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Romans

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?

Romans 2:27

Another question which demands a "Yes" answer is handed to the Jews of Paul's day. Those gentiles (the physically uncircumcised) who fulfill the law will judge those who have the written code and circumcision (the Jews who have the law and the sign of the law) because of their failure to meet the law, of which circumcision is a sign.

It is obvious in and of itself that having the law and having the sign of the law is pointless unless one obeys the law they have. And so Paul has laid out the precepts to show us this. They involve the following thoughts -

1) Having the sign of circumcision without fulfilling the law which mandates the sign is lawlessness.

2) Those who fulfill the law, regardless of whether they have the sign of the law or not, will receive God's praise. On the other hand, those who have the sign but who fail to fulfill the law may receive praise from man but not from God.

3) Those who do not have the sign but who keep the law are more pleasing to God than those who have the sign but don't keep it.

4) Those who keep the law, regardless of having the sign, will judge those who do not keep the law even if they have the sign.

As before, we can simply insert the word "judge" into "those who have the sign of the law" to help us make mental images of what these points make:

1) Being a judge without fulfilling the law which mandates what he judges is lawlessness.

2) Those who obey the law, regardless of whether they are judges or not, will be secure in what the laws of the nation requires. On the other hand, those who are judges but fail to fulfill the law may receive praise from men (because they are judges) but not from the nation who has given the law.

3) Those who aren't judges but keep the law are more pleasing to the nation who has given the law than those who are judges but don't keep it.

4) Those who keep the law, regardless of whether they are appointed judges, will judge those who don't keep the law even if they are appointed judges.

All this is telling us that being circumcised means nothing without obedience. What God asks for is that our heart is turned toward Him and that we are obedient to what He requires.

Life application: God has sent His Son into the world to fulfill the law which none of us can fulfill. Now, He asks us to accept what Jesus has done on our behalf thus allowing us to meet the impossible demands of the law through Him - vicariously.

Let us apply this to our life by being grateful, from moment to moment, for the grace He has lavished upon us.

For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; Romans 2:28

The Hebrew people were given the rite of circumcision in Genesis 17. From Abraham came Isaac and from Isaac came Jacob who is Israel. From Israel came the 12 tribes of Israel, the fourth being Judah. Judah, became the preeminent tribe of the Israelites and the term Jew (being derived from Judah) became synonymous with all the people of Israel. To this line of people was given the rite of circumcision which was to be an outward mark of what should be an inward trait - a separation from the world and a dedication to, and service of, the true God.

In today's verse though, Paul removes the outward sign as the identifying mark of the Jewish people and thus strips them of their privileged status based on this sign alone. "For" is a conclusion resulting from the previous three verses. "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly." The word for "outwardly" is phanero and it indicates what is visible. A beard (well normally...) identifies a man. It is an outward sign of being a male. The circumcision was supposed to be the same. The outward mark identifies what the person is. But Paul strips this notion. Just as a woman could be born with hypertrichosis and have a beard, or she could have a false beard to make herself look like a man, she is nonetheless a female. The same is true with the Jew. The outward sign does not make the person.

Paul then explains this - "Nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh." The circumcision of the foreskin on the male was to be an external display of the true circumcision which is reflected in the inward man. Jeremiah tells us about this many generations before Paul wrote his epistle -

"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." Jeremiah 4:4

The people's trust in the outward rite without the accompanying inward conviction would only result in harsh judgment. The true Jew is the one who lives in accord with the expectations of the outward sign, having the inward circumcision to accompany it.

Now that this has been discerned, one of the most vital distinctions of all must be made. Is a person a Jew if they are circumcised in the heart, but not of the line of Israel (the Jewish people?) The answer is a resounding "No." This is a fundamental error in theology which will be carefully treated in the next chapter and throughout the entire New Testament. However, there are those who claim that it is the case. RC Sproul of Ligonier Ministries stated this in his *Tabletalk Magazine*

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"We're not dispensationalists here....We believe that the church is essentially Israel. We believe that the answer to, "What about the Jews?" is, "Here we are." We deny that the church is God's "plan B." We deny that we are living in God's redemptive parenthesis."

This type of error leads to confusion of what God is doing in and through history and it inevitably results in a denial that Israel, the land and the people of today, has a plan and purpose in God's dealings with the world in which we live. In essence, they are some sort of aberration. This is not the case at all. Extreme care needs to be given to the issue.

Life application: Regardless of whether we are Jews or not, we are to have the inward circumcision of the heart. If we don't live lives as Christians, then the name "Christian" has no meaning. Let us endeavor to carefully evaluate our internal person and have it align with our external appellation