

Circumcised Hearts (Exodus 4:19-31)

I We see many symbols regarding our Faith in Exodus. (We can see ample historical evidence that the culture of Egypt, during the time of Moses, was polytheistic, superstitious, and secular, and the aristocracy was paranoid and hedonistic. This description could fit the post-industrial 21st century, and liberal contemporary churches easily enough too. For these reasons then, we use the terms “*egypt*” and “*egyptian-ness*” to describe worldliness and a variety of sins related to the practice of secular humanism in the contemporary world. Now just as Moses went to Egypt to demand that Pharaoh release the Hebrews from their slavery and to lead them to the Promised Land, so Jesus arrived in our world, to demand the release of souls from bondage to sin, by redeeming us with His own Blood, and to lead us to our Promised Land in Heaven. Then 2 Corinthians 6:17 tells us, *come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.* This is a clear call from the Lord Himself for believers not to imitate the *egyptian-ness*, or worldliness, of contemporary culture, but to separate ourselves from it and to have a lifestyle that is different from that of all the other *egyptians* of the contemporary, secular world. The Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt was a symbol for us then, of our own exodus from this world; and their arrival in the Promised Land is a symbol for us of our own eventual arrival, in our Promised Land, the eternal Kingdom of God, in Heaven.)

A Egypt is a symbol for us of sin and worldliness. (Can we identify the most pervasive sin in Egypt, at that time? The historical record adds some interesting details that are not included in the Bible story. That period of history was characterized by migrations, driven by pressures of population on local food supplies. This is the secular historian’s explanation for why the Hyksos invaded Egypt and toppled the native Egyptian Pharaohs. Invaders imposed their institutions

and aristocracies on their new homelands, and the new regime could stay in power only if it could persuade the old guard (and the people it guarded) that the new was better, smarter, stronger, than the old; and that they, not the old order, enjoyed the blessings of the gods. So at this time in their history, the Egyptians began to deify their kings, at the expense of native Egyptian religions. They succeeded so well that only an Act of God could break the power of the Pharaohs, which was, as we shall see, what finally happened.

Can we think of some all-pervasive sin in the modern world? We can, but it might not appear to be such at first. The new religion is secular humanism, its temples are the public schools, and the new aristocracy is the omnipotent nation-state. The great sin is sacrificing children on its altars, and the most pervasive form of worldliness is the unwillingness of parents to assert their God-given authority against pluralism, which is the politically correct term for surrendering to assimilation.)

B God sent Moses to deliver the Hebrews from bondage in Egypt, and He sent Jesus to deliver us from bondage in sin. (Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt and they were willing to follow him. Jesus offers to lead Christians out of worldliness, too, but *not* many are willing to follow Him. He said (Matthew 7:13-14): *Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* In John 14:6 He said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.* The *Truth* is that Jesus is the Way to solve every problem in Korea (and everywhere else too), and the solution God offers is redemption from sin and new, spiritual life in our souls, which is only available in the Grace of God, by our faith in Jesus.)

II Romans 2:29 helps us to relate Exodus 4:24-25 to our New Testament Faith in Jesus. (In the Old Testament, animal sacrifices and circumcision were signs of God's

Covenant with Abraham; the circumcision of males symbolized their participation in the Covenant. In the New Testament, the signs of our Covenant with God in the Blood of Jesus are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Circumcision was a sign, and Baptism is a sign, neither is the Covenant. The heart is about what we love, and the natural man loves his worldliness. So circumcision of the heart is another way to express the separation from worldliness of which we read in 2 Corinthians 6:17.)

