

Circumcision in the Old Testament and New Testament:

Circumcision, as defined in the Old Testament (Genesis 17), was a symbolic act by which a Jewish male was entered into a covenant with God. It required the participants in this covenant to accept and obediently follow sanctions and strict commandments. Circumcision became the "badge of membership" within the covenant community. It became the distinguishing mark of being a Jewish male.

The picture changes in the New Testament. The covenant with God for Christians is through acceptance and belief in the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ. By this New Testament covenant, Christians are enjoined not to submit to circumcision. Christian families are not bound to God through the mark of circumcision. As defined by the Apostle Paul, circumcision could be interpreted as contrary to the Christian faith and teachings. Although Paul speaks only with regard to religious ritual circumcision and could not have conceived of the practice of routine infant circumcision, it is uncanny how his statements in Titus 1:10-11 define the situation today. Circumcision was not simply viewed as a sign of the covenant community, but was viewed as a sign of separation. It was the *sine qua non* of being a Son of Abraham, in distinction to being a Christian.

Everywhere circumcision is spoken of in the Bible, it refers to religious or ritual circumcision. The Bible does not address the issue of medical or routine circumcision as practiced in the United States. However, the rationale for much of Gentile circumcision in the United States is based on the belief that Jewish religious circumcision was adopted for health benefits. Routine infant circumcision, from its very beginning, was postulated and fostered on the false premise that Jews

enjoyed a variety of health benefits as a result of the practice of circumcision. It is most important to point out that circumcision as a religious commitment of covenant is not done for health benefit--a fact that is generally misunderstood by Jewish and non-Jewish people. This is not surprising, since for years the medical profession has been guilty of this misunderstanding, attempting to use this belief to find justification for and to promote this medically unnecessary procedure.

What does this mean for Christian parents?

For Christian parents, therefore, circumcision of newborn boys is not a religious issue. It is strictly a medical issue. As such, it is a procedure which should not be routinely performed without very sound evidence of benefits. Any medical procedure performed on your child should be fully evaluated in light of your Christian obligation to love, protect, and nurture him. You need to be well informed.

As Christian parents you need to be aware that no medical group in the world associated with child health supports the routine circumcision of male infants. In 1999, the American Academy of Pediatrics made this quite clear, stressing that they do not recommend the routine circumcision of male infants. They stated: "The purported medical benefits are not significant or compelling enough to make such a recommendation." In the same year, the American Medical Association joined other medical organizations in not recommending circumcision as a routine procedure, noting that the persistently high percentage of non-ritual circumcisions "occurs in large measure because parental decision-making is based on social or cultural expectations, rather than medical concerns."

You should not agree to circumcision of your newborn son unless and until you fully understand: (1) the nature of the operation; (2)

the purpose or rationale of the operation; (3) the risks to your son, not only the common risks but ALL of them (ask your doctor about this); (4) proof of benefits weighed against potential for physical, psychological, and sexual damage resulting from this unnecessary elective surgery.

The Social/Cultural Dimension:

Simply put, any practice that has been sanctioned for many years will eventually take on a social and cultural scope and rationale. Now that it has been clearly shown that routine circumcision is not a sound rational medical practice, we have those who would perpetuate the practice based on social and cultural arguments. Such arguments are numerous. Among them are: he should look like his father, his brother, or the neighbor boy; the desire to conform to social/cultural peer pressure; to perpetuate the "look" of a circumcised penis, arguing that it is more aesthetically pleasing; we just do it because it is the "American Way."

Here we are outside the realm of sound medical considerations. These are not valid rational reasons to circumcise your newborn son. Rarely if ever, would there be a valid medical indication to perform a newborn circumcision. Thus, routine infant circumcision is "cosmetic surgery" in its truest sense. Conformity is not a Christian value. Christian parents, and especially those parents dedicated to natural birth, home birth, and a holistic approach to health and childcare, should have serious questions about any health care professional who would suggest routine infant circumcision.

The United States is the only country in the world that has practiced the routine circumcision of a large percentage of its male infants. No other developed country in

the world routinely circumcises infants for non-religious reasons. Given the now-confirmed lack of medical benefit and well-documented evidence of potential damage, one has to wonder why hospitals in the United States continue to provide facilities for routine infant circumcision, and solicit circumcision by presenting non-requested circumcision consent forms to every parent of a newborn male. Why do doctors - while agreeing to the lack of medical validity of infant circumcision - continue to circumcise newborns? If you were to suggest similar routine cosmetic genital surgery for a female child, you and the doctor who would consent to perform it would be in violation of state and federal statutes. Why, then, is this routine cosmetic surgery even possible with regard to a male child?

Christian parents should not buy into this "American custom." Circumcision is a surgical procedure performed on an hours-old infant who has decreased ability to ward off infection or adapt to loss of blood. It takes away a functional body part, in a way that is very painful, and subjects the child to risks of complications associated with any surgical procedure. These include but are not limited to hemorrhage, overwhelming infection, excessive penile skin loss, painful erections, mutilation, and accidental injury. Damage from circumcision can be severe and has even resulted in the death of the child. Circumcision will have life-long physical consequences for your son. Countless thousands of adult males have been caused physical, emotional, and sexually dysfunctional consequences as a direct result of routine infant circumcision.

In the absence of valid medical reasons, it should be clear that there should be no such thing as a "routine" circumcision procedure. As Christians we are called upon to love, protect, and nurture our children. The start of your son's physical well-being is better assured by saying NO to the pain, trauma,

loss of sensitivity, and loss of intended protection caused by submitting him to an unnecessary, medically unjustified, routine circumcision that is not recommended. It is unconscionable to subject a child to such risks simply as a cosmetic peer look-alike procedure.

Since routine circumcision is not supported by Christian teaching, and the medical community universally agrees that there are no valid medical indications for the routine circumcision of baby boys, the choice of loving and compassionate Christian parents should be obvious. We are obligated to protect him from the risks, loss, and damage from routine circumcision.

Christian parents, alarms have been sounded and the "red flags" are clearly visible. It is time we heeded them to diligently endeavor to protect our male newborns.

Dr. Peron is a medical research writer, educator lecturer, and founder of the Childbirth Education Foundation.

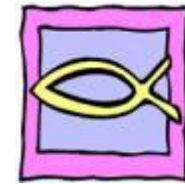
Additional information regarding infant circumcision, scriptural and ethical issues, and the simple and proper care of the uncircumcised child is available at:
www.Acts15.net
www.CatholicsAgainstCircumcision.org
www.cirp.org

Or by contacting:
The Childbirth Education Foundation
P.O. Box 251
Oxford, PA 19363
Phone (717) 529-2561

Originally published in MANY BLESSINGS, Volume 3, Spring 2000. MANY BLESSINGS is a Christian parenting magazine, published in Houston, Texas.

Christian Parents and the Circumcision Issue

By: James E. Peron, MS, EdD



**Parents in the United States
must wrestle with the
circumcision decision when
blessed with the birth of a
male child. In no other nation
are parents pressured to make
this decision. This pamphlet
reviews the subject of routine
infant circumcision as it
relates to Christian parents.**