

Romans 2:25-29 (NKJV)
Rom 2:25 For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.
26 Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?
27 And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?

1

Rom 2:28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;
29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

2

- Evangelical Christianity predominantly interprets the first four chapters of Romans as soteriological, meaning Paul is talking about matters of initial salvation
- I disagree with that interpretation, for it is not Scriptural, but theological – driven by the Reformers

3

- Rightly Dividing the Book of Romans**
1. Paul directs this letter to the BELIEVERS at Rome – both Jews and Gentiles
 2. His ultimate purpose is to dispel the disunity and division within the church which has largely fallen out along ethnic lines – Jews vs. Gentiles (and in particular, Greeks, who were the sophisticated subset of Gentiles, as opposed to the barbarians)

4

- Rightly Dividing the Book of Romans**
3. Paul's GOSPEL of SALVATION in 1:16 is the good news that believers can be sanctified, set apart unto holiness, and if they continue on this pathway throughout life, they can inherit rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ

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- Rightly Dividing the Book of Romans**
4. Paul's Gospel reveals two things:
 - a) 1:17 – God's righteousness – upon those believers who progress from initial faith (regeneration) to continuing faith (sanctification)
 - God justifies (declares righteous) those believers who are living righteously, producing faith-filled works
 - b) 1:18-32 – God's wrath – upon those believers who live unrighteously

6

Rightly Dividing the Book of Romans

- 5. Paul takes the Jewish believers to task in chapter 2, because of their condescending attitude toward the Gentiles**
- The Jews, who were in outward conformity to the OT legal requirements, thought they were accepted by God
 - But Paul points out they were just as guilty as the Gentiles, because although they did not commit the so-called “big” sins, they were guilty of many of the other sins listed in ch. 1

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Rightly Dividing the Book of Romans

- 6. Paul warns that God will judge all believers according to their deeds (works):**
- Those who patiently continue in doing good will inherit the rewards of age-lasting life, glory, honor, peace, and incorruption (2:7, 10)
 - In contrast, those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but unrighteousness, will be repaid with indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish (2:8-9)

8

- Paul emphasizes that God judges impartially; He does not show favoritism to Jews simply because they are His covenant people (2:11)
- Those who sin *without law* (Gentiles) will perish (lose their soul), as well as those who sin *in the law* (Jews) (2:12)
- God justifies those Jewish believers who are truly obedient to the law, not merely hearers of the law (2:13)

9

- God also justifies those Gentile believers who are righteous, even though they don't have the law, seeing that God has given a conscience to all men, and believers have a special advantage, for they have the law written on their hearts (2:14-15)

10

- Romans 2:25-29 is the critical pivot point in the book of Romans for understanding chapters 3-4
- Paul continues his rebuke of the Jewish believers who think they are accepted by God – despite their sinning – because they are circumcised, which is the symbol of being Jewish and God's covenant people

11

Gen 17:9 God said to Abraham: “As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations.

10-11 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 it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you.

13 He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

12

Gen 17:14 And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised ... that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.”

- Circumcision of the males was the indispensable requirement for being Jewish, for being God’s covenant people
- Those who refused to circumcise were excommunicated from Israel and from the covenant with Jehovah – and that was a very serious thing indeed

13

Commentator James Dunn:

This sense of circumcision’s importance had been strengthened in the Hellenistic period [323 BC—32 BC] by way of reaction to Hellenism’s distaste for the rite, and ever since the Maccabees, circumcision had been seen as an absolutely essential expression of Israel’s national identity and religion.

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Commentator James Dunn (cont’d):

Those listening to Paul’s letter would thus recognize the connection of thought without difficulty: circumcision was fundamental to the typical Jew’s self-understanding, the mark of his religious distinctiveness, the badge of national privilege, the seal of God’s covenant favor to Israel his chosen people.