A Most Biblical scholars agree that this anecdote is about the circumcision of Gershom, not of Moses. (As we pointed out last week, Hebrews circumcised their male babies 8 days after birth, as a sign of God's Covenant with Abraham. Since Moses lived with his family until he was 3 months old, we may be sure that he was already circumcised—one way by which Pharaoh's daughter would know that he was one of the Hebrew babies—before his mother put him in the basket. Gershom, on the other hand, was born in Midian, and since Midianites were not included in God's Covenant the way Isaac's descendants (particularly Jacob) were, then there is no reason to circumcise Midianites as a sign of the Covenant. Just as church people may, or may not, baptize their babies, and even some adult believers neglect the ordinances (of Baptism and Holy Communion), it is very likely that Moses' son was as yet uncircumcised, in Exodus Chapter 4. Moreover, experts in Biblical languages tell us that there is an un-descriptive pronoun in the Hebrew text for the person the Lord might otherwise have killed, so the name Moses probably refers to the son of Moses, not to Moses himself.)

B Circumcision was a sign of the Covenant God made with Abraham. (For this reason alone it was important. Apparently it was important enough that God was willing to kill someone for not being circumcised. This is of special interest to us as New Testament believers. We are called out of the world, for a life of separation from worldliness in preparation for eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Now God

has promised this eternal life to every believer, it is our Covenant with God in the Blood of Jesus. *Our* signs of *our* Covenant are baptism and the Holy Communion. So this is important to us in that we need to pay attention to these ceremonies, and not neglect them with thoughts like, *Well, yes, but isn't baptism something like expecting to be saved by works instead of by faith in the Grace of God? ...or we might be tempted to think, The Lord's Supper uses wine and the Bible tells us not to use alcohol, so isn't this a kind of inconsistency in God's expectations of us?* We would like to say from the first that if these excuses don't suit you, then the devil will be happy to help you think of others—but the excuses merely mask a deeper problem with our understanding of the way Grace works. Baptism and Communion are ordinances, and so our participation in these ceremonies is obedience to Jesus as our Lord, not a vain hope of Salvation by works. We must understand that these are signs, and that signs are not the reality which they signify. The reality of the sign is the Grace of God, which is the source and substance of our Salvation. Participation in the ceremonies of Baptism and Communion are signs of our faith, that we have the Grace of God. (At this point we shall not digress onto questions about whether the Grace was already delivered, or if it comes as we obey the ordinances, or if we still wait for it in the future; in some senses all three cases are true, for some people and at some times, but that is a topic for another sermon.) Our alcohol related problems arise from a somewhat puritanical persuasion that *an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure*, in other words, that alcohol consumption can lead to inebriation and inebriation is a bad thing, so it would be better to substitute grape juice for wine and not risk helping create a wino or risk helping one get drunk in the name of Jesus. As we say, this is a puritanical attitude, not a Biblical injunction. So we have signs of our Covenant with God, which are just as important to us as circumcision was to Gershom and to Moses. Yet there is another point that we must

address. Circumcision identified Hebrews (eventually called Jews) as theologically, if not ethnically, distinct from other descendants of Abraham, and certainly from other gentiles. But the existence of God does not depend upon the presence or absence of foreskins; and neither does it depend on whether or not we love God enough to obey Him, especially with respect to honoring Jesus as our Lord as well as our Christ. The heart is a symbol for what we love. The natural heart loves worldliness, but the converted, born-again heart loves God. A circumcised Hebrew meant that there was a basic change, a cutting-off, if you will, of un-Hebrew-ness (let us say, worldliness) from that person. A circumcised heart should mean, then, that worldliness is cut off from the loves of the heart, of the Child of God. For this, we see that the Jew is not just a Jew outwardly, that is, by the circumcision of the flesh, but a Jew in the heart, by the circumcision of the heart. We may then say that the born-again, Bible-believing Child of God is not a Christian because he has the signs of the New Covenant in the Blood of Christ, but that the person who loves God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and who loves his neighbor as he loves himself, is the true Christian.)

