

Genesis 17:12-14 (NIVUK)

¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner – those who are not your offspring.¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.'

Exodus 4:24-26 (NIVUK)

²⁴ At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses^[a] and was about to kill him. ²⁵ But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it.^[b] 'Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,' she said. ²⁶ So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said 'bridegroom of blood', referring to circumcision.)

Galatians 5:1-15 Freedom in Christ

¹ It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is required to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope.⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

⁷ You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth? ⁸ That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. ⁹ 'A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.'¹⁰ I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion, whoever that may be, will have to pay the penalty. ¹¹ Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offence of the cross has been abolished. ¹² As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

Life by the Spirit

¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh^[a]; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'^[b] ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

LAUNCH

Can you remember the last time you did something without properly preparing in advance before hand? What was the result and how did it make you feel?

DISCOVERY

Why was Moses's failure to circumcise his son so serious in God's eyes?

What comments does Paul make about circumcision in the Galatians passage?

What has changed?

Paul even suggests in this passage that circumcision is dangerous (spiritually rather than physically). In what way?

Circumcision has no value so what replaces it?

UNDERSTANDING

Moses had a number of reasons not to circumcise his son. It was to take place before a long journey and his wife was probably opposed to the procedure. Yet he should have done it. Can you think of a situation where you are faced with a dilemma between doing something that is easy and something that is right?

Moses was bailed out by his wife Zipporah at a critical time. Can you remember the last time you were rescued by someone when you were in a fix? How do we go about surrounding ourselves with people who can rescue us when we get into trouble? How can we develop an attitude where we cover one another with love rather than exposing each other's wrongdoing?

Circumcision was legalistic and dangerous. What modern day legalisms do we need to avoid as Christians?

What is the freedom that is found in the covenant of grace? How is it similar or different to other types of freedom?

The new covenant according to Paul is 'faith expressed through love' (verse 6).

What faith is necessary and how does this translate into love?

If faith and love are the key requirements, does this mean that baptism and communion are legalistic extras? Why or why not?

What are some practical ways in which you can show love to your wife/ your family/ your friends/ your work colleagues/ your neighbours this week?

Try to share a specific plan with the group.

APPLICATION

In the Old Testament it was the covenant of sacrifice and circumcision. Now it is the covenant of Christ and faith. Spend time praying for those who are not under God's covenant. Pray that he will have mercy and gift faith to those that so desperately need it.