–Save This Page as a PDF–

The Religious Jew’s Lack of the Spirit 2: 25-29

The religious Jew’s lack of the Spirit DIG: What is circumcision symbolic of? Does this passage teach that if you circumcise your heart then you are a spiritual Jew? If that were true, how would this passage lead to replacement theology and destroy the unique bond that God has with Isra’el? Who’s a real Jew? Where does this leave Jewish women?

REFLECT: Instead of special treatment, what did the blessings of ADONAI actually give to the Jews? How might this be true of God’s blessings to you? When you call yourself a believer, you are an ambassador of the Messiah; in effect, God is making His appeal through you, “Be reconciled to God” (Second Corinthians 5:20). How is your ambassadorship going?

A real Jew has both external (physical circumcision), and internal (circumcision of the heart) circumcision; therefore, without faith in Yeshua Messiah, the reality behind the symbol of circumcision becomes meaningless.



YHVH had instituted **circumcision** as **the** great **sign of the covenant** with **Abraham** and **his descendants**, declaring that **every male among you who is eight days old is to be circumcised (Genesis 17:10-12).** Centuries later, when **Moshe** failed to **circumcise** one of his sons, his wife, **Zipporah**, performed the rite

herself, thereby protecting **Moses** from divine wrath (see the commentary on **Exodus, to see link click Az – Surely You are a Bridegroom of Blood to Me**). No doubt this surgery was symbolic of the sinfulness of man that was passed from one generation to another. The very procreative organ needed to be cleansed of a covering. Therefore, man, at the very center of his nature, is sinful and needs cleansing of **the heart**. This graphic symbol of the need for removing sin became the sign of being **a Jew**. But as important as **circumcision** is as an act of obedience to **ADONAI,** and as a reminder to **Jews** of **their** covenant relationship with **Him**, the rite, in and of itself, has no **spiritual** power.[61]

On the one hand, for **the Jew**, **Paul** says that **circumcision is indeed of value if you do what Torah says** and **circumcise** your **heart**. **But, if you are Jewish,** and **a transgressor of Torah, your circumcision has become uncircumcision (2:25)!** Because **he** would have thrown away everything that **his Jewishness** stands for. By despising **YHVH** and **His Torah he** would have cut **himself** off from the promises of **Abraham** and from **his people**, **spiritually**, even though biological and cultural attachments remain. The reality behind the symbol of **circumcision** would have departed.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, A real and loving relationship with **God** – **the King of kings** and **Sovereign** over all the universe – how wonderful! Yet the reality of the relationship is not merely a legal arrangement. **A loving heart** is at the essence of our relationship with **You**, dear **God**. As **Yeshua** said, **"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Torah?" And He said to him: You shall love ADONAI your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-38).***

***You** presented the gift of relationship to all who choose to **love** and follow **You**. **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves – it is the gift of God. It is not based on deeds, so that no one may boast** (**Ephesians 2:8-9).** How we praise **You** that **You** are our sure hope **(Ephesians 1:12)** and **You** allow us to love **You** back by serving and praising **You**. **For we are His workmanship – created in Messiah Yeshua for good deeds, which God prepared beforehand so we might walk in them (Ephesians 2:10).** It is a joy to serve **You**. In Holy **Yeshua's** name and **His** power of resurrection. Amen*

If the **Jew** claimed exemption on the basis of being **circumcised**, then the logical

conclusion would be that no **Jew** would ever be condemned. **In essence some rabbis concluded that. A famous line in the Oral Law** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei – The Oral Law**) **says, "all Isra'el will have a share in the world to come (Sanhedrin 11:1)" For a while rabbis taught that anyone who was a Jew will never go to hell no matter what they have done. But they changed their teaching because of the Messianic Jews. They didn't want Messianic Jews, who were also circumcised, to end up in heaven merely because they were Jews, so they changed their teaching. They now say that when a Messianic Jew dies, an angel comes and puts the foreskin back on, therefore the Messianic Jew becomes uncircumcised and goes to hell.**

But the prophets had made it clear that mere **physical circumcision** had no **spiritual** power or benefit. **The days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh – Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all who live in the wilderness in distant places** (apparently these nations practiced **circumcision**)**. Though physically circumcised, they are spiritually uncircumcised, their hearts being closed to the understanding and love of God and His teachings. For all the** Gentile **nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Isra'el is uncircumcised in heart (9:25-26).** While all those Gentile **nations** at some point practiced **physical circumcision**, nevertheless, **they** had remained **uncircumcised** at **heart**. Unfortunately, so did **Judah**. This emphasized again that Judah had deteriorated to the same level as the Gentiles and were no more **circumcised spiritually** than **they** were. Disobedience to **God** put **the circumcised Israelites** in the same category of judgment as **the uncircumcised** Gentiles. As a result, this was a **near historical future** prophecy about the fall of Jerusalem (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gb – The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC**).

So, despite the fact that in **Genesis 17 God** gave **the Jews** the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, in **Deuteronomy 30:1-10 ADONAI** also talks about having **a circumcised heart** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Fp – Restoration After Repentance**). All the customs of Judaism, as we know, point to a greater **spiritual** truth. And that is what **Paul** is trying to get **the Jews** in **Rome** to see here is that **they** needed to have **the circumcised** spirit. Today we would call **them** Messianic **Jews**.

