

CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART

Who can be saved? Jew or Gentile? The Scripture really simplifies the world. That's right! The Scripture divides people's ethnicity into two camps, Jew and Gentile. The word "Ethnic" means "race." Which "race" are you? To which "tribe" do you belong? There are many races and tribes in the world. But when it comes to spiritual salvation there is only two. So, spiritually speaking, are you a Jew or a Gentile?

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ.

Sometimes we hear people talking about an "Ethnic group." In other words, all the people in that group have a racial identity that may include a cultural commonality. And there is a fleshly blood-line that intersects or connects those people. The ethnic group may share several physical characteristics that identify them as in that racial group.

When it comes to salvation from sin there are some physical and spiritual characteristics by which a saved person can be identified! That's right! However, salvation does not hinge on an individual's physical characteristics of race, but it does hinge upon a person's spiritual characteristics!

Jesus commissioned His apostles to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15) Jesus wanted every person to hear about the good news of eternal salvation. Jesus commanded a Christian by the name of Ananias to go to a man by the name of Saul of Tarsus. Ananias objected because he knew that Saul was a persecutor of Christians. However Jesus said, **"Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."** (Acts 9:15 ESV)

As Jesus' apostle, that man Saul of Tarsus preached to both Jews and Gentiles, but he always started with the Jews. In fact, in many of his travels Paul by-passed some cities along his route but stopped at cities with a synagogue. (Acts 17:1) When he found a synagogue Paul waited for a Sabbath day when he would go to worship. As a Jewish man He would wait for an invitation to speak and then he would preach the gospel of Christ to the Jewish group. Only after the gospel of Christ was rejected and Paul was ejected from the synagogue would Paul and his helpers turn to the Gentiles. Paul once boldly said to a synagogue "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the

Gentiles." ([Acts 13:46 ESV](#)) Paul then continued his preaching in the community to both Jews and Gentiles on the streets or in the homes of believers.

One of the continuous battles that Paul had to fight was racism. Among Jewish believers there was the idea that in order to be saved Gentile men had to be physically circumcised. In other words, in order to be a true Christian a person must cease being a physical Gentile and physically become a Jew. Some of Paul's letters deal with this falsehood. However, the Jewish believers who spread that false teaching about circumcision did not stop at circumcision. They taught that believing Gentiles and believing Jews could justify God's forgiveness of their sins by keeping the ceremonial Law of Moses.

The ceremonial Law of Moses included such calendar items as Sabbath-day worship and keeping the feast days of the Jewish calendar. It also included Jewish food laws. But Paul objected to this teaching, he wrote, "Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. *[Furthermore Paul commanded]* "Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God."

[\(Colossians 2:16-19 ESV\)](#)

You see, these works of the Law of Moses does NOT justify God's grace. The crucifixion of God's Son on behalf of human sin justifies God's forgiveness. Believers in the life and action of Jesus Christ can receive this sweet forgiveness by repentance, confession of faith, and baptism into Christ. These obedient believers can then work out their salvation in their daily living. As Paul put it, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." ([Philippians 2:12-13 ESV](#))

Now it is obvious that Jewish believers in Christ had some advantages over Gentile believers. That's right! Jewish believers received some value because of their exposure to God's laws of behavior, God's morality. For instance, Jewish believers were already schooled in God's "Ten Commandments" and the rest of God's moral commandments to mankind.

Paul admitted to Jewish believers that "Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So,

if a man who is uncircumcised [*a Gentile*] keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. **For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.** His praise is not from man but from God." ([Romans 2:25-29 ESV](#)) You see, in the matter of salvation, your physical ethnicity means nothing, but your spiritual ethnicity is everything!

Paul put it this way in his letter to the Colossians: "In him [*in Christ*] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead." ([Colossians 2:9-12 ESV](#)) You see, there is a "circumcision made without hands." The death of Christ was his spiritual circumcision, and when we believed in Him and repented, died to ourselves, and were buried with Christ in baptism, we were raised from the watery grave with Christ, arising from a spiritual death (a spiritual circumcisiion) in order to live a new life.

We arise with Christ in order to rejoice in this newness of life that God has granted by His grace. Paul described this new life this way in Colossians, chapter 3: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."

"Here there is not Gentile and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another,

forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

"And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to [peace] indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:1-17 ESV)

In God's Judgment Day Jesus Christ, the Judge, will be concerned about one circumcision, and that's the "circumcision made without hands." Jesus' apostle Paul speaks of that day this way: "We make it our aim to please him [Christ]. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." (2 Corinthians 5:9-10 ESV) Jesus told His apostle John that "All the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works." (Revelation 2:23 ESV)

You see, the circumcision made without hands is a circumcision of the heart. Have you had such a change of heart? Have you been converted by the hearing of the Gospel of Christ? Jesus paid your penalty so that when you come before Him in Judgment you will find forgiveness of your evil deeds and all that will be left are your good deeds. Upon the basis of your works then you will be judged! The Bible teaches this over and over again.

Jesus once said, "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:33-37 ESV) On Judgment Day, what will you confess?

Solomon wrote, "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 NIV)

Paul once wrote, "My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time;

wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God." (1 Corinthians 4:4-5 NIV) What about your conscience? Has your heart been circumcised, cutting out the old self of sin? Have you been renewed with the teaching of God? Have you come to believe that Christ is the answer for your eternity? Jesus Christ is giving you and the world an opportunity for eternal life! Will you take hold of the opportunity?

Seek out a church of Christ near you. They can help you obey and follow Jesus Christ.