15

4 Earth-Shattering Truths for the Jewish Believers

1. If you are a lawbreaker, then your circumcision is nullified

Rom 2:25 For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

- Paul declares that those Jewish believers who live disobediently to the law (i.e., the moral aspects of the law) have essentially identified as non-Jews, non-circumcised

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- That’s radical! Because it means they are no longer accepted as God’s covenant people
- The Jews never imagined their breaking of the law would nullify God’s covenant with them, as long as they were circumcised
- But Paul arrests their attention with this new revelation
- Those Jews who continue in sinfulness – even the sins they consider “lesser” in offense – are no different than the uncircumcised Gentiles toward whom they have been critical and condescending!

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4 Earth-Shattering Truths for the Jewish Believers

2. If an uncircumcised Gentile keeps the righteous requirements of the law, he will be considered circumcised in God’s eyes

Rom 2:26 Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?

- If uncircumcised Gentiles live righteously – by obeying God’s moral commands – they are counted as circumcised in God’s eyes, that is, under the covenant and accepted

18

Commentator James Dunn:

The clear implication of Paul's teaching: that in order to become a full member of the covenant, a full participator in the blessings God had promised to the people of Israel, it was not necessary to be circumcised.

- Think of it! Any believer – Jew or Gentile – who lives righteously, in accordance with the law's righteous demands, is justified in God's eyes and stands to inherit the rewards of age-lasting life, glory, honor, peace, and incorruption – that is glorious!

19

"the righteous requirements of the law"

- This term is absolutely essential to understand, for it marks a turning point in Jewish understanding of the law
- Paul teaches, not just here in Romans, but also in his other epistles, that the ritual aspects of the law are now defunct because of Christ

20

Col 2:11-14 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements [KJV: ordinances] that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

21

Then Paul adds:

Col 2:16-17 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

- In Colossians Paul nullifies rituals for Jewish believers, such as observing the feasts and sabbaths
- In Galatians Paul nullifies rituals such as dietary laws when rebuking Peter for not eating with the Gentiles when the Jews from Jerusalem showed up

22

- In Romans Paul nullifies rituals such as circumcision
- Ritualistic laws are NOT required for sanctification, for either Jewish or Gentile believers – those who are IN CHRIST – (including all the rituals in the Mosaic law, things such as laws regarding ceremonial uncleanness, leprosy, etc.)
- God wants His children to observe His moral laws, which are not merely for Jews, but for all mankind –
- Jesus announced to the Jews:

23

Luke 16:16 "The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it."

- In other words, the era of the Mosaic law officially ended when John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus arrived
- From that point forward, the emphasis would be on the kingdom of heaven (New Jerusalem) and how to qualify for inheritance in it, which is NOT by keeping the ritualistic aspects of the Mosaic law, but by keeping the moral law of God

24

Jesus summarized the moral law of God (the ten commandments) in two simple commands:

Matt 22:37-38 Jesus said ... "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.

Matt 22:39 And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Matt 22:40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

25

Jesus later elevated to a higher standard:

John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

- Immediately following His teaching about the vine and branches, which is about believers remaining in fellowship with God, Jesus said:

John 15:8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

26

John 15:9 As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

11 These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

27

- Notice Jesus doesn't mention anything about observing ritualistic aspects of the law, such as circumcision or dietary laws or feast days or sabbaths!

- Remember when the rich, young ruler came to Jesus asking how he could inherit eternal (i.e., age-lasting) life? What did Jesus say to the man?

Mark 10:17 Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

28

Mark 10:18-19 So Jesus said to him ... "You know the commandments: do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and your mother."

