

Romans 2:25-27

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Just and righteous living comes through living by faith. The Jewish people, who break the law and are circumcised, are the same as those who are uncircumcised. Circumcision is of no value if you do not keep the law.

A significant part of the claim for spiritual authority by the competing Jewish “authorities” would be an appeal to Jewish authority. This is powerful because at this time Christianity was simply a segment of Judaism. The notion that Christianity is anything other than a segment of Judaism would have seemed strange to believers at that time and to Paul in particular, who maintained his Jewishness throughout his life. For example, when Paul finally makes it to Rome, he meets with the “leading men of the Jews” and declares to them he had “done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers” (Acts 28:17).

Echoing this letter’s theme that just living or righteousness comes through living by faith, Paul unravels their Jewish basis for being an authority and proclaims that by virtue of being lawbreakers they are effectively now no better than uncircumcised pagans: *For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision* (v 25).

Paul continues his argument undermining the asserted authority of the Jews who are slandering his message (Romans 3:8). Paul points out here that an uncircumcised man (a Gentile, in other words) who keeps the law would actually be righteous or just, even though that man had not experienced the sacred Jewish ceremony of *circumcision*. *So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision* (v 26)? God would regard him as circumcised, because he would be doing what the circumcision is supposed to remind the Jews to do: to keep their covenant with God by following God’s ways (including God’s law).

This would infer that the competing Jewish “authorities” are claiming spiritual authority based on a religious ceremony. The Bible is clear that God’s primary concern is the heart. We, as humans, tend to prefer something tangible we can point to in order to justify ourselves: “See look at me, I am better than you because I do this.” Paul makes clear that this is faulty reasoning.

Continuing his dismantling of the argument of competing Jewish “authorities,” Paul now sets up a scenario where uncircumcised people who keep the law are actually judging these competing Jewish “authorities.” *And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law* (v 27)? Paul already accused these “authorities” of breaking the very laws they proclaim. So Paul proposes a very ironic scenario where these “authorities” who sit in judgment of others are instead being judged by those they judge.

Biblical Text

25 For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.26 So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?27 And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?