

Romans 3:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?

Analysis

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?

Paul anticipates the logical objection to his prior arguments (2:25-29). If circumcision is merely external and Jewish identity confers no immunity from judgment, what was the point? The Greek *perisson* (περισσόον, "advantage") and *opheleia* (ὠφέλεια, "profit") are commercial terms—what return on investment did Israel receive?

This diatribe-style question introduces 3:1-8, where Paul addresses six objections to his gospel. Far from dismantling Jewish privilege, he will affirm God's faithfulness to His covenant people (v. 2) while insisting that privilege brings responsibility, not exemption. The question itself reveals the carnal reasoning Paul combats throughout Romans—treating God's grace as a transactional commodity rather than covenant faithfulness.

Historical Context

Written circa AD 57 from Corinth, Romans addresses a mixed congregation of Jewish and Gentile believers experiencing ethnic tensions over the role of Torah observance. Paul's argument would have been provocative: first-century Judaism understood circumcision as the essential covenant sign guaranteeing participation in the age to come. Paul's redefinition of the people of God threatened Jewish Christian identity while simultaneously affirming God's irrevocable promises to Israel.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How do you balance affirming God's unique historical work through Israel with the gospel's demolition of ethnic privilege?
2. What "advantages" in your Christian experience might you wrongly trust as guarantees of standing before God?
3. How does this verse challenge both works-righteousness and cheap grace?

Interlinear Text

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|---------|-------|-------|--------------------------|-------|--------------|-------|-------|-------|
| τίς | οὖν | τὸ | περισσὸν | τοῦ | Ἰουδαίου | ἢ | τίς | ἡ |
| What | then | G3588 | advantage | G3588 | hath the Jew | or | What | G3588 |
| G5101 | G3767 | | G4053 | | G2453 | G2228 | G5101 | |
| ὠφέλεια | τῆς | | περιτομῆς | | | | | |
| profit | G3588 | | is there of circumcision | | | | | |
| G5622 | | | G4061 | | | | | |

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 25:32 (Parallel theme): And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?

Ecclesiastes 6:8 (Parallel theme): For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?

Ecclesiastes 6:11 (Parallel theme): Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better?