

Page 80 - Accordingly, the statement that circumcision does not produce a people of God is true and beyond doubt, and from it there follows the true and sound conclusion that it is not necessary for all nations to be circumcised.

“What, then, is circumcision?” you will ask. **Nothing but a work of obedience and an exercise of faith, such as the sacrifice of Isaac and other similar works which God assigned to some men.**

For this reason Paul does not call circumcision righteousness; he calls it **a sign of righteousness**. For to be justified through works and to do works after being justified are not the same.

First the person is righteous. Then he is commanded to be circumcised, not to become righteous through circumcision. When these facts have been carefully considered, they will disclose the error and the godless arrogance of the Jews.

Page 83 - I gladly impress this on you, for **the question concerning circumcision is very difficult and complicated**; and if St. Paul had not stepped in and dealt with it so profusely and seriously, we would hardly have avoided errors.

For we read in Acts 15 that after Christ's resurrection the Jews who had been converted to the faith continued to stress the Law and to compel those who had been baptized to observe not only circumcision but also the entire Law; for they maintained (Acts 15:5): “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge them to keep the Law of Moses.”

Accordingly, this was a serious question—a question which, as is apparent in the early church, caused trouble for the apostles themselves and compelled Paul to go to Jerusalem and to confer with the apostles about it.

Furthermore, this question in Acts is not a single question. It has two parts: (1) whether man is justified on the basis of works; (2) whether circumcision is necessary.

Page 87 - **But for the descendants of Abraham circumcision was a symbol that they were the heirs of the promise which had been given to Abraham before he was circumcised.**

Thus it is necessary for us to make a distinction between act and act. When Christ was baptized and when we are baptized, there is, so far as the act itself is concerned, no difference at all between the Baptism of Christ and that of other believers. Both are washed with water in the Jordan; both receive the comfort that God wants to forgive sins. But there is a very great difference in the persons.

Christ is baptized, not in order to be made righteous—for He is the Son of God and endowed with eternal righteousness so that we may be made righteous through Him—but as an example, so to speak, for us, in order that He may precede us and we may follow His example and also be baptized.

In almost the same way **circumcision is a sacrament for the descendants of Abraham** because, since they have the promise, they are made righteous by believing this promise and making use of the sacrament in faith. But those who do not believe are not made righteous. Yet they are circumcised. But **this was not the purpose of Abraham's circumcision**; for, on the one hand, he had the promise before he had this sign, and, on the other hand, through faith in this promise he was made righteous before he was circumcised.

Page 92-93 - But it is also necessary to consider **the purpose of this chapter**. The increase of the descendants of Abraham, to whom the promise is given here that he will be the father of many nations, is drawing near. But because it did not suit God to make a new covenant with each generation and to confirm new promises—as He did to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—He gives all the descendants of Isaac **a common revelation or seal by which they are not only to be distinguished from the rest of the nations but are also to be reminded as by a sacrament that they are the people of God and that God, in turn,**

will be a God to them, that is, will do good to them in this life and in the eternal life, and will do all this because of Christ, the promised Seed of the Woman.

In the first place, therefore, the Jews are people set apart from all the nations in order that their own generation may not be confused with other nations and the promise concerning Christ may be sure to those on whom it is to be conferred. In the second place, circumcision is for them **a sign of righteousness; for by this very deed that is done to them**—if I may express myself in this way—they are reminded that they are the people of God and that God has them in His care.

Page 95 - But, as I have already stated repeatedly, this people is circumcised for the purpose of designating it with **a distinctive mark**, in order that **the Gentiles, prompted by admiration, may learn to acknowledge the God of the Jews until Christ should come and provide a new mark**—a mark by which both the Jews and the Gentiles would be certified as sharers in the eternal grace which, through the Son of God, falls to the lot, not of those who are favored because of the prerogative of birth according to the flesh but of those who believe, or have been born again through water and the Spirit.