C If Moses is to speak for God, there must be no deficiency in his life at all. (God will soon tell the Children of Israel, *Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy* (Leviticus 19:2); and then to all of us, in Matthew 5:48, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* Our humanism rises up almost immediately, to object that perfect holiness is an unreasonable expectation, and surely, God will forgive us, at least after we repent our unholy imperfections. But we should note that as impossible as it seems to be to satisfy God, the requirements He imposes on leaders are even more rigorous. 1 Timothy 3:4-5 tells us that the leader must be *One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how*

shall he take care of the church of God?). God demands such a high degree of perfection in the character of a leader because God Himself is absolutely holy. Moses must represent God in a way that no one else but Jesus represented Him. So Moses must rule *well in his own house*— in this Chapter, concerning circumcision. We shall say again, as before, that the perfect holiness which God demands is in fact at once impossible for us to attain unto, and absolutely non-negotiable with God. So how can anyone even be saved, much less satisfy God that he or she is qualified even to attend a church meeting, much less to lead one? The Disciples once asked Jesus a similar question, and His reply was that *with men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God, all things are possible* (Mark 10:27). We have seen that God selected Moses for his office specifically because He knew that Moses could and would do the job; and God chooses men and women for work in the Body of Christ for the same reasons. Once we believe, and Jesus begins to live in us, then it is no longer we who do or do not do anything, but Christ living in us. That should mean two very profound things to us all: first, that our attitudes, thoughts, words, and deeds must be those of Jesus Himself, which means that we must be very circumspect concerning spiritual purity; and second, that when God examines the life of the believer, He sees the image of Jesus in all His glory, to which we are predestined to be conformed, rather than the unredeemed, impenitent sinner that we used to be; at least, if we repent and forsake what we used to be, and allow the Holy Spirit to sanctify our lives.)

III Aaron spoke for Moses the way a priest spoke for God. (This was part of what God told Moses at the Burning Bush; that he would put the words in Aaron's mouth and that Aaron would speak for him, that he would be to Aaron as God was to him, and Aaron will be Moses' spokesman as Moses was God's. Now with respect to what we have just observed about God's requirements of a leader, this will put a

very heavy burden on Aaron, and he will not be quite as faithful to the cause, so to speak, as Moses. God will forgive him anyway, which should give us some hope when *we* fail to measure up to God's standard of absolutely perfect holiness.)

A God will require perfection in Aaron and Miriam, too. (Aaron, as the high priest, will speak for Moses as Moses spoke for God, and Miriam, as a prophetess, must not allow any humanism at all to interfere with her office. Aaron will fail several times; Miriam, too, eventually will join in the general complaint about the leadership of Moses. Both of them will suffer the wrath of God for their failures.)

B (In the immediate future, though,) Aaron's voice will speak Moses' words and Israel will believe. (The Bible tells us that Aaron *told them everything the Lord had said to Moses, and he also performed the signs before the people* (Exodus 4:30). They believed, because they wanted to believe, and because the signs proved to them that Moses had come from God. Now the really impressive part of this whole story is in the last part of verse 31. *When they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped.* Their worship was the result of everything that began at the Burning Bush in Exodus 3:4. Moses was the man God sent to deliver the Children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt; Jesus is the Man God sent to deliver believers from our bondage in sin. The result of Moses' return to Egypt was worship of God by the Children of Israel; the result of the coming of Jesus to our world has been... what, the institutionalization of bigotry, idolatry, jealousy, humanism, selfishness, and secular entertainments in the contemporary church?! Such hypocrisies are the result of the failure of the institutional church to stick to the Word of God, as Moses and Aaron did; and of its failure to demand the highest standards of perfect holiness in its leadership, and a compromise of our separation from worldliness with pluralistic assimilation into it, as we are taught —no, compelled— to do by our educational experiences. And just

as only an Act of God could break the power of Satan as exercised by Pharaoh in Egypt, only the Second Coming of Jesus will break the power of Satan, as exercised in the modern nation-state. Now perhaps we can see yet another symbol for us in the Book of Exodus: The Hebrews could not simultaneously stay in Egypt and go to possess the Promised Land; similarly, believers cannot simultaneously stay rooted and grounded in worldliness and expect to enter the Kingdom of God.)

