

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. Let us review the subject of routine infant circumcision as it addresses Christian parents.

Circumcision in the Old Testament and New Testament:

Circumcision as defined in the Old Testament (Genesis 17) was a symbolic act of Covenant with God by which a Jewish male was entered into 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 (Galatians 5:1-6, 11-12), 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. 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 allowed such misunderstanding and deception in attempting to find justification for this unnecessary and medically unjustified procedure. Thus, 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.

What does this mean for Christian parents?

For Christian parents, circumcision of newborn boys is not a religious issue. It is strictly a medical issue, 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 March 1999, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) 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.”

You should not agree to circumcision of your newborn son unless and until you fully understand: (1) The functions of the body part being removed; (2) The nature, purpose and

rationale of the operation; (3) the risks to your son; (4) proof of benefits weighed against potential for physical, psychological, and sexual dysfunctional damage resulting from this unnecessary elective surgery. In July 2000 the American Medical Association joined other health organizations in not recommending circumcision as a routine procedure, also 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.”

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: that he should look like his father, his brother, or the neighbor boy; the desire to conform to social/cultural peer pressure; perpetuating the “look” of a circumcised penis, arguing that it is more aesthetically pleasing; or just doing it because it is the “American Way”. These reasons are outside the realm of sound medical consideration and 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. With rare exception, 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, or 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 practices 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 this 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 male newborn. Why do doctors - while agreeing to the lack of medical necessity for infant circumcision- continue to circumcise newborns? If you were to suggest similar routine cosmetic genital surgery for a female child, you and any consenting doctor 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 minimal ability to ward off infection or 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 can be severe and has even resulted in the death of the child. Circumcision will have a life-long physical consequence to your son. Countless thousands of adult males have been caused physical, emotional, and sexual 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 lookalike procedure. Since Christian teaching does not support routine circumcision, and the medical community universally states, "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.

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Acts 15 is an interdenominational group dedicated to educating Christian parents about the realities of infant circumcision.

Additional information regarding routine infant circumcision, scriptural & ethical issues, and the simple and proper care of the uncircumcised child is available at:

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