

# 1 Corinthians 7:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised.

## Analysis

**Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised**—the procedure epispasthō (ἐπισπάσθω, "draw over the foreskin") refers to a surgical operation some Hellenized Jews underwent to hide circumcision and appear Greek. This was considered apostasy. Paul prohibits this despite earlier arguing circumcision is irrelevant (Galatians 5:6; 6:15).

Conversely, **Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised**. Gentile converts should not adopt Jewish identity markers thinking it gains spiritual advantage. This directly addresses Judaizers who insisted Gentile Christians be circumcised for salvation (Acts 15; Galatians 2-3). Paul's point: ethnic and cultural identity don't determine standing before God.

Paul's teaching liberates both Jews and Gentiles: Jews need not abandon Jewish identity, Gentiles need not adopt it. The gospel transcends ethnic markers. This application of "remain as called" (v. 17) prevents converts from thinking spiritual transformation requires cultural transformation. Identity in Christ supersedes ethnic identity without erasing it.

## Historical Context

Hellenistic culture prized the nude male form, making circumcision socially embarrassing for Jews in gymnasiums and baths. Some Jewish men underwent

epispasm to appear Greek. Conversely, Judaizers insisted Gentile converts be circumcised (Acts 15:1). Paul declares both procedures spiritually irrelevant under the new covenant.

## Related Passages

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**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

## Study Questions

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1. Why would Jewish Christians seek to reverse circumcision, and why does Paul forbid it?
2. How does Paul's teaching that circumcision is irrelevant relate to his broader principle of remaining in one's calling?
3. What modern equivalents exist where Christians wrongly think changing cultural identity markers affects spiritual status?

## Interlinear Text

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περιτεμνέσθω	τις	ἐκλήθη	μὴ	ἐπισπάσθω·	ἐν
<b>be circumcised</b>	<b>any</b>	<b>Is</b>	<b>not</b>	<b>become uncircumcised</b>	<b>in</b>
G4059	G5100	G2564	G3361	G1986	G1722

ἀκροβυστία	τις	ἐκλήθη	μὴ	περιτεμνέσθω
<b>uncircumcision</b>	<b>any</b>	<b>Is</b>	<b>not</b>	<b>be circumcised</b>
G203	G5100	G2564	G3361	G4059

## Additional Cross-References

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**Acts 15:5** (Parallel theme): But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

**Acts 15:24** (Parallel theme): Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:

**Acts 15:19** (Parallel theme): Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

**Acts 15:28** (Parallel theme): For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

**Colossians 3:11** (Parallel theme): Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.