Romans 2:17-29

Righteousness is not Found in Your Flesh

Jewish Identity is Blinding

17-20: "Paul is considering the Jewish moralist, and the business of every moralist is the reformation of others." - R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, p. 183.

Paul begins by approving the teaching of the Jews and their boasting in God. He does not rebuke them for their laying hold of the "oracles" as he will call them in 3:2. However, he does this, sets them up, so that their fall in verses 21-24 will be much stronger.

It is interesting that the NT picks up the term "Jew" [Ioudaoios] when they are consistently referred to as Israel in the OT. After the diaspora, the Israelites took upon themselves the title given them by their pagan overlords "People from Judea," instead of the ancestral name of promise given them by God. Paul in Romans is clearly speaking to a ethnically Jewish audience. Gentiles could become "God-fearers" or a "proselyte" but not a Jew cf. **Acts 13:16, 26; Mt. 23:15; Acts 6:5**. Paul, and the NT, never uses the term Jew for Gentiles when addressing them. However, they are all "Jews" by faith: **Gal. 3:7-29**.

The only reason anyone has to listen to the Jews of this time is found in **Matt. 23:1-12** which the reader ought to compare to **Matt. 6:1-8**. Listen to the Jews because they teach the Scriptures (and no mouth that speaks God's word can profane that word by the mouth alone) but do not practice the teachings they bring out of their own hearts **Jer. 17:9**. Ironically, it is the same Scriptures that accuse them, as Paul will use in vv. 21-24; **Jhn 5:45; 2 Tim. 3:1-5**. The Jewish Christians ought to be a light to the nations (as every disciple is **Matt. 5:12-13**) The Psalmist identifies God and His Word as light -- which the Jewish people possessed! **Ps. 27:1; 119:105**.

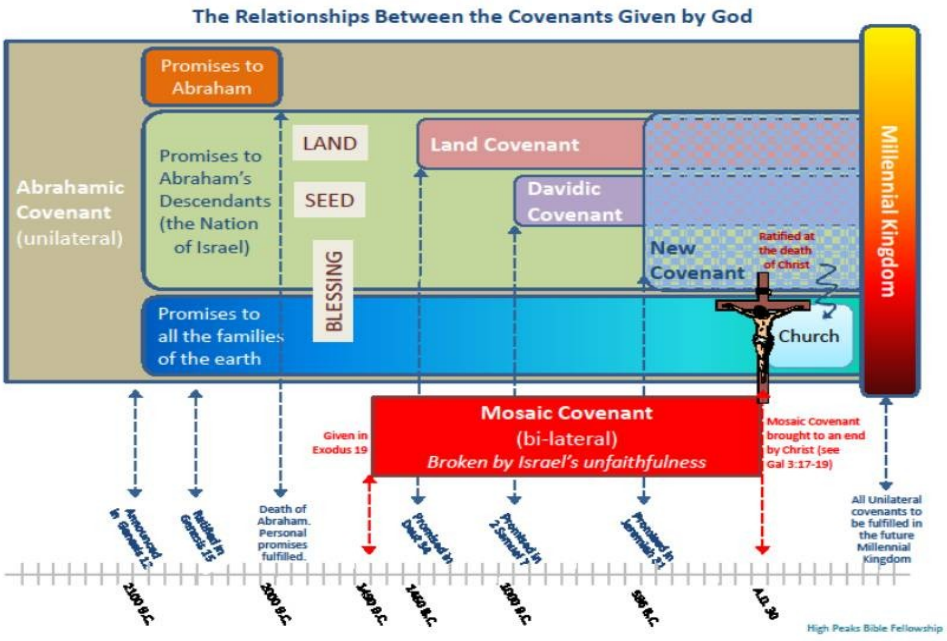
This applies to modern pastors as well. A pastor is tasked with speaking God's Word to the Christians whom God has entrusted into his care. Anything your pastor says that conflicts with the Word of God or comes from His own opinion

DISCARD!!! If you need to rebuke your pastor, follow the pattern laid forth in Matthew 18. It is the responsibility of the congregation, and especially the elders, to keep the pastor honest and faithful to the Word of God. **2 Tim. 1:13-14; 2:14f; 3:10f; 4:1f**

We do not want the Christian Church to be a place where the blind lead the blind **Matt. 15:14; Luke 6:39f**. The "*form of Knowledge and Truth in the law.*" refers to the shadow cast by Christ that stretches into the Old Testament **Matt. 9:13**. We call this typology. As Jesus says, **Luke 24:27; Jhn 5:39-40**. However, because they war against the Holy Spirit, the picture of Christ in the OT is concealed by God from their eyes and ears. **2 Cor. 3:14 (context); Matt. 13:10-17.**

Boasting in God is a good thing! Paul is not using it here in the negative sense, necessarily. **1 Cor. 1:31; Jer. 9:24; Rom. 5:2**. The problem here is reliance on the Law instead of reliance on God for salvation.

Its important to remember that the Law came after the salvation of Israel in the Exodus. Ex. 1-20 cf. **Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6**.



To Teach the Law, Come Under the Law

21-24: Paul here preaches the same doctrine as the Apostle James: **Jas. 2:8-13; 3:11-12.** This is a reminder to return to our doctrine of judging. Very simply: It is God who judges and His Christians who deliver that judgment to the world by speaking God's Law to them. Are *we* to judge? No. Are we to *speak God's judgment*? Yes. **Matt. 7:2; Prov. 7:7-9**. Compare this, however, with **Rom. 7:7**. The Law teaches us of our sinfulness and corrects it. Should someone be teaching out of the Law, as a pastor or Christian does, it will do the work God has purposed it for and convict the sinner!

