

In Philippians 3:1-3 (NKJV), the Apostle Paul writes:

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the mutilation! For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

In this passage, Paul is warning the believers in Philippi – primarily Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians – about a group known as the Judaizers. These were Jews who taught that in order to be truly saved, Gentile Christians needed to obey the Law of Moses, including physical circumcision. Paul refers to their insistence on circumcision as “mutilation” (Greek: *katatomē*) – a sharp rebuke implying that this ritual had become nothing more than meaningless cutting of the flesh when separated from genuine faith.

Old Testament Background: The Covenant of Circumcision

Under the Old Covenant, circumcision was commanded by God as

a physical sign of His covenant with Abraham and his descendants:

Genesis 17:10-11 (NKJV)

“This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.”

This practice became a cornerstone of Jewish identity and religious life. However, even in the Old Testament, God hinted that true circumcision was spiritual:

Deuteronomy 10:16 (NKJV)

“Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.”

Jeremiah 4:4 (NKJV)

“Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts...”

New Covenant Fulfillment: Circumcision of the Heart

With the coming of Christ, the requirement for physical circumcision was fulfilled and replaced by spiritual transformation through the Holy Spirit. Paul explains that those who are truly God’s people are not marked by external rituals but by inward change:

Romans 2:28-29 (NKJV)

“For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter...”

This inner transformation is what the Bible calls being “born again” a spiritual rebirth through faith in Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

John 3:3,5 (NKJV)

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

Titus 3:5 (NKJV)

“...according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.”

Paul’s Strong Opposition to Legalism

Paul continually warned that relying on the flesh – including rituals like circumcision – undermines the gospel of grace. Salvation is by faith alone in Christ, not by works of the law:

Galatians 5:2-4 (NKJV)

“Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing... You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have

fallen from grace.”

Galatians 6:15 (NKJV)

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.”

In other words, what matters is not whether someone is circumcised in the body, but whether they have been made new by the Holy Spirit.

True Christianity: Life in the Spirit

Those who belong to Christ are recognized not by outward signs, but by the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives:

Romans 8:9 (NKJV)

“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.”

Therefore, spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of sin and the old nature is done by the Holy Spirit, not by human hands:

Colossians 2:11-12 (NKJV)

“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh... buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith...”

Conclusion: Be Born Again

Jesus taught that unless a person is born again, they cannot enter the Kingdom of God. This involves:

1. Believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
2. Repenting of sin.
3. Being baptized in water (by immersion) in Jesus’ name.

4. Receiving the Holy Spirit, who renews the heart and seals the believer as God’s child.

This is the spiritual circumcision that God accepts.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

Maranatha!

(Our Lord comes!)

Feel free to share this message of truth with others so they too may understand the power of the new birth through Christ.

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Who Are the People That “Mutilate Themselves”? (Philippians 3:1–3)

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