But on the other hand, **Paul** continues, **if an uncircumcised man,** a Gentile,

keeps the righteous requirements of the Torah, won't his physical uncircumcision be counted as spiritual circumcision, or **circumcision of the heart (2:26). He** will then become heir to the promises of the covenant with **Abraham** because **he** would be **grafted in (11:17)**.[62]

Indeed, the man who is physically uncircumcised, that is, a Gentile, **but obeys the Torah,** and **circumcises his heart (Deuteronomy 30:6),** then **ADONAI** will look on **him** just as favorably as **He** looks at a **circumcised Jew** – counting the believing Gentile's **uncircumcision** as if it were true **circumcision**. **Paul's** next devastating blow to **the Jew** who had false trust in **his Jewish** privileges, was the declaration that the obedient Gentile, who is **physically uncircumcised** but has **a circumcised heart**, not only pleases **YHVH**, but **will stand as a judgment on Jews** with **uncircumcised hearts who have had a b'rit-milah** (a **circumcision** ceremony), **and have Torah written out – but violate it (2:27)!** It is not that such Gentiles will perform the actual **judgment**, which is **Yeshua's** right alone **(John 5:22)**, but rather that **their** faithful obedience will stand as a rebuke to the faithless disobedience of the hypocritical **Jews**.

Who is a Jew? As Rabbi Barry Rubin states in the Complete Jewish Study Bible, in traditional Judaism, one is either a **Jew** by birth or by choice. For a **Jew** by birth, there are two basic positions: matrilineal (that is, a person is **Jewish** if born from a **Jewish** mother) and patrilineal (born of a **Jewish** father). Orthodox and Conservative **Judaism** hold to a matrilineal position. In Reform and Reconstructionist **Judaism**, a bi-lineal approach is used, acknowledging both matrilineal and patrilineal descent. Messianic **Judaism** also uses the bi-lineal approach. A **Jew** by choice is a person not born a **Jew** who freely chooses to become a **Jew** through conversion (a proselyte). This person is called a *ger* (convert).

Generally, all of **Judaism** traces its origin to **Abraham**, who was called **a Hebrew (Genesis 14:13)**. The etymology of the word *Jew* goes back to the word **Y'hudah** (**Judah**), one of the twelve sons of Jacob, or the twelve tribes of **Isra'el**. The root **Hebrew** meaning of the word *Jew* (**Y'hudah**) means *to praise*. At first, the term **Jew** came to mean anyone from the tribe of **Y'hudah**. Eventually, however, it was extended to refer to **Israelites** of all tribes, not just the descendants of **Y'hudah**.

But what about **Romans 2:28-29**? Was **Paul** redefining the term **Jew** to mean only **spiritually**, and thereby rejecting **the physical**? On the surface it seems so, but when the text is considered with other related verses, it is clear that **his** purpose

was to remind those who were **Jews** not to rely upon **the physical** signs of **circumcision**, **their Jewishness**, to be justified before **ADONAI**, but to rely upon **the circumcision of the heart** which leads to true *praise*.[63]

Therefore, because the name *Jew* comes from *Y'hudah*, which means *to praise*, **Paul** is basically saying, "Live up to your name!" **Such a one** is not a *God-praiser* in any sense and will exclude **him** from the promises **He** made to **the Jewish people (Chapters 9-11)**. However, if **he** repents, gives up **his** pride, **circumcises his heart**, and comes to acknowledge **Yeshua** as **his Savior, Lord** and **Messiah**, then **he** will be **grafted back into his own olive tree (11:24).** But in **his** present state, **he** is merely a branch cut off from the tree, hence not **a Jew (11:23-24)**.

Now **Paul** wraps up **his** discussion of **Torah** and **circumcision**. **For the real Jew, contrary to Pharisaic theology, is not merely Jewish outwardly: true circumcision is not only external and physical. On the contrary, the real Jew** (*one who praises ADONAI*) **is one inwardly, and true circumcision is of the heart, spiritual, not** merely **physical (2:28).**

Paul will answer the question, "Has the gospel nullified God's promises to Isra'el," in Chapters 9, 10 and 11.

So that his praise (meaning *his Judaism*) **comes not from other people but from God (2:29).** Therefore, **the praise** is reciprocal; **ADONAI praises** such **a Jew** with **a circumcised heart**. This is why some **Jews** like to call themselves "completed **Jews**," because they have received both types of **circumcision**, **outward** and **inward**. Where the **outward circumcision** identifies their **Jewishness**, it is their **inward circumcision** that saves them.

This verse does not teach that everyone who becomes a believer becomes **a spiritual Jew**, because the context here is with **Jews**, not Gentiles. **Jews** who believe are **spiritual Jews**, and Gentiles who believe are **spiritual** Gentiles.

Where does this leave **the Jewish** women? Some people interpret this as the Bible being anti-women. But does that lack of a sign for women mean that **God** views them to be less valuable than the men in **His** eyes? Absolutely not! Throughout the entire Bible, **YHVH** does nothing but elevate that status of women. **In fact, Judaism teaches that the men are more accountable than the women.** This is echoed in the relationship between husbands and wives in the B'rit Chadashah (see the commentary on **Genesis Lv – I Do Not Permit a Woman to Teach or**

Have Authority Over a Man, She Must Be Silent).[64]