

In Romans 2:28-29, Paul explains that a “Jew” is not a true “Jew” until the “*Spirit*” has circumcised his “*heart*.”

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:28-29)

Paul’s point is that the “*heart*” of a church saint is circumcised by “*the Spirit*” (Romans 2:29), a circumcision that occurs in conjunction with the New Testament believer being placed “*in Christ*” (2Corinthians 5:17) through the power of the Holy Spirit (1Corinthians 12:13) subsequent to exercising repentance and faith while depraved (Acts 16:31; Acts 26:18; Romans 10:9-10). Colossians 2:11 verifies this truth:

and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;
(Colossians 2:11)

We must be extremely careful with Romans 2:28-29, for these passages have been misinterpreted by those who view the church as having replaced physical Israel as God’s covenant people. Understanding verses 28-29 in their context is absolutely essential. When Jews or Gentiles exercise repentance and faith during the church age, God makes them members of the body of Christ, the universal church. However, this transformation does not mean that the church is fulfilling God’s unconditional covenants granted to the physical Jewish nation, covenants that we addressed in Romans 1. For example, God promised Abram that he and his physical descendants, the physical Jewish nation, would possess the territory “*From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates*” (Genesis 13:15; 15:18; 17:8). Genesis 26:2-5 and 28:13-15 also verify that the land was given to physical Israel. The Jews will not possess and inhabit this land in its entirety until the Millennium, the one thousand year reign of Christ on the earth (Revelation 20:4, 6). This fulfillment must occur if God is to

remain faithful to His Word. However, many people have misunderstood Romans 2:28-29 and accepted the following error:

Because a true Jew is one who is circumcised inwardly, and since every member of the body of Christ fits this category, God is not obligated to fulfill the unconditional covenants granted to the physical Jewish nation. In fact, God is done with physical Israel and is concerned with the church alone.

How can this conclusion be valid if God is uncompromisingly faithful to His Word? He guaranteed a literal nation a literal land, along with other unconditional promises. He must fulfill these promises if He is the God of truth and faithfulness portrayed in the Scriptures. We will address this subject matter in more detail later.

Make sure to desire the “*praise...from God*” rather than the “*praise...from men*” (Romans 2:29) as you serve this glorious Creator! The dividends reaped from such a mindset are limitless.

Advancing in Romans

Romans 2

Romans 3:1-8

Romans 3:1-8 reveals some of the arguments presented by the Jews who rejected Paul's gospel. These eight verses should be linked to Romans 2:17-29, for Romans 2:17 through 3:8 comprise a complete section, dealing entirely with the Jews. A Jew who rejected Jesus as Messiah considered himself right with Jehovah on three counts: (1) He was a descendent of Abraham, and thereby a Jew (2) He was part of the nation that had received the Law (3) He had been circumcised. As far as the unbelieving Jew in Paul's day was concerned, any or all of the three would suffice. But Paul's gospel stated that man, any man, be he Jew or Gentile, was right with God only if he had, while depraved, repented and received Christ as Savior. One can only imagine the degree to which Paul's Jewish opponents resented his teaching.

The Theology of the Jew who Rejected Paul's Gospel

I, a Jew, believe that Jehovah has chosen/elected every member of the Jewish nation to enter into covenant with Him and be His covenant people.

I am right with Jehovah because I am part of Jehovah's covenant people.

All Jews are descendants of Abraham.

Jehovah commanded that Abraham and his male offspring be circumcised.

This circumcision is an outward sign of a Jew's participation in Jehovah's covenant with Israel. It seals my position in Jehovah's family.

Being a Jew, I am a member of the nation that received the Law, the nation that God chose/elected as a covenant people to belong to Him forever. Jehovah married Israel at the base of Mount Sinai.

Through keeping the commandments of the Law I maintain the covenant that God made with me as a member of the Jewish nation.

Should I fail to obey the Law to the degree that Jehovah desires, and die physically, Jehovah will reincarnate (*gilgul*) me so I (being a soul) can be perfected in another lifetime as I seek more diligently to keep the Law's commands.

Reincarnation has been a factor in Jewish thinking for many centuries. The following quote is from Rabbi Simmons:

There are many Jewish sources dealing with what is popularly called "reincarnation." In Hebrew, it is called "gilgul ha'ne'shamot," literally the recycling or transmigration of souls. This concept can be compared to a flame of one candle lighting another candle. While the essence of the

second flame comes from the first one, the second flame is an independent entity. Still, the new flame contains imperfections inherited from the initial flame, and it is these imperfections that are to be corrected....

