

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

CIRCUMCISION

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Many Muslims never question whether this ritual has any basis in scripture (i.e. the Quran) or whether it is documented in early Islam practice. Instead, they blindly follow the traditions of their forefathers without rational thought, evidence or analysis subjecting their new born children to a part mutilation of their genitalia.

Basic questions are never dealt with. Did God really ordain this practice for all humanity and men? Did the child have any choice in the matter? What about innocent children not born into Muslim households? Has the child any capacity to choose his faith at birth? What has belief in God to do with the foreskin of a male child or adult? How does a new adult convert into Islam address this issue of circumcision?

The intention of this article is not to address the medical benefits of circumcision or otherwise. Rather, the purpose is to ascertain whether there is convincing proof that circumcision is a necessary part of 'religion' instituted from the Quran's perspective.

IS THERE ANY SOLID PROOF IN THE QURAN THAT SUCH A PRACTICE IS REQUIRED?

Answer: None.

Instead, there are verses that indicate that God has already created the human shape in a perfected form (requiring no changes such as the removal of a male's foreskin)

032.007-9

"He who has made everything which He has created most good (Arabic: Alladhi ahsana kulla shayin khalqahu): He began the creation of man with (nothing more than) clay, And made his progeny from a quintessence of the nature of a fluid despised: But He fashioned him in due proportion (Arabic: Sawahu), and breathed into him something of His spirit. And He gave you (the faculties of) hearing and sight and feeling (and understanding): little thanks do ye give!"

Note the Arabic word 'Sawahu' which comes from the root word **SIIN-WAW-YA** which means to **perfect a thing**, put a thing into a **right or good state**. Its verb form 'sawwa' carries the meaning of **proportion, perfection, levelling**.

We note in another verse:

095.004

"We have indeed created mankind in the best of moulds (Arabic: taqwimim)"

The above verses beg the following question. Why then is the male incomplete and requires his foreskin to be removed if our Lord has revealed no decree for it nor hinted at it from His words that He has revealed to us?

In fact, the only source that can be cited is the 'Sunna', a practice carried forward from Abraham. But the question still remains. Where is the proof that this indeed was a practice instituted for humanity (men) when clearly God instructed Prophet Muhammad^(pbuh) to follow the commandments and warn by way of the Quran only (6:19; 50:45)?

By doing so, he would not only be following the footsteps of Abraham but would be following the same 'Deen' inspired in all the Prophets. **At no place in the Quran** does it mention that Abraham practiced circumcision or even if he did, whether this was to be a practice to be reinstated and continued.

THE QURAN RECOGNISES DIFFERENT SHARIAH (LAWS) REVEALED TO DIFFERENT PROPHETS AS PART OF A FUNDAMENTAL 'DEEN' (SYSTEM/RELIGION)

005.048

"To thee We sent the scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: so judge between them by what Allah hath revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the Truth that hath come to thee. To each among you have we prescribed a law (Arabic: Shari-atan) and an open way (Arabic: wamin-hajan). If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is to Allah; it is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which ye dispute;"

Note in particular, the Arabic word: Shari-atan / law. It is clear that God has given People of the Book each their own laws and an open way. There is no proof that previous laws are incumbent on followers of the final scripture unless specifically stated by the Quran.

INVOKING THE BIBLE AS PROOF

In connection with the above, the desperation to prove this practice as a religious requirement of Islam is all too evident in Muslim thought when the Bible is used to invoke proof. It is clear that many Christians do not see circumcision as a fundamental requirement of their faith and worship towards God and they posit their arguments from scripture. Jewish followers do much the same to support their particular stance for the commandment of circumcision.

The Quran on the other hand makes no mention of circumcision.

Those readers that have a deeper grasp of [Islamic secondary sources](#) will no doubt appreciate the discussions with regards circumcision in light of the earliest Islamic sources. This may be new to those not so familiar, but I do feel it useful to include and note by way of an example.

EARLY MUSLIM SOURCES ALSO CHALLENGE THE PRACTICE OF MALE CIRCUMCISION

• Classical scholars were **not** unanimous about even the circumcision of the Prophet Muhammad! ^(pbuh)

- Neither Ibn Ishaq (died 767 CE) who is well known as the earliest biographer of the Prophet nor his editor Ibn Hisham (died 838 CE) speak of Prophet Muhammad's ^(pbuh) circumcision in their works. This must be considered in the backdrop of their prophetic biographies which attempt to capture all areas of the Prophet's early life and ministry. Even crude poetry uttered on the battlefield by fighters is included in their works, yet no mention of circumcision!