Mark 10:20-21 And he answered and said to Him, "Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth." Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

29

22 But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

- The rich man apparently struggled with coveting
- That was his big sin, thus he would need to find victory over that sin in order to inherit a place of ruling in the kingdom of the heavens
- Notice Jesus doesn't say anything about observing ritualistic aspects of the law, such as circumcision or dietary laws or feast days or sabbaths

30

James puts it this way in his epistle to the Jews who had scattered in the diaspora:

Jas 2:8-9 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

31

Jas 2:11 For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

12 So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.

- James refers to it as the *royal law* and the *law of liberty*
- Just like Christ's teaching, James says nothing about observing ritualistic aspects of the law, such as circumcision or dietary laws or feast days or sabbaths

32

Paul puts it this way later in Romans:

Rom 13:8b He who loves another has fulfilled the law. (see also Gal. 5:14)

9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

33

- Just as in the teachings of Jesus and James, Paul says nothing about observing ritualistic aspects of the law, such as circumcision or dietary laws or feast days or sabbaths
- So what are the righteous requirements of the law which must be observed by a child of God if he or she would be sanctified unto maturity and qualified to inherit rewards at the JSC?
- They are the moral commands of God, which transcend time and ethnicity – the opposites of the sins listed in Romans 1:18-32

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- The Mosaic law is NOT applicable to believers – those who are "in Christ" – but we are, nevertheless, obligated to keep God's moral law – call it the royal law ... the law of liberty ... the law of Christ ... the law of love
- Now that you are in Christ, the moral law of God is written in your heart (Rom. 2:15)
- It seems that God gives to believers NOW what He promises to Israel in the New Covenant, which will officially be given to Israel at the end of the Tribulation when they repent of national sins and embrace Jesus as Messiah

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Ezek 36:26-27 I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Jer 31:33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

36

- While these are promises for future Israel, the same essentially happens when anyone believes on Jesus for the gift of eternal life
- We become regenerated; old things pass away, all things become new; we are henceforth designated as being “in Christ” – and the law is written on our hearts (Rom. 2:15) – regardless of national ethnicity
- Jews and Gentiles who are “in Christ” are the one new man in Christ

37

Eph 2:14-16 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

- In Christ, there are no Jews or Gentiles, but simply “Christians” – this is what the disunited believers at Rome need to grasp

38

- Key to resolving the disunity is for the Jewish believers to see they are now dead to the ritual aspects of the law through Christ

Rom 7:4 Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God.

- Evident from the overall context of Romans is that Paul abrogates the Mosaic rituals, but NOT the moral law of God, which is based on the character of God and transcends time

39

Rom 2:26 Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?

- Remember that Paul is talking to Jewish believers, and he shocks them by claiming:
- When a Gentile keeps the righteous requirements of the law (i.e., the moral law of God), he is counted by God as righteous and, therefore, as if he were circumcised, having entered into a favored relationship with God

40

- We now come to the crux of the matter, the pinnacle of application

Rom 8:4 that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- Are we obligated to fulfill *the righteous requirement of the law*? Absolutely! And how do we do so?
- Through the Holy Spirit, who enables us to walk according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh – when that happens, we are living from faith to faith ...

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- We are being justified by faith-filled works of righteousness that please God
- And we will be rewarded with age-lasting life and glory and honor and peace and incorruption at His Judgment Seat
- Those who are NOT fulfilling *the righteous requirements of the law* are not justified and can expect to be repaid with wrath and tribulation and anguish

42

4 Earth-Shattering Truths for the Jewish Believers

3. Ironically, righteous Gentiles, even though physically uncircumcised, will judge unrighteous Jewish believers, who insist on clinging to their rituals and circumcision and mere outward observance of the letter of the law

Rom 2:27 And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code [KJV: the letter] and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?

43

Commentator James Dunn:

In contrast to “fulfilling the law,” “the letter” must mean something like the literal meaning, an understanding of the law which stays at the level of the ritual act and outward deed.

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- It is as if Paul is saying ...
- “You can hold on to your rituals all you want, Jewish believers, and you can merely observe the *letter* of the law, not the *spirit* of the law, but if you do not fulfill the righteous requirements of the law – if you do not obey your new Master, Jesus Christ *inwardly* – you will be judged by those who truly live righteously, and that includes Gentiles who never had the Jewish rituals.”

