

Romans 2:28

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

Analysis

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly—οὐ γὰρ ὁ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ Ἰουδαῖός ἐστιν (ou gar ho en tō phanerō Ioudaios estin). Φανερός (phaneros, "visible/manifest/outward") refers to external appearance—ethnic descent, physical circumcision, ritual observance. Paul here redefines Jewishness itself, stripping it from mere ethnicity to spiritual reality. True Ioudaios (Judean/Jew, "praised one") is defined by God's approval, not human pedigree.

Neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh—οὐδὲ ἡ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ ἐν σαρκὶ περιτομή (oude hē en tō phanerō en sarki peritomē). Σὰρξ (sarx, "flesh") emphasizes physical, external aspect. Mere bodily ritual without heart transformation is not true peritomē (circumcision) in God's eyes. This echoes Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6 (circumcise your hearts), Jeremiah 4:4 (circumcise hearts to the LORD), Jeremiah 9:25-26 (Egypt, Judah, all uncircumcised in heart).

This verse devastates Jewish presumption more thoroughly than any previous argument. Paul doesn't merely say circumcision is insufficient; he declares outward circumcision isn't true circumcision at all! God redefines His covenant people from ethnic category to spiritual reality. This anticipates Galatians 3:7, 29 ("they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham") and Philippians 3:3 ("we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit").

Historical Context

Jewish identity was fundamentally ethnic throughout Old Testament and Second Temple periods. Descent from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, marked by circumcision, defined covenant membership. Converts (proselytes) could join through circumcision and Torah observance, but natural-born Jews held privileged status. Paul here revolutionizes this: true Jewishness transcends ethnicity, depending on spiritual reality (faith, heart circumcision). This created massive controversy in early church—Judaizers insisted Gentile Christians be circumcised (Acts 15, Galatians 2-3).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What 'outward' religious markers do I trust in—baptism, church attendance, Christian family—while lacking inward transformation?
2. How does redefining covenant membership from external ritual to heart reality challenge my understanding of who belongs to God's people?
3. In what areas might I be maintaining 'outward' Christian appearance while my heart remains uncircumcised—hard, rebellious, unrepentant?

Interlinear Text

οὐ	γὰρ	ὁ	ἐν	τῷ	φανερῷ	Ἰουδαῖός	ἐστιν	οὐδὲ	ἡ
not	For	G3588	in	G3588	G5318	a Jew	he is	neither	G3588
G3756	G1063		G1722			G2453	G2076	G3761	
ἐν	τῷ	φανερῷ	ἐν	σαρκὶ	περιτομῇ				
in	G3588	G5318	in	the flesh	is that circumcision				
G1722			G1722	G4561	G4061				

Additional Cross-References

Galatians 6:15 (Parallel theme): For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

Matthew 3:9 (Parallel theme): And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Revelation 2:9 (Parallel theme): I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

Psalms 73:1 (Parallel theme): Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.

Jeremiah 9:26 (Parallel theme): Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.

Romans 2:17 (Parallel theme): Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,

John 1:47 (Parallel theme): Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

1 Peter 3:21 (Parallel theme): The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: