

The Circumcision Evangel

Galatians 2:7.

WHAT is the subject matter of this evangel ? Does it differ from the evangel of the UNcircumcision ? Why do the differing titles arise ? Have the two evangels the same objective ? Our discussion will seek to answer these queries.

Both evangels have the purpose of bringing *salvation*, yet we must distinguish between two *aspects* of salvation, for, in relation to each evangel, salvation differs *radically*. We may understand *why* it does so when we learn that the *underlying purpose* of each of the two evangels is also a different one. One evangel saves for the *kingdom* of the *prophets* on the *earth*; the other for the *ecclesia* which is Christ's *body* among the *celestials*. One *evangel* is but a stage on the *way* to God's ultimate; the other *brings* God's ultimate, for its inherent spiritual value is such that it will consummate the eons. With these introductory thoughts we will turn to the details of the Circumcision evangel, merely mentioning, when necessary, matter related to the evangel of the UNcircumcision.

Let us note the "of" and "to" of Ga. 2:7 and 2:9:

1. OF-the divergent nature.
2. TO-the distinct sphere.

The "of" implies an evangel related to a particular *privilege*. The "to" indicates an evangel for a particular *people*.

These titles arise and take their point because the privilege of *circumcision* has been cited as of the greatest value. As to privilege, the Circumcision evangel is based upon God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:10). Circumcision was the sign of a perpetual *covenant*. It is for a particular *nation*, whom God invested with supremacy amongst the nations of the world, and through whom God channels blessings to all the others.

But Israel had failed to enjoy the promised blessings of circumcision. History had merely unfolded and made Israel's delinquency apparent. Yet God had promised them the inward spiritual reality signified by circumcision (Deut. 30:5-6). The evangel of the Circumcision is one more of God's means to bring such blessings to Israel.

The evangel of the Circumcision is vitally related to the circumcised people who are its chief beneficiaries. This evangel takes account of Israel's privileges and prerogatives, and is founded on the fact that they are to become the channel of blessings to the other *nations* if they themselves accept its blessings, as intimated by the Hebrew Scriptures.

Though the Circumcision evangel is addressed to the physical seed of Abraham, through Sarah, yet its special emphasis (i.e. in the so-called gospels and the Acts) was around God's covenant with *David* (see Acts 2:30). Though the title of this evangel arises in relation to Peter (Ga. 2), yet as a matter of fact it had been initiated by John the Baptist. His ministry was followed by that of the Lord Jesus, and later by that of Peter at Pentecost (Acts 13:24-28). Thus these preachings were "a word of salvation" for the nation.

With the coming of Pentecost, the priestly feature was added to this evangel, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. This had to be dealt with. It was in its first analysis only another crime committed against God's prophets by the Circumcision.

Though the Twelve proclaim the historic facts concerning the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus as witnesses, yet they do not develop doctrine from these facts. The Circumcision evangel does not deal with the deeper and ultimate meaning and value of the death and resurrection, nor of the cross of Christ. It is quite true that it tells of the sufferings and the blood of Christ shed for the pardoning of sin, but it says nothing of such matters as *death with Christ* and *deliverance from law*; nor is the "word of the cross" to be found in it. The Circumcision evangel does not mention the snare of the cross. And the reason is plain. *They go against the particular position of Israel*.

To help us to understand this evangel, we should realize that it is proclaimed to those who are in touch with

God (Jn. 1:11). He came to His *own*. He came to a people related to God by a covenant and by a form of knowledge and truth in the law (Ro. 2:20). Thus, the ministry of the Lord asserted that He came not to demolish the law (Mt. 5:17). Nor were others to teach the annulling of law (Mt. 5:19). In fact, many of the points of the sermon on the mount were but a development of the spiritual contents of the precepts of the law. It was into minds instructed by the law that our Master launched His evangel. It was not to people left to themselves during many centuries. The Circumcision evangel did not take away the law. From this fact we can understand why many tens of thousands who had believed were *inherently* zealous of the law (Ac. 21:20). The blessedness of keeping the law will be seen in the millennial kingdom. Then God's law shall be written on new hearts, and, consequently, life will be greatly prolonged. Israel's circumcision is a pledge that the law of God will find no antagonism in their redeemed and cleansed flesh.

