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Romans

...but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

Romans 2:29

In our evaluation of verse 28, the question was asked, "Is a person a Jew if they are circumcised in the heart, but not of the line of Israel." The answer is "no." This will be explored in detail in the chapters ahead as well as in the other epistles, however, one could come to this conclusion if they were to take verses such as verse 29 out of context. Paul says that "he is a Jew who is one inwardly." Does this in any way imply that gentiles are included in this statement? No. It simply means that a person born of the line of Israel who only outwardly reflects his nature is not counted as a true Jew. He must have an inward reflection as well.

Next Paul says that "circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter." What this means is that having the sign of circumcision in the flesh, but not having the heart for what this means to God is of no value. Circumcision in the Spirit means that the Jew is internally convicted of his state and doesn't live only by "the letter." This term, "not in the letter," is speaking of living by the precepts of the law without caring about the intent behind those precepts. Paul speaks of the Spirit and the letter in 2 Corinthians 3:1-6 -

"Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an

epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

The "letter" is the law which actually condemns all people because they can never meet the demands of the law. The Spirit is the Holy Spirit who gives the inner testimony of God and which frees one from the condemnation of the law. This isn't just a New Testament concept. David, who failed to meet the demands of the law, demonstrated his understanding of the letter versus the Spirit -

"Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." Psalm 51:11

David knew that without the Spirit, there was only separation from God's presence. It's good to note that since Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, a believer cannot lose the Holy Spirit. Christ fulfilled the law and therefore its demands are met in those who call on Him.

Having discerned these things, the same question needs to be asked for the second portion of today's verse. Paul says that "circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter." Does this in any way imply that gentiles are included in this statement? Again, the answer is "No." Just because a gentile may be circumcised in the heart and have the Spirit in no way implies that they are now Jews.

To understand this, let's use the concept of being a patriot. We could say, "Being a patriot is an inward allegiance to the nation and not merely being a citizen of the United States." There are many people who are citizens of the United States, but not all of them have an inward allegiance to the nation. In fact, many citizens

have great animosity towards their country; they are not patriots. Therefore, being a patriot, like being a Jew, is not based on externals, but internals.

Now let's consider those who have a great allegiance to the United States, but they are not citizens. Are they patriots? No. Because they are not citizens, they are not considered patriots. There were many foreigners who came to the aid of the patriots during the revolutionary war, who believed in the cause of the war, and who even died in support of America, and yet they were not considered patriots. Likewise, gentiles are not Jews simply because they bear circumcision of the heart and have the Spirit.

This is an immensely important issue, because if one believes he is a Jew when he isn't, then his theology is garbled and confused. This confusion comes from misapplying verses such as today's and other verses such as Galatians 3:28 which says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Paul says "there is neither Jew nor Greek" which leads people to say that we are all the same; the Christians are now the Jews. But this is entirely wrong and is verifiable by the same verse. Paul says also that "there is neither male nor female." However, it's obvious that there are still males and there are still females. Nothing has changed. The very fact that Paul states "Jew" and "Greek" implies that there is, in fact, a difference just as by stating "male" and "female" implies there is a difference. Paul is speaking in a spiritual context - "We are all one in Christ." Not that we are not distinctive entities in Christ.

Finally in verse 29, Paul says, "whose praise is not from men but from God." The term "Jew" comes from the name "Judah" which means "praise." Therefore, Paul is making a pun on the term. He is saying that being a Jew is not something that comes from man (meaning ancestry) but it comes from God. In other words, not all Jews are truly Jews. Only those who live by God's Spirit are the true Jews. Again, as has been noted twice already, this in no way implies that a gentile who has received God's Spirit is now a Jew. It only negates those of the line of Israel who don't qualify.

What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?

Romans 3:1

The obvious question which arises from Paul's words in the previous verses is, if all of this is true, then "what advantage has the Jew." If the Jew has the law and no one is able to fully meet the law thus making their circumcision as uncircumcision (2:25), then "what is the profit of circumcision?" This thinking is similar to several questions asked in Ecclesiastes, such as Ecclesiastes 6:8 -

For what more has the wise man than the fool?
What does the poor man have,
Who knows how to walk before the living?

If the wise man ends up in the same box six feet under the ground that the fool and the poor man go to, then what good is all the wise man's wisdom? There must be a reason for being wise beyond our temporary life or it would be better to live foolishly and carelessly. Likewise, there must be some value in being a Jew beyond the law or it would be better to not be a Jew at all.

