

Romans: Verse-by-Verse

Romans 2:25

Student Notes

Verses 25-29: In dealing with the Jewish moralizers Paul redefines what it is to be a Jew and to possess the Law of Moses.

- **Jewish Consciousness and Jewish Pride**

Perhaps no group in history has taken more pride in their ancestry than the Jews. National consciousness was not, in and of itself, sinful. See: Esther 3:3

The Jews were, indeed special. They were set apart from the rest of the world. See: Deuteronomy 33:29; 2 Samuel 7:23; Psalm 147:20; Deuteronomy 4:7

By Paul's era: Jewish identity= Jewish superiority.

"... By the time you get to Paul's time, the Jew is no longer seeing his Jewishness as a revelation of God's goodness and God's grace, but he is seeing it as an indicator of his own superiority." -- John MacArthur

- **Paul: Redefining What It Means To Be A Jew:**

Paul's previous statement, "If you call yourself a Jew" followed by verse 25: "*Circumcision has value if you observe the law...*"

Circumcision in the light of its original purpose found in Genesis 17:11: "You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you."

Circumcision not only symbolized the covenant between God and Abraham's lineage, but their obligation to obedience to God. With the introduction of the Law, circumcision marked a person as one of God's people and served as a lifetime reminder of their obligations to Him.

Over time, what was meant to be a sign of commitment to obedience morphed into a claim of special status – with or without the accompanying obedience.

John Stott: “The Jews had an almost superstitious confidence in the saving power of their circumcision.” Examples of Rabbinic epigrams: “Circumcised men do not descend into Gehenna.” “Circumcision will deliver Israel from Gehenna.”

By Jesus’ day, to be Jewish meant to avoid God’s punishment of sin.

Paul’s Counter Argument: “If you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised.”

Circumcision without obedience to the entire Law fails God’s original purposes. As long as a Jew carried the mark of the covenant he was expected to live up to the requirements of that covenant.

- **Paul’s use of Jeremiah 9:25-26**

“The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh— “Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all who live in the wilderness in distant places. For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.”
– Jeremiah 9:25-26

“All who are circumcised only in the flesh” speaks of Israel. God’s real intent is also evident; they are not truly circumcised in their hearts. They do not have hearts that are tender and receptive to God’s commands.

The Jews were not the only culture to practice circumcision: Mesopotamian cultures also practiced circumcision. A notable exception: The Philistines. See I Samuel 17:26

The point: Other ancient cultures practiced circumcision as a religious rite or cultural milestone. For Paul, if covenant obedience does not follow circumcision, then it is as if you had never received the mark of covenant. You may as well be a Gentile.”