts for the fanaticism with which some people hold to the tradition of women circumcision, and it is because of this belief they regard those who oppose the practice as potential foes.

### **Dangerous**

We must say that the circumcision of women is dangerous and very unscriptural. As a result of it some people had untimely lost their daughters or had they deformed for life. It is an unnecessary exercise which medical experts have advised against.

In the issue of July 20, 1960, of the defunct Nigerian Daily Service, the "Daily Service Doctor" stated: "Chinyere is a thirteen-day-old child. A few days ago she was brought into my hospital by the parents who were all shouting and crying at the same time as this was their first child. The child was bleeding...What are the facts of the case? Twelve days after the birth of the child, the parents took her to an old woman to be circumcised. The old woman performed her 'crude- surgery' and immediately after the operation the child began to bleed heavily. They had to rush the child to me and but for a timely action on my part, the child would have died of haemorrhage."

The doctor was writing under the caption, "CIRCUMCISION IS DANGEROUS". After outlining some biological aspects of women, which make their circumcision dangerous, he concluded: "Female circumcision is therefore unnecessary...It is about time our people stop this primitive female circumcision." (Emphasis ours)

Recently, the nursing sister in a Lagos Hospital strongly advised against female circumcision. She described clearly what circumcision in female consists of, and went on to show the complications involved in it. She made it known that "it might result in some gynecological conditions later on in life" She further stated: "I think nature should not be interfered with in this respect. The public in general should be educated on this subject and the ethnic and religious groups who indulge in this practice should be educated on this subject and discouraged from performing this operation in females," (Sunday Times, November, 17, 1968,)

Experience and events do justify these medical views, There was a case of a girl who turned neither man nor woman after circumcision, The matter was reported to have been investigated by the Criminal Investigation Department of the Nigerian Police, Warri, and taken to the Magistrate's Court where a charge of "negligent act causing harm" to a girl was preferred against an old woman, This was published in the front page of the Mid- West Echo, issue of Tuesday, June 21, 1960, The newspaper reported: "Medical examination performed by the medical officer in charge of the Warri General Hospital claimed that ??? has been rendered sexless, due to what the doctor described as 'mal-circumcision'," (Ellipsis ours)

It is sad to note that some people who call themselves Christians do not only subscribe to the idea of women circumcision but do put it into practice, No one can show from the Bible that God's people ever circumcised a woman, When God instituted circumcision as earlier explained in this sermon, He did not include women. He told Abraham: "Every MAN child (not woman child) among you shall be circumcised," – Genesis 17: 10.

The argument of some that circumcision is a custom of the people does not justify the practice. The laws of God transcend all man-made customs or traditions. There- fore any

custom that is contrary to the will of God must be thrown away by true Christians. God's people are warned against heathenish customs. – Jeremiah 10: 2,3.

### **Heart Circumcision**

Right from the time of Moses the prophet, God indicated that though the Jews were circumcised in the flesh, there was need yet for them to be circumcised in their hearts so that they might truly "love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live". – Deuteronomy 10: 16; 30: 6.

In the days of the early apostles of Jesus Christ, the question of circumcision aroused considerable controversy when certain Judaising teachers said to the gentle converts, "Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved". To all intents and purposes, this teaching was subversive of genuine Christianity, and so Paul and Barnabas disputed and opposed it. – Acts 15: 1-5.

When the matter was discussed in the assembly of the apostles and the elders of the Church at Jerusalem, the decision was reached that it was not necessary for the gentile converts to observe the rite of circumcision. – Acts 15: 6, 22-29.

We must at this juncture stress that in the Christian era, the circumcision of the flesh is of no spiritual significance. Since the advent of Christianity when the way of salvation was opened to the gentiles, the lit era circumcision ceased to be a mark of distinction by which Abraham's spiritual children are to be identified. What is important now is the spiritual circumcision which is a true conversion of the heart, faith in God and the keeping of His commandments.

St. Paul stated: "For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision ..... 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: 25-29.

### **Faith**

Today, there are many people that have been circumcised in the flesh – both among the natural Jews and non-Jews alike – who do not believe in Christianity nor have faith in God. Such ones are not spiritually circumcised and they cannot be saved. On this score, St. Paul declared: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." "For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision: but faith which worketh by love." – 1 Corinthians 7: 19; Galatians 5: 2-3,6; 6: 12-16.

We can understand, therefore, that neither circumcision in the flesh nor uncircumcision has anything to do with our salvation. It is a person who repents of his sins, fears God and serves Him with faith in the true church organisation, which preaches the truth of Christ unadulteratedly, that is spiritually circumcised; and it is such that will obtain life eternal in God's Kingdom of end- less bliss. Said St. Paul: "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh."

(Philippians 3: 3) Furthermore, he exhorted the Christians to be constant in the faith of Christ, and added: "In whom (Christ) 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 closing, we exhort you to be truly circumcised in your hearts so that you may worship the Lord in truth. It does not matter which nation or race or tribe you hail from, because God is

no respecter of persons. In every nation he that fears Him and does His will is accepted by Him. – Acts 10: 34, 35: Romans 4: 9-12.  
May the Lord bless His upon your hearts. Amen.