Note also that our Lord proclaimed His evangel before His crucifixion, and, at first, without reference to His sufferings. And when He did begin to speak of these, His words were not understood

Even in the past, circumcision should not have been merely an external rite, but should have been of the heart (Deut. 10:16). Let us look more closely into the features and announcements of this Circumcision evangel. Take Peter as the exponent. He called Israel to repentance, told them to be baptized, and so their sins would be pardoned (Ac. 2:38, 3:19, 5:30-32). Primarily *repentance* was a change of mind and attitude to their Messiah. It calls for the production of worthy fruits (Mt. 3:8). *Baptism* was the outward sign of repentance. This was so in John's pre-proclamation ministry, also in the Lord's, and then in that of the twelve (Ac. 2:38). *Pardon* is ruggedly expressed by *to let off* (Ac. 2:38). Repentance and pardon call for faith in the declarations which lead to them. Hence we read:

all that believe (Ac. 2:24),
those who hear the word believe (Ac. 4:4).

In all this, that is, in the evangel of the Circumcision, there is nothing to occasion the arguments which arose against the evangel of the *UNCircumcision*. The Jew had no reason to forsake circumcision or the law, in order to follow Christ and the twelve. But the *Jew must break with both circumcision and the law*, as Paul did, if he would be justified by faith, which is the initial item of the *UNCircumcision* evangel.

The evangel proclaimed by Paul removes the law, but Peter's evangel does not. The features of repentance, pardon and baptism *take their point in the fact of law, but justification is apart from law*. Saul was not saved by Peter's evangel. Under the terms of Peter's evangel, Saul ought to have been exterminated (Ac. 3:23). Saul was not for hearing that Prophet, nor was he at all repentant.

Deliverance from law was entirely absent from the Circumcision evangel. Later, mere legalists joined issues with Paul on this question, yet their objections could not be made against the evangel defined by the term Circumcision. For the nations to adopt law would mean nothing less than separation from Christ (Ga. 5:1-6). Why is this? *The salvation to which Israel is being called is not the salvation to which the nations are introduced.*

Let us turn back to examine pardon and faith in the evangel of the Circumcision. Pardon means to *let off*. It does not put its recipients beyond condemnation. It does not preclude falling aside. Nor does it intimate reconciliation, just as law and ritual do not intimate reconciliation. Pardon requires God to pass over the penalties of sins. It requires the continuance of God's forbearance, yet does not begin to display His righteousness, or the fact that God can be and is also a Justifier. Pardon presumes that good works will ensue. See the illustration regarding land which does not bring forth good herbage (Heb. 6:7,8). Pardon requires "things which have to do with salvation" (Heb. 6:9), and "diligence . . . until the consummation" (Heb. 3:6,14; 6:11; 1 Pet. 2:4; 2 Pet. 1:5-11). There is great reward for endurance (Heb. 10:35,36, 11-6. Here we see the force of "enduring" as counselled in Mt. 10:22; 24:13). Even those of the nations, who were previously in contact with God's revelation and, under the Circumcision evangel, came into touch with Israel, were expected to be "acting righteously" (Ac. 10:35).

The difference between the faith of those who believe the evangel of the Circumcision and those who believe the evangel of the *Uncircumcision* lies in the message which each believe. The faculty to believe is the same in each case, but the character of the faith is related to the contents of the word addressed to them.

Note how a particular faith arises and what its accompaniments are. The faith of the *Uncircumcision* was sealed by holy spirit; but that of the *Circumcision* was corroborated by signs, miracles and various powerful deeds (Heb. 2:4). Indeed, the powers of the impending eon, to which the evangel directed them, were present along with the confirmation of the Lord's message by those who hear Him (Heb. 6:5). Their faith was called forth by these factors. Thus, around this faith we find such aspects as, "believe the works" (Jn. 10:38). Again, in response to the question as to how men may work the work of God: "this is the *work* of God that you may be believing into the One Whom He commissions" (Jn. 6:29). "And, when it is occurring, you shall be believing" (Jn. 14:29).