Hasan Al Basri (born 642 CE), a Muslim theologian born in Madinah and an early scholar protests that many people belonging to a variety of races became Muslims in the days of Muhammad. ^(pbuh) No one looked under their clothes to see whether or not they were circumcised! (Source: Ibn-Qudamah n.d. 1:85)

Ibn Hanbal mentions in his 'Al Musnad' 'Uthman Ibn Abi-al-As was invited to a circumcision but he declined the invitation. Asked why, he answered: in the days of Muhammad we didn't practice circumcision and were not invited' (Ibn Hanbal 1998 4:127)

Al Tabari who died in 923 CE (Another well known historian and Quranic commentator) informs us that Caliph Umar Ibn Ad-Aziz (d.720CE) wrote to the general of his army (Al-Jarrah Ibn Ab-God - died 730CE) who conquered the region of Kharassan: "Those who pray before you toward Mecca, excuse them from the payment of tribute'. People then hurried to convert to Islam. However, when the general was told that people converted out of avoidance to paying the tribute rather than conviction of belief and that a test of circumcision was necessary, the general consulted with the caliph. The Caliph responded: "God sent Muhammad to call people to Islam, not to circumcise them!" (Al Tabari 1992, 3:592).

Imam Mahmoud Shaltout (Egyptian scholar) relying on Imam Al-Shawkani's (18th century Yemeni scholar) authority argues that the tests regarding male and female circumcision are neither clear nor authentic (Shaltout 1980: 331-32)

Ahmad Amin reports that a Sudanese tribe wanted to adhere to Islam. The chief wrote to Al-Azhar in Egypt to ask what was necessary as a requirement. Al-Azhar sent a list, placing circumcision as priority. The tribe then refused to become Muslim! (Amin 1992:187)"

For above source references, see book: Female Circumcision: Multicultural Perspectives (Edited by Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf) for a basic, general insight and above paraphrased references. In particular, See Chapter 3 - Male and Female Circumcision: The Myth of the Difference by Sami A. Aldeeb Abu Sahlieh

Many modern scholars have also disputed this practice citing lack of evidence and Quranic support to negate it. However, this practice continues to remain the mainstay of majority Muslim belief as a requirement instituted by God on all believers.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The practice of circumcision as religious decree has absolutely no support in the Quran. It remains a matter of individual choice. Even early sources show serious challenges to this practice. Biblical evidence is also not conclusive and poses weaknesses if cited as support for such a practice. Furthermore, the Quran dispenses with certain laws of the previous scriptures and remains the sole and ultimate authority for the believers.

Many never question nor challenge what they inherit from their forefathers by rational thinking. Others are quick to criticize the adherents of other world religions and rebuke their practices. However a very important question begs to be considered. Would we (Muslims) be any different if we were those very people we rebuke or would we simply follow what they do, in the blind footsteps of our forefathers if we were to be born in their households?

If one posits lack of evidence for male circumcision, one only has then to consider the fate of female circumcision which doesn't even bare mentioning. It is useful to remember however, many Muslims may take the moral high ground and cite lack of evidence with regards female circumcision. But to those that practice female circumcision, it is as authentic a practice as is male circumcision.

004:119

"I will mislead them, and I will create in them false desires; **I will order them to slit the ears of cattle, and to deface the (fair) nature created by God.**" *Whoever, forsaking God, takes Satan for a friend, has of a surety suffered a loss that is manifest.*

005:103

"It was not God who instituted (superstitions like those of) a slit-ear she-camel, or a she-camel let loose for free pasture, or idol sacrifices for twin-births in animals, or stallion-camels freed from work: It is blasphemers who invent a lie against God; but most of them lack wisdom"

057:027

"Then We caused Our messengers to follow in their footsteps; and We caused Jesus, son of Mary, to follow, and gave him the Gospel, and placed compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him. **But monasticism they invented - We ordained it not for them - only seeking God's pleasure, and they observed it not with right observance.** So We give those of them who believe their reward, but many of them are evil-livers"

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