C All the Hebrews will deliver God's message (v23) to Pharaoh. (The message was simple enough: God wanted to receive the worship of the Israelites, whom He calls His *firstborn son* for reasons that are important in other symbolic contexts. God has power enough to enforce His demands, but Pharaoh would not recognize that power, in part because his own magicians could imitate the miracles of God. God will use their ability to harden Pharaoh's heart, in order to demonstrate His power, to both Israelites and Egyptians. For Pharaoh's refusal to release God's firstborn son to Him, God will kill Pharaoh's firstborn son, which is a prophetic reference to the Tenth Plague, recounted for us in Exodus 11. On that night, the Children of Israel will depart from Egypt by the Almighty Power of God, without the consent of Pharaoh.

There are two symbols in this for us. The first, more spiritual symbol, was the death of Jesus on the Cross. Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, was taken by death just as any ordinary sinner might have been; but He was no sinner. Satan had no claim on the soul of Jesus, but death took Him anyway. This became the means by which God redeemed all souls from death. Just as the Egyptians lost their firstborn children to the Angel of Death on the Night of the Passover, so Satan lost his claim on the souls of all humanity, the morning Jesus rose from the dead. That is the Biblical meaning of redemption.

The second symbol, which is possibly more immediately relevant to us, in

light of current affairs, is that the real Church —all believers of all times and places, is composed of adopted children of God, adopted and sanctified, with Jesus in our souls and our souls in Him. The nation of Israel is an Old Testament symbol for the New Testament church for this reason: God called the children of Israel His first-born son, and Jesus is His only begotten Son, Whose Soul includes the souls of all true believers. Just as Pharaoh hoped to keep the Hebrews in Egypt, so Satan hopes to keep believers in the world —and unfortunately there are some believers whose understanding of this is so poor that Satan succeeds— but God killed Pharaoh’s first-born son, and God will kill Satan’s firstborn son. His identity and fate are exposed in 2 Thessalonians 2: 1-12. (Let us take time to read that entire passage.) God help us not to be deceived by the strong delusion, especially now that this mystery of iniquity is working such strong delusions in the institutional churches!) IV God is Light; His children must not walk in darkness. (That comes from 1 John 1:5; the light is the illumination we have from the Spirit of God working through the Word of God, our Bibles. Darkness, then, is a metaphor for the ignorance that possesses men who refuse to receive the Truth of the Scripture. That darkness is the reason for the excuses people offer for their failure to separate themselves from sin and worldliness, to circumcise their hearts, so to speak, with the Sword of the Spirit (which is the Word of God). God grant us the courage to apply Scriptural Truth to our own lives, and not to make excuses for remaining *in egypt*, which is the desire of our natural hearts.)

A The servant of God must be absolutely holy by Biblical standards. (All of us are servants of God in one way or another, even if our service is nothing more than attending a worship service and praying about the application of scriptural truth to our lives. Some of us are tasked with greater responsibilities and therefore subject to even more stringent accountability, and as such we need your prayers, for the

consistency of our lifestyles with our Christian testimony. And let us mark once again that the only way any of us will succeed in attaining unto the perfectly holy standard of godliness demanded by the scriptures is if Jesus is in us, attaining unto that perfect standard of His righteousness for us.)

B One measure of that perfection is the lifestyle of the servant's family. (For this reason, the children of pastors and evangelists, and elders and deacons must to be examples of good behavior, not rebellious teenagers, and no one who cannot control his own children should be serving in any church office; bad behavior is a reproach to the church, whether the miscreant is the leader or one of his children. For that reason alone, circumcision was so important in verse 25, and for that reason, it really matters a lot, whose foreskin Zippora threw at the Lord's feet.)