Paul will give an immediate answer here in verse 3:2 and then he will treat the situation concerning the Jews in detail in chapters 9-11. It's important to note in today's question that it confirms the issue raised and answered in the last verses of the previous chapter - "Are those gentiles who are "circumcised in the heart" now Jews? If they were, Paul wouldn't even ask the question in verse 3:1, nor would he then answer it. The Bible reveals these truths concerning the state of God's people -

1) Anyone who is a faithful believer is a spiritual descendant of Abraham.

- 1) 2) Israel comprises those faithful Jews who are obedient sons of Jacob; they are of his physical descent.
- 2) The church is anyone who has called on Jesus, whether from Israel or from outside of Israel.
- 3) The church did not replace Israel, although we are grafted into their spiritual heritage.

Life application: God's wisdom is displayed in how He is working out His plan of redemption. Our unfaithfulness in no way negates God's faithfulness and so we should remember the Jewish people in our daily prayers. God selected them for His reasons and His greatness is being demonstrated through them. Therefore, our prayers for them will reflect an understanding of this and a desire for Him to receive the glory He is due.

Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God. Romans 3:2

In response to the question of 3:1 (What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?) Paul answers with an exclamatory sentence... "Much in every way!" In every way, in all respects, and from all sides, the benefits are evident. The first being "Chiefly..." that "...to them were committed the oracles of God." Paul's word translated "chiefly" can be thought of as "in principle advantage."

Every other aspect of being a Jew or bearing the sign of circumcision is to be found within this concept - that they are the stewards of God's word. If for no other reason than this, and outside of ushering in the Messiah Himself, it is the most important and greatest honor that could be bestowed upon a group of people. These oracles, meaning the entire canon of the Old Testament which were recorded prior to Paul's time, contain God's special revelation of Himself. They show His acts in creation; they show why the world is in the state it is in;

they show His plan of righting every wrong and restoring rightness to a fallen world.

In the process of accomplishing these things, these oracles show that He chose a select group of people in which to display His very heart; His intolerance at sin; His grace, mercy, and forgiveness; His longsuffering; etc. They also show His wisdom in the selection because no other group of people has been so minutely diligent in the tender care and protection of these oracles. Even if some generations lost them (2 Kings 22:8), a previous generation had secured them in a place where they could be found. And this is not only the case within the Bible, but outside of it as well.

The Dead Sea scrolls, dating to approximately 250BC, were exactly copied and stored in an environment where they would last an extremely long period. When they were discovered, they showed that the word had been maintained in an exceedingly careful manner throughout the ages. Any error or intentional manipulation since the time of Christ could now be compared and corrected if necessary, or if none, there would be a validation of the long-copied and carefully protected oracles.

As you can see, even the environment in which the Jew lived, the land granted to them by God, is a testimony to being a Jew. Why? Because the land has the right properties, such as humidity, temperature, isolation, etc, to protect the ancient scrolls. It also became mostly unsuitable for habitation during the exile of the people, thus preserving the archaeological record which can now substantiate the narratives found within the oracles. Being a Jew and a member of the group who has carefully kept circumcision as a right for many millennia is one of the most astonishing aspects of the wisdom of God and the validation of His word. The two are tied together and inseparable.

This leaves an important question to be answered, what about the New Testament? Although this couldn't be answered completely in 10 doctoral dissertations, what should be noted is that what occurs in New Testament times was anticipated in the Old Testament. Further, there are many Old Testament promises (as well as New) which are yet to be fulfilled for the Jewish people as they dwell in the Land of Israel. This, if no other concept, tells us that Israel was set aside, not cast away. God's plans and purposes for His covenant people will come to pass exactly as prophesied. Stand back and watch God's amazing plans unfold, quite possibly in your own lifetime and before your very eyes.

Life application: The immense wisdom of God is displayed in His word, in His people, and in His land for the protection and care of His plan for the people of the world. It is true that the Jew rejected Christ, but this was known by God before it occurred and therefore He set aside these people during the dispensation of grace; the Church Age. But this era is ending and the times of the fulfillment of God's plan in and through the people of Israel is coming. Pray for the people of Israel, support the people of Israel, and stand with the people of Israel. God's hand is upon them and ours should be as well.