

CONVERSATION GUIDE:

OPENING QUESTIONS:

- Think about the different “tribes” or groups you belong to (family, church, political party, sports teams, etc.). How do these identities shape your worldview and interactions with others?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Circumcision was originally a tribal identity marker. What are some “identity markers” in Christianity today that people might mistakenly view as requirements for salvation?
- **Read Philippians 3:3.** What does Paul mean when he says “we are the circumcision”?
- The sermon outlined three levels of identity development:
 - Egocentric (focused on self)
 - Ethnocentric (focused on tribe)
 - World-centric (focused on all people)
- Where do you see yourself in this progression? Where do you see the church?
- How can being too focused on one identity become dangerous for Christians? Can you think of examples from history or current events?

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

- Reflect on your own life: Where might you be adding “circumcision-like” requirements to your understanding of salvation or Christian living?
- Think about a situation where you prioritize tribal identity over loving someone different from you. How might you approach that situation differently with a more world-centric perspective?
- This week, practice expanding your perspective by:
 - Engaging with someone outside your usual “tribes”
 - Reading news or perspectives from different viewpoints
 - Praying for God to reveal any ways you’ve limited His Gospel

GROUP FOCUS:

- As a group, discuss one way your community might be operating from an ethno-centric mindset rather than a world-centric one.



WEEK 18 THE JOY IN CIRCUMCISION? (PHILIPPIANS 3:1-3)

TODAY'S VERSES:

Philippians 3:1-3	Genesis 4:23-24	Genesis 12:1-3
Isaiah 14:12-14	Genesis 6:5	Genesis 17:9-10
Deuteronomy 23:18	Genesis 11:4	

MAY 25, 2025

WEEK 18

THE JOY IN CIRCUMCISION

In Philippians 3:1-3, Paul continues his message about unity and humility in Christ while warning believers to “watch out” for those who would add requirements to salvation. Paul will speak about the issue of circumcision to address deeper questions of identity and belonging in God’s family. Paul says that there are schemes from people that want to detract us from the work of the Gospel. These people are described as:

- **Dogs** – This would refer to those of impure mind
 - **Evildoers** – This refers to workers of evil or those who labor for that purpose.
 - **Mutilators of the flesh** – These are people that Paul has talked about who push law and not grace as the prerequisite for being in God’s family.
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Circumcision – The background for the ‘why’ of circumcision starts all the way back in Genesis. You meet a dysfunctional family in which the older son (Cain) kills the younger son (Abel). God allows Cain to live, and Cain goes off to start a different family. A later descendent of Cain’s, named Lamech, kills someone who hurts him. He even sings a song to his wives that essentially boasts of how he will avenge himself ELEVEN times more than Cain. Later, in Genesis 11, technology/innovation leads these people to a place of pride and arrogance where they say, “We can determine our destiny and control the world.”

Scripture includes these stories to reveal an important truth to us. The writer of Genesis wants you to feel the spiral of human sin, that we would be destroyed without the intervening grace of God. Mankind, steeped in sin, continues to destroy itself by destroying one another.

In Genesis 12, we meet Abraham. God grounds Abraham’s life in blessing and grace so that others will know about God. In Genesis 15 it says, “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.” This language means that God is going to save Abraham, and by extension, humankind. God tells Abraham that his lineage will include a whole nation. Circumcision, in this context, is a tribal and national ritual of identification. Unfortunately, this tribe started to focus on the ritual so much that they lost the meaning. Circumcision was meant to be a sign of who they belonged to—God—as opposed to the means for their belonging. This is what Paul speaks about to the Philippians.

Egocentric → Ethnocentric → World-centric – Abraham → Tribe → Nation → All People. A child has an: **EGO** (a self-centric level of awareness) that is crucial for development. But as your child matures, they need to move from an egocentric view of the world to an ethnocentric view of the world. They must realize they are part of a family and tribe. If someone stalls at an ethnocentric perspective and doesn’t mature to a WORLD-centric perspective (in how the Bible speaks about the world), there will be trouble; when our tribes inevitably fall short, someone needs to speak up.

Paul points out the issues with those who focus on circumcision because they are prioritizing tribal identity over the Gospel. The Gospel is meant to push us outside of ourselves to have a world-centric view. He saved us, adopted us, and made us part of His family.

Ego – He saves us, as we are, with all of our sin and shame.

Ethno – He places us in His family and grows us out of focusing on ourselves by focusing upon the Gospel.

World – He sends us out so that we would speak the message of His saving grace to those who are just as lost as we were.

We are all a part of various tribes today, but the family of God should take precedence over ALL of it.