C If we have circumcised hearts, we will not make excuses for sins. (We will not excuse any sins, ours or anyone else's, because all sin will be as abhorrent to us as it is to our Heavenly Father. We will love what He loves and hate what He hates, and we will teach our children to do so as well. Now, that is certainly harder to do, when the children spend more time away from the parents than with them. They learn *egyptian-ness*, not godliness, in *egypt* (that is, in the government schools, where educational policies are dictated by the nation-state instead of by the Holy Spirit); children learn to lie, cheat, and steal, they learn to be bullies, or victims, and to be disrespectful, disobedient, and dishonest, and all in pursuit of worldly success. There is an alternative available, but Christian parents have to have the courage to assert their God-given authority over their own children in order to utilize it. They must not to be intimidated by the threats with which the modern-day Pharaohs who articulate government policies seek to hold them and their children in bondage, by means of indoctrination with the principles of secular humanism.

As a non-parent, and a Christian educator, I must not recommend anything to

the rest of you regarding this problem; these comments are simply observations of what should be plain enough to everyone. It is the business of parents to pray about a solution to the problem, and then it is the business of the church to minister to you and your children with Christian education, if you choose that solution.)

V The Bible has a lot to say about perfection, especially in God's servant. (We had better remember 2 very important things which it teaches: first, God holds His servants to a higher standard of perfection than other, ordinary believers; it is non-negotiable, and it is impossible to attain unto the standard without Jesus. Secondly, if God chooses anyone to do anything, it is because He has faith in our dedication, diligence, humility, and determination. With God, all things are possible, and so we who aspire to serve God must be patient in our preparation, for He will choose whom He will, to do His Will in our world, beginning with *in our own lives*. We must be completely honest in our humility, too, because we cannot anoint ourselves for God's service. Let us remember that just as there is one particular miracle that every true believer will experience, which is our regeneration as children of God, there is one particular service that all believers will render to God: it is that we will glorify God by the way we live. The lifestyle of the believer will be the sign that everyone can see, that the Power of God gave him or her new life in Jesus, and that the Holy Spirit is transforming our lives, conforming us to the image of Jesus.)

A Jesus was absolutely perfect; and so must we be, in order to glorify God.

(Now let us now consider this absolute perfection from another point of view. If an architect built a house that had a leaky roof, we would say he is not a very good architect; or if a restaurant served food that made customers ill, we would say it was not a very good restaurant. The glory of a famous doctor is that his remedies heal sick people; the glory of the symphony composer is that people play his music even centuries after his own passing. Similarly, the glory of God is His Almighty power,

used in the case of an individual believer to deliver him from sin and worldliness; in the case of the church it is the dispensation of the Grace of God; in the case of Old Testament Israel it was the manifestation of divine power in the form of miraculous signs, which God performed by the hand of Moses, or other prophets. If you or I are ever to glorify God, it will be by expressing the holiness of God's character in the righteousness of our own behavior, or in other words, the godliness of our lifestyle. So we say again, that the only way we will ever satisfy God's demand that we be perfectly holy is for Jesus to be perfectly holy in us. Any other attempt on our parts at good behavior is, at best, only humanistic vanity.)

B Neither our ecclesiastical position nor social status changes God. (Moses did not ask for an exception to the rite of circumcision based on his new position as the spokesman of God; nor was Aaron or Miriam excused for their sins because they were his relatives. We should not expect God to make exceptions for us either, not because of any position or status we have, and certainly not because, as His servant, we enjoy certain privileges of exemption, as if we were policemen who are free to ignore laws about speed limits and seat belts. God holds all believers to the same high standards of godliness, and He holds our leaders to even higher standards than the rest. God does not and will not change; we *must* change. When we look at the changes we must make in our lives in order to be more like Christ, we shrink back and wonder how we can ever be good enough. That is just the point. We must realize that in our own strength we cannot be good enough; the only way that we can be good enough to get into Heaven is if Jesus is in us, making us better and better, day by day. That is the meaning of the circumcised heart in Romans 2:29. It is also the only way we can glorify God by applying His Word to our lives, and that, the Word of the Lord from our or another believer's lips, is the only means by which we might inspire others to repent sins and love God instead, too.)