45

Commentator James Dunn:

By resting on the law, in the false confidence that what the law requires is a strict observance of the practice of circumcision and the maintenance of ... its attendant laws, the devout Jew is actually transgressing the law. He has missed the point of the law and of circumcision. What he counts as “doing the law” Paul counts as transgressing the law!

46

Commentator James Dunn (cont’d):

In consequence it will not be a case of the faithful Jew passing judgment on the lawless Gentile ... [see 2:1–3], but rather a case of the law-fulfilling Gentile (by his faith and life) passing judgment on the law-transgressing Jew—this is what God’s judgment of human secrets will reveal in the day of judgment (2:16).

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4 Earth-Shattering Truths for the Jewish Believers

4. Physical circumcision is mere outward observance of the Mosaic rituals; heart circumcision is inward observance, led by the Spirit, and therefore accepted by God

Rom 2:28-29 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; whose praise is not from men but from God.

48

Incidentally, this is what the law and the prophets called for:

Deut 10:16 Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.

Jer 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest My fury come forth like fire, and burn so that no one can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

49

- If Israel had been taken captive by enemies as judgment by God for sinfulness, when they later turned back to the Lord, God promised something very special:

Deut 30:4 If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you.

Deut 30:5 Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.

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Deut 30:6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

- Even from the OT law and prophets it's obvious where God puts the emphasis:
- God always desired Israel's inward obedience, i.e., a circumcised heart
- But His people merely obeyed outwardly, focused on their circumcised flesh, which is the context of Romans 2

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- Thus, Jesus dealt with the sin of mere outward obedience in the Sermon on the Mount
- The Jews claimed they were not committing adultery, but they were lusting
- They claimed they were not murdering, but they were hating others
- They claimed they were not stealing, but they were charging high prices and high interest rates for lending

52

- In addition to mere outward observance of the moral law, the Jewish believers continue to keep the rituals – observing feast days and sabbaths, eating only kosher foods, and making sure all the males were circumcised
- The Pharisees were guilty of this during the time of Christ, and their influence upon the Christians continued for decades after, even as far as Rome
- Sadly, the fundamentalist segment of the church of Jesus Christ, in large part, is guilty of living in like manner

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- The emphasis is on outward obedience and keeping a list of ritualistic rules they have made for themselves that are not found in the Bible – then expecting everyone to abide by them
- Those who do not, are looked down upon and considered unspiritual or, at the very least, less spiritual
- As a result, the church of Jesus Christ is full of disunity and division, just like the church at Rome

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- Thus, rightly interpreting the book of Romans is critical for application to 21st century believers

James Dunn: Paul looks for a circumcision of the heart that completely replaces the physical rite and does not merely complement it, for a law-keeping which can be completely independent of so much of the law, the ritual law, which Jews regarded as fundamental, with all the authority of Moses behind them.

55

Dunn continues: Not only is the requirement of circumcision to be redefined (properly defined) in a way which renders the outward rite unnecessary, but the very name “Jew” is to be redefined (properly defined) also, as one whose Jewishness (= praiseworthiness) is dependent not on what spectators can see and approve, but on what God alone can see and approve (the hidden secrets of the heart—2:16).

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What you should take away from this message:

- God wants His children to live righteously, inwardly obeying Him, not committing any of the sins listed in the latter half of ch. 1 (many of which are inward sins, secret sins that no one knows about except the one sinning)
- Those who live in this manner are circumcised in heart, which God can see and which He justifies
- They will be rewarded with age-lasting life, glory, honor, peace and incorruption

57

- On the other hand, God condemns mere outward obedience and observance of rituals
- For the Jews the rituals included such things as observing feast days and sabbaths and circumcision and dietary laws
- For modern fundamentalists rituals are lists concocted by pastors and churches, or lists put together in the minds of believers either consciously or subconsciously, the keeping of which they think makes them spiritual
- What is missing? Faith-filled works of righteousness, that justify (Rom. 14:23b)

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What about you?

Are you fulfilling
the righteous requirements of the law
by surrendering to the Holy Spirit in faith?

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