

Romans 2:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Analysis

But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly—ἀλλ' ὁ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαῖος (all' ho en tō kryptō Ioudaios). Κρυπτός (kryptos, "hidden/secret/inward") contrasts verse 28's phaneros (outward). True Jewishness exists in the unseen realm of heart and spirit, visible only to God (1 Samuel 16:7, Jeremiah 17:10). This Jew is Ioudaios indeed—one whom God praises (the name's etymology from Judah, "praised").

And circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter—καὶ περιτομὴ καρδίας ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι (kai peritomē kardias en pneumati ou grammati). Καρδία (kardia, "heart") is the seat of moral will and spiritual affection. Ἐν πνεύματι (en pneumi, "in/by the Spirit") could mean human spirit (regenerated inner person) or Holy Spirit (divine agent of transformation). Most likely both: the Holy Spirit circumcises the human spirit, removing the heart's 'foreskin' (deadness to God) and creating capacity to love and obey Him (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Whose praise is not of men, but of God—οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ (hou ho epainos ouk ex anthrōpōn all' ek tou theou). Ἔπαινος (epainos, "praise/approval") plays on Ioudaios (Judah/praise). True Jews receive God's commendation, not human applause. This recalls John 5:44 (seeking glory from one another rather than God) and 12:43 (loving praise of men more than praise of God). Heart circumcision—regeneration by the Spirit—produces lives that glorify God, not self.

Historical Context

Prophets consistently called for heart circumcision: Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, Jeremiah 4:4, 9:25-26, Ezekiel 44:7, 9. However, most Jews interpreted these as metaphors calling for Torah devotion, not replacing physical circumcision. Paul here radicalizes the prophets: heart circumcision IS true circumcision; physical ritual without it is worthless. This becomes foundation for understanding the church as true Israel (Galatians 6:16, Philippians 3:3) and Gentile inclusion without circumcision (Acts 15, Galatians 2-5).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Has my heart been circumcised by the Spirit—has God removed my deadness to Him and given me new affections for His glory?
2. Do I live for human 'praise'—approval, reputation, status—or for God's commendation, even when it costs me human approval?
3. How does understanding true covenant membership as 'inward' and 'of the Spirit' transform my view of salvation, sanctification, and the church?

Interlinear Text

ἀλλ' ὁ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαῖος καὶ περιτομὴ^ἡ
But G3588 in G3588 G2927 he is a Jew and circumcision
G235 G1722 G2453 G2532 G4061

καρδίας ἐν πνεύματι οὐκ γράμματι οὐδὲ ὁ
is that of the heart in the spirit and not in the letter whose G3588
G2588 G1722 G4151 G3756 G1121 G3739

ἔπαινος οὐκ ἐκ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ
praise and not of men But of G3588 God
G1868 G3756 G1537 G444 G235 G1537 G2316

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 30:6 (References God): And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

Deuteronomy 10:16 (Parallel theme): Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

Philippians 3:3 (Spirit): For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Jeremiah 4:4 (Parallel theme): Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

1 Thessalonians 2:4 (References God): But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

1 Corinthians 4:5 (Resurrection): Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

1 Peter 3:4 (Spirit): But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

2 Corinthians 10:18 (Parallel theme): For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.

Romans 7:6 (Spirit): But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

Jeremiah 4:14 (Parallel theme): O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?

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