Page 100 - **“What, then, is circumcision?”** the Jew will ask. In the first place, **it cannot be stated according to natural reason and in philosophical parlance that circumcision is a work like the works enjoined by the ceremonial law and the moral law.** For moral works, as they call them—such as the obedience of children to their superiors, in conformity with the Second Table, and invoking God and the giving of thanks, in conformity with the First Table—these have been enjoined in such a way that they must always be performed every day, yes, every hour.

Circumcision, however, took place only once during an entire lifetime; nor could it be repeated, just as in the New Testament it is sufficient to be baptized in the name of Jesus only once, and it is sinful to repeat Baptism.¹²

In this respect **circumcision differs** from moral works. Ceremonies, too, are repeated. It was not enough to have sacrificed only once, to have worshiped in the temple only once, to have been reconciled with the church only once, etc.

In the second place, circumcision is **an affliction and a cross** rather than a work. For he who is circumcised does not perform it; he suffers it from others and indeed with pain. Therefore if it is not a moral or a ceremonial work, then, what is it?

Paul is an excellent definer and an expert dialectician; for he defines circumcision as a sign or seal of the righteousness which Abraham had before he was circumcised, in fact as a sign imprinted on the very flesh of Abraham and of all males who descended from him (Rom. 4:11).

But if someone calls circumcision **a ceremony**, he will concede in spite of this that it differs from the rest of the ceremonies in that it, **like Baptism, is a passive ceremony.**

Furthermore, when it has been established that circumcision is a sign which does not make Abraham righteous but indicates the righteousness which Abraham already has, the question arises whether this seal was an empty sign or something that was implemented together with the seal.

My answer to this question is that **in Abraham’s case circumcision is a mere sign without implementing anything**; that is, it is a sign in such a way that it does not implement what it signifies but merely signifies. For the argument with which Paul proves that Abraham was righteous before he was circumcised is irrefutable. Hence circumcision is a sign that merely signifies righteousness but does not confer it, for it finds Abraham already righteous. It does not make him righteous.

But the situation of Abraham’s descendants was different. Circumcision does not find them righteous like Abraham. Therefore it was a seal of righteousness in such a way that righteousness was implemented by it. For thus it is written below (v. 14): “Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.” Here spiritual and eternal destruction is meant.

This negative statement implies the positive one that a male who has been circumcised on the eighth day will be saved and will be counted among the people of God. **Therefore circumcision was efficacious among the descendants of Abraham; that is, it brought righteousness, not because of the work alone, which was merely passive, but because of God's promise, which was joined to this passive work.**

Page 104 - Those who are circumcised are given **the promise** that they are the people of God and that God wants to be their God. This means that **they are in the fellowship of the kingdom of God, since they have been justified by the justifying faith which the Lord grants them through His Spirit.**

If this was brought about with the Jews in the Old Testament through the medium of circumcision, why would God not do the same thing with the Gentiles through the medium of the new covenant of Baptism?

Page 104-105 - This is a powerful argument against those who say that because **little children** have no understanding and do not believe, they should not be baptized. For here the command is given that little children are to be circumcised on the eighth day, and the promise is added: "I will be their God."

Hence both the command and the promise bear witness **that righteousness was imputed to infants through the medium of circumcision**, just as it was imputed to Abraham through faith before circumcision; for it is impossible to please God without faith (Heb. 11:6).

Page 105-106 - For this reason Paul states in Rom. 4:11 that circumcision was given to Abraham as a sign, that it might be a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had before he was circumcised; and Paul immediately adds that **"the purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised and likewise the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but also follow the example of the faith which our father Abraham had before he was circumcised"** (Rom. 4:11-12).

The correct definition of circumcision is this: It is a public mark by which all, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, are urged to follow in the footsteps of Abraham or to emulate the faith of Abraham.

For Abraham is the common father of the Gentiles and the Jews. He has been distinguished with a new sign in order **that the Gentiles might hasten to him as to a standard-bearer and might acknowledge, confess, and worship the same God.** The Gentiles are also invited to the same righteousness of faith, in order that Abraham, in accordance with the promise, may become the father of many nations.

Page 109 - We shall be safe from these dangers if we follow **that visible form or those signs which God Himself has set before us.** In the New Testament we have as a visible form the Son of God on the lap of His mother Mary. He suffered and died for us, as the Creed teaches. Besides, we have other visible forms: Baptism, the Eucharist, and the spoken Word itself. Therefore we cannot complain of having been forsaken.

In the first place, however, Satan, and, in the second place, his servants, the pope with his entire church, strive to divert us from these divinely appointed visible forms to their own forms: the canonization of the saints, the invocation and worship of the departed saints, and the statues set up in special places for the sake of gain, etc.

Therefore we must be fortified against these plots in order that we may say: **"Just as I have no knowledge of any church before Christ's coming except the one which was in the home of Abraham and was marked by circumcision, so after Christ's coming I know nothing except Christ and Him crucified, who reveals Himself to us in visible forms: in the use of the Keys and in the Eucharist. I know that I find God there and that I receive forgiveness of sins there and nowhere else."**

Apology, Article XIII. (VII): Of the Number and Use of the Sacraments.

18] It is still more needful to understand *how the Sacraments are to be used*. Here we condemn the whole crowd of scholastic doctors, who teach that the Sacraments confer grace *ex opere operato*, without a good disposition on the part of the one using them, provided he do not place a hindrance in the way. This is absolutely a Jewish opinion, to hold that we are justified by a ceremony, without a good disposition of the heart, *i.e.*, without faith. And yet this impious and pernicious opinion **19]** is taught with great authority throughout the entire realm of the Pope. Paul contradicts this, and denies, Rom. 4, 9, that Abraham was justified by circumcision, but asserts that circumcision was a sign presented for exercising faith. Thus we teach that in the use of the Sacraments *faith ought to be added, which should believe these promises, and receive the promised things, there offered in the Sacrament.*

20] And the reason is plain and thoroughly grounded. [This is a certain and true use of the holy Sacrament, on which Christian hearts and consciences may risk to rely.] The promise is useless unless it is received by faith. But the Sacraments are the signs [and seals] of the promises. Therefore, in the use of the Sacraments faith ought to be added, so that, if any one use the Lord's Supper, he use it thus. Because this is a Sacrament of the New Testament, as Christ clearly says, he ought for this very reason to be confident that what is promised in the New Testament, namely, the free remission of sins, is offered him. And let him receive this by faith, let him comfort his alarmed conscience, and know that these testimonies are not fallacious, but as sure as though [and still surer than if] God by a new miracle would declare from heaven that it was His will to grant forgiveness. But of what advantage would these miracles and promises be to an unbeliever? **21]** And here we speak of *special faith* which believes the present promise, not only that which in general believes that God exists, but which believes that the remission of sins is offered. **22]** This use of the Sacrament consoles godly and alarmed minds.

The Sacrament as a Human Work that does not give salvation.

- no faith or trust in the promise connected with the sacrament (for, they believe, there is no promise)
- the sacrament becomes a profession of your already received salvation (sign so others may know I am saved)
- Baptist teaching on baptism (Outward sign of an inward condition)

The Sacrament as a Human Work that does give salvation.

- no faith or trust in the Gospel promise connected with the sacrament (for they believe, the sacrament is a law which offers a reward, if it is performed.)
- thus faith(trust) is in my works
- For Armenian Baptists, their teaching that you must "make a decision for Jesus" in order to be saved, has become their "sacrament."
- For Roman Catholicism, their teaching on the Lord's Supper is that by performing the Mass, the benefits are produced *ex opere operato*. Although, interestingly, it is not a valid Mass if the priest does not have the intention of making a sacrifice to God(human work). Thus since this work is not received by faith, it can give benefits "for the living and the dead."

The Sacrament as a Divine Work that does give salvation.

- faith is required to receive the benefits which are offered in the Promise connected to the sacrament.
- the sacrament is a sign of God's will toward me, a will to save which I am to believe("through which God moves hearts to believe.")