Faith, then, varies in its value and stability according to its basic message. It may require works to perfect it (Jas. 2:22), or endurance to prevent shrinking back (Heb. 10:38). And so, with the delay in the coming of the kingdom, the position arises as to whether the faith of the saints will continue, and so confirm the reality of the repentance, the baptism and pardon. If the kingdom was to be postponed indefinitely, to what purpose was their change of attitude toward Him Whom Israel had slain and gibbeted? In the epistles of Peter, and in that to the Hebrews, the saints are urged to maintain the faith which had accompanied their repentance and pardon. And so we may turn to these epistles to extract a brief view of them and their relation to the evangel of the *Circumcision*.

The Hebrew epistle. Many are the details to which we could turn. Briefly: that which the Lord began, which those who *heard Him* confirmed, and God corroborated (2:3,4). This ministry to Israel had emphasized that the slain One was their King. But now they are shown that their avowal was related to the Apostle and Chief Priest, Jesus, over the house of God (3:1). They are urged to hold to this avowal (4:14). This Chief Priest, unlike those of the Levitical Priesthood, had *sat down* in the holiest (10:12). Here is the intimation why He had not returned as announced by Peter. Their avowal was a foundation (6:1) for maturity; the maturity is that which comes under the new covenant (10:14).

The law perfected nothing, yet the law is being transferred, as also the priesthood. They are pointed to the glories of the Melchisedek Priesthood, related to a more perfect tabernacle. Now that they have such a Priest they are introduced to a better covenant and better promises. They have now a Priest according to the power of an indissoluble life. The law is to be imparted to their *comprehension* and inscribed in their *hearts*. Like the worthies of old, whose faith was not requited, they were to hold to their avowal.

Now they have a living way into the holy places and may approach with a true heart, in assurance of faith, and hearts sprinkled from a wicked conscience. Jesus, by His own blood, has hallowed them. And, like the sin offering burned without the camp, so He suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem. They are to carry His reproach. He, though He sat down, will yet appear the second time, apart from sin, for salvation through faith.

Peter's epistles: The *standpoint* is that of one who heard the Lord when on earth. It is *addressed* to expatriates dispersed by the persecution in Acts (8 and 10). It seeks to encourage their faith amidst further persecution. They are reminded that they are chosen to obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus (1:2, Heb. 12:24). These matters speak to them of the covenant and the mercy seat (Ex. 24:8, Lev. 16-14). They are regenerated to a living expectation (1:3), of incorruptible seed (1:23). The allotment in the land may have faded, but they have a living expectation of an incorruptible and unfading, allotment (1:4). This expectation will become a salvation to be revealed in the last era (1:5). Though sorrowed by present trials, yet glory and honor awaits them at the unveiling of Jesus Christ (1:7). Endurance gives grace *with* God (2:20).

Their salvation is related to the seeking and searching of the prophets, who told of the sufferings of Christ and the glory to follow (1:10-12, Mt. 13:10). The sufferings they were enduring were the outcome of the sufferings Christ endured, for they were Christians.

Peter reminds them that they are living stones of the spiritual house. They were a holy priesthood (2:5). The Stone, a corner capstone, has been rejected by Israel's builders (2:7), yet these believers are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a procured people (2:9). In making known the power and presence of the Lord Jesus, Peter had not followed wisely made myths (2 Pt. 1:16), but had declared that of which they were spectators (1:16). And this is further confirmed by the prophetic word, which is a lamp appearing in a dingy place. They were to confirm their calling and choice; under no circumstances to trip - as had the nation of Israel

(Ro. 11). A rich entrance will be supplied into the eonian kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pt. 1:10-11).

These considerations, though largely confined to one side of the matter, stress that one immediate objective of the evangel of the Circumcision is *to lead forward to the glory of the Hebrew prophets*. Later Israel will come to the cross of Christ, but that is in the New Creation. Then there will be no Circumcision nor *Uncircumcision*.

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