Many sources say that a soul has a maximum of three chances in this world. One example given is that the great Talmudic sage Hillel was a reincarnation of the Biblical figure Aaron. The soul only comes into this world in the first place in order to make a spiritual repair. If that is not fulfilled by the end of one's lifetime, then the soul will be sent down once again. The return trip may only be needed for a short time or in a limited way. This in part explains why people are born with handicaps or may live a brief life.¹

Additional quotes from a variety of resources could be cited, but the previous quote is sufficient to understand the influence of the false doctrine of *gilgul* on the minds of Paul's audience. The Jew had much to overcome before accepting Jesus as Messiah. Paul, being a Jew, could understand; he was required to do the same. He remained steadfast while presenting Jesus to his Jewish brethren, although the majority rejected his message.

According to Paul's theology, the Jews could no longer view their Jewishness, the Law, or circumcision as providing a righteous standing before God. Paul had annihilated all of these arguments in Romans 2:17-29. Consequently, their only alternative was to attack Paul's theology. Paul, therefore, addresses the questions he must have faced time after time as he spoke with Jews who resisted the gospel.

Romans 3:1 records two of these questions:

"Then what advantage has the Jew?" "Or what is the benefit of circumcision?" (Romans 3:1)

Paul's Jewish opponents were bewildered to the point of asking: "If what you are teaching is true, does being a Jew carry any advantage at all?" Paul is quick to answer, stating:

Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God. (Romans 3:2)

Paul taught that "Great" advantage is attached to being Jewish and much benefit is associated with circumcision. After all, the Jews "were entrusted with the oracles of God"!

The "oracles of God," also mentioned in Acts 7:37-38, were received by Moses on Mount Sinai. "Oracles" in this case are synonymous with the Law. Romans 1:20 tells that God initially revealed Himself to mankind through creation. That revelation was minor compared to the degree to which He revealed Himself through the Law; an oracle is a divine communication or revelation. Through these "oracles," the Jewish nation had opportunity to know God in a way that had not been provided for the Gentiles. No other nation had received such a revelation. Thus, giving the Jewish nation a distinct advantage.

Most Jews, however, misinterpreted the Law's purpose. Instead of allowing it to reveal their sin and confirm their need for the Savior, they perceived it as an end in itself. In fact, the Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and the Prophets (Isaiah through Malachi) were passionately memorized—but had little impact on their daily living due to sin. This fact is vividly portrayed in Matthew 2:3-6, for the Jewish leaders revealed to Herod the exact location of the Messiah's birth and, at the same time, were directly responsible for Jesus' death (Matthew 27:20). They knew the letter of the Law but did not know the God Who provided the letter.

The Father requires repentance and faith from the depraved (the spiritually unregenerated) prior to delivering them from the Law and awarding them new "*life*" in Christ (read 2Corinthians 3:1-18). Note what 2Corinthians 3:16 states concerning the individual who "*turns to the Lord*" while depraved:

but whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.
(2Corinthians 3:16)

Once a Jew or Gentile "*turns to the Lord,*" the veil that has hindered (yet not totally blinded) his spiritual vision is removed. While depraved, one has ample vision to understand his need for a Savior (Romans 1:20; 2Corinthians 3:16; Galatians 3:24), but the veil prevents one from understanding the deeper things of God—truths which can be easily understood subsequent to salvation/justification.

Comparing Exodus 34:27-35 with 2Corinthians 3:1-18 reveals that the old covenant (Law) is temporary in the life of a believer while the "*new covenant*" is eternal (although the Law itself, being part of "*the word of the Lord,*" "*abides forever*"—1Peter 1:25). Paul uses some intriguing terminology in 2Corinthians 3:6-11 while comparing the old covenant with the new:

who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, how shall the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory. For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory on account of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which fades away was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory. (2Corinthians 3:6-11)

Paul states that "*the letter* [the old covenant] *kills, but the Spirit* [the new covenant] *gives life*" (v.6). He also speaks of "*the ministry of death*" (v.7) and "*condemnation*" (v.9) brought on by the Law (Exodus 20:18-21 and Hebrews 12:18-24 relate very well to this topic). A right standing with God is unattainable through the deeds of the Law, for it was given as a "*tutor to lead us to Christ*" (Galatians 3:24; 1Timothy 1:8-11).

The followers of a discredited theology often misrepresent the views of those who have proven them incorrect, which is exactly how Paul's Jewish opponents responded

once he dismantled their contradictory beliefs. Their arguments, however, did nothing to sway Paul or refute the truth of his gospel.

ⁱ Simmons, Rabbi Shraga. Ask.com Religion and Spirituality>Judaism>Reincarnation.
<http://judaism.about.com/library/3_askrabbi_o/bl_simmons_reincarnation.htm>.