The problem with the Jews, here, is that they think their condemnation of others acquits them of their sins! It is not forgiveness for Christ's sake but arrogating oneself above the Law of God. This is a real danger for Christians too. We should not shrink back from speaking God's law because of the danger. Remember, remove the log from your own eye so that you can remove the spec from your brothers eye. It is impossible for you to ascertain the degree and weight of your brothers sins but, through meditation on the Law, you will certainly feel your own sinfulness. **Phil. 3:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:9-11; 1 Cor. 13:1-3.**

Consider the list of Jewish trespasses: *Theft, adultery, robbing temples, dishonoring God*. These are not abstractions. **Theft**: Mark 7:11; **Adultery:** Matthew 19:3; **Robbing Temples:** Malachi 3:8; **Dishonoring God:** Matthew 15:3-11. These all pertain to the false teaching of the Pharisees who introduced the modern Jewish religion. Robbing temples could refer to two things, it could simply be a recapitulation of **Deut. 7:25-26** or it could be a reference to failing to pay the Temple tax **Matt. 17:22f; Mal. 1:14**.

All of the failures of those who have the Law but refuse to keep it, or use it to justify their wickedness is understood as dishonoring God. Compare the explanation of the second commandment in our Small Catechism to our understanding of the Baptized life.

> We should fear and love God that we may not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

This is connected to Paul's words in Rom. 1:24. The dishonoring must be

understood as a relationship of maltreatment. We mistreat God who gives us life by turning our noses up at that life. **Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 2:14**.

Circumcision of No Use in the NT

25-27: Circumcision corresponds to Baptism according to the typology of the OT. Its institution is connected to Promise (Gospel) and not to Law. **Gen. 17:9-14; Ex. 12:43f; Luke 2:21; Col. 2:11-15; Gal. 5:1-12**. Note in Gal. 5:12 Paul says, "I could wish that those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!" Literally, "mutilate (ἀποκόπτω)" themselves. He's urging them to, as one translator put it, cut off their "privy parts." Circumcision avails nothing to the Christian life because we live under the better covenant -- the covenant of Grace! Paul literally urges us to flee from those who commend circumcision as beneficial **Phil. 3:2-3**.

Circumcision, as Paul makes clear in Rom. 2:25 is only beneficial if you keep all of the Law (Here it is arguable whether he means OT Law or Moral Law) perfectly. This, of course, should point us toward Christ as both gift and example (Circumcised, Kept the Law, Gives that life to You!). Another way of understanding this is that circumcision is a representation of the grace received by those in the community of faith. Therefore, circumcision without faith is just another broken commandment added to the list.

Excursus on Circumcision

By the time of the Jews in the NT, they had "so closely associated circumcision with Moses that they had virtually forgotten its more fundamental association with Abraham (Acts [15:1, 5], [21:21]...). Our lord had to remind them that it antedated Moses (Jn. [7:22])."[1] Circumcision is throughout the OT a seal placed upon the Grace of Righteousness already given the believers by God Cf. **Ex. 6:12, 30** and **Rom. 4:11**. The relationship between circumcision and obedience is strong in the OT because circumcision was the means by which God entered peoples into His relationship of promise (covenantal relationship) that gave them access both to His words and the sacrificial system of the OT.

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1 *The New Bible Dictionary*, eds J. D. Douglas, F. F. Bruce, J. I. Packer, et al, (WM B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co: Grand Rapids, MI, 1962), 233-234.

The Bible allows for it to be possible to possess the sign and not the grace it is supposed to signify **Rom2:27**. This corresponds to our understanding of Baptism but you must bear in mind that circumcision was not sacramental and baptism is in the NT. Passages like **Col. 2:11, 12**; and **Phil. 3:3** display the connection between Baptism and Circumcision.

BAPTISM[2]	CIRCUMCISION
Receive the Blood of Christ	Sheds the blood of the covenant
Makes you part of the Church	Makes you part of the OT Church
Given to Children as their right	Given to Children as their right
Established by Christ	Established by the Father
Called a seal (sphragis)	Called a seal (sphragis)
Places you in the 8th day	Done on the 8th day
Cuts off the Old Adam	Cuts off the Old Flesh
Seals the contract of Grace	Seals into the Covenant and Law
Sends demons fleeing	Destroyer passes over the blood (Ex.)

Circumcision of No Use in the NT

Since God desires a circumcised heart, Paul concludes that even uncircumcision counts as circumcision before the Lord when the circumcised or uncircumcised man has faith **Deut. 10:16** and **Rom. 2:29**. This leads to Paul's final point of chapter two. He has spent the end of chapter one and all of chapter two attempting to tear down the errors of the prideful heart. Pride within the heart is the strongest enemy of faith. Pride says "I have and do not need," **Rev. 3:17** faith says, "I am poor and needy" **Ps. 40:17**; **Luke 5:30-31**.

28-29: Paul makes a similiar argument to his words in Galatians wherein he considers all who have received Faith the true children of Abraham. By Jew, he here means a member of the household of Faith - which is a difference valance than he has used previously. He begins to transition, here, into arguments

2 Jean Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, (University of Notre Dame Press, IN: Notre Dame, 1956), 63-67; 165.

about faith. **Gal. 6:15; 1 Pet. 3:4; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11; Deut. 30:6**. Circumcision of the heart is discussed clearly in **Jer. 9:25-26**. Remember the words of Christ in **Rev. 2:28-29; Matt. 3:8-9**. This also may remind us of the parallels to Baptism in **Ez. 36-37**.

Paul and Jesus are exclusively interested in the inner man, the hidden heart of the believer that alone is the recipient of God's Righteousness. Remember, Baptism is different than circumcision in that it is applied to the body and effects the heart! Jesus words are remembered **Matt. 6:1-18**. Would you like to be rewarded by God or by man?