

God's Faithfulness Feb 13, 2011

Romans 2:25

What about circumcision and why bring it up here? Paul is here speaking to the Jews, who would gain great benefit from being Jewish if they lived up to Laws for the Jews, but for the most part their behavior and motives were wrong. Of course, an important part of being a Jewish male was circumcision.

Let's do some cross-reference work here; the first reference to circumcision is in Genesis, the record of Abraham. God had called Abram and told him to move from the Ur to a Promised Land and Abram obeyed. As years followed God made promises to Abram which were covenants; he was promised a land, descendents, his name would be great and a nation would come from him. This was an unconditional covenant, that is God made it in Chapters 12-15 of Genesis and God would keep it no matter what Abram did.

Abram made a huge mistake and reasoned that since his wife was barren he should procreate children with someone else and so he and Hagar, his wife's maid, with his wife Sarai's blessing had a son. Abram was 86 years old when he fathered this son of the flesh. The son was Ishmael and is the father of the Arabs. For a description of this son take a look at Genesis 16:11.

God's covenant was unconditional so 13 years later, when Abram was 99 God came to him and renewed His unconditional covenant. He promised a son to Abram by his wife Sari who was 90 years old. Their names were changed to Abraham, meaning father of many nations and from Sari to Sarah, princess.

Abraham believed God even though he knew it was impossible for him or his wife to bear children in their advanced age. As a result of his faith, believing God would give him a son, Abraham was reckoned righteous. Then God described a sign of His covenant for all Jewish men and that would be circumcision, the cutting away of the flesh, or as one commentator said "putting away the corruption of the flesh". Abraham was 99 years old when he submitted to this. Did you ever wonder why circumcision, what is this all about and what does it have to do with me if I am a woman?

As we have said before, God's word is an unfolding revelation. We first see circumcision instituted in Genesis but the further understanding is not revealed until much later in Jeremiah. Much of what we read in Genesis, the "book of beginnings", has its revelation later. Therefore it is necessary to know this book of Genesis as a foundation for what God has done in the past, is doing right now and will so in the future.

Circumcision was meant to be a spiritual sign for all Jewish males forever; it was a mark on the Jewish nation as a sign of the covenant God made with Abraham. In all the scripture it is clear this is not just a physical sign but something of great spiritual importance.

Circumcision was Abraham's part of the covenant so therefore it was a bloody covenant; remember without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. Circumcision was for

males only but women were included in the covenant. Some have said that Abraham had to give some part of his own body as a sign of his faith in the covenant.

It was the flesh of the foreskin that was cut off because it is by ordinary propagation that sin is continued. Ishmael was a child of the flesh, not miraculous, he had a young mother, the bible says. Ninety nine year old Abraham fathering Isaac with 90-year-old Sarah was miraculous just as God said; the promised seed would come from his loins, that Seed being Jesus the Messiah. So Isaac was the first child of promise. After this time God required every Jewish male to be circumcised at 8 days old and any male among you, God said, "any servant born in your house or bought with money. Any male not circumcised would be cut off from God's covenant".

God did not demand something of value to life to be cut off, for instance, He could have said, from now on every Jewish male must cut off his thumb and present it to me. Removing the foreskin was to show how useless the flesh is in our relationship with God. It is not only useless it is in the way and must be removed. Until the flesh was removed from Abraham the miraculous child could not be fathered. I hope you are following this as we unfold this amazing revelation of God.

For now we get back to our lesson and hear Paul say that yes its good to be Jewish and be circumcised but even the ritual of circumcision will not save the soul who is far from God and not obedient to the LAW. In fact Paul described true circumcision

Romans 2:28

This is not to keep the Jewish families from obeying God in circumcising their infant sons but from trusting circumcision as sufficient to take them to heaven. To be a true Jew was not is not to be circumcised but to love God and obey Him.

What are you trusting in to take you to heaven? God does not desire you to be tied to some heritage, religious tradition or church membership. It is a matter of your heart. How can your heart be made right? The person whose heart is right with God because God's Holy Spirit has put away the reliance on the flesh, circumcising the heart. When the heart is set on or loves the flesh and our own works of righteousness, we cannot please God.

What is this flesh of the heart that is circumcised or removed? It is the belief that by your own flesh/works you can please God and get yourself to heaven.

Romans 2:29

What about circumcising the heart? Friends, the greatest sin is desire to go your own way, do your own thing, follow your flesh. The fact is that God wishes those who name His name to become like Him day by day. He is a holy God who demands holiness of His people. We are born, children of Adam, prone to sin, wanting our own way. Did you have to teach your little child to demand his own way? They come automatically programmed to demand their way, and some more than others. You can get everything from pouting to screaming temper tantrums but it boils down to this; I want what I want when I want it, is the way we all trend, it is our flesh. This is a good reason to pray for your children and grandchildren to have teachable hearts and desire to please God.

What does God say about this? Isaiah 53:6

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way". This is why God had to intervene and provide a way of salvation. How can a person be brought to the place where he wants God's will rather than his own? The heart must be circumcised, that is the "my way" of the flesh must be cut away. Remember the male circumcision cuts away flesh that is not needed and is superfluous and so circumcision of the heart cuts away the fleshly desire to go my own way, definitely not needed and in the way of victorious living.

You cannot circumcise your own heart.

When you decide to lay down doing your own thing and make the choice and ask God to do this, then He will begin at the root of the problem, the deceitful heart and begin to cut away the flesh of self indulgence, self righteousness and self focus.

What about circumcision of the ear? Turn to Jeremiah 6:10 this is God speaking "to whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold their ears are uncircumcised and they cannot listen. The Word of the LORD has become a reproach to them and they have not delighted in it". This is saying the people of Israel had closed their ears to God, and they didn't like to hear the bible because it seemed to them like they were being criticized. Sound familiar? Just the people in Romans chapter 1 who knew God was there but didn't want to recognize Him, surely didn't want to hear the bible and tried to suppress the bible (the truth). Why did all this happen, God said their ears were uncircumcised? How do ears get circumcised? Again this is a work of the Holy Spirit after your choice to submit to God and His Word.

What does it mean if you have no delight in studying God's word? What does it mean to have an uncircumcised ear? Remember Jesus cried out 3 times in one gospel record "let him who has ears let him hear". If the gospel message does not come through our ears, it cannot come into our heart. Faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God.

Ask God to circumcise your ears so that you can hear; we naturally do not receive the things of God. Our willingness to read and study the bible and make it our guide, the light for our path, is saying to God, you have authority over my life. It is a submitting. When we refuse to hear the Word of God, we are rejecting Him.

Paul, speaking by inspiration of the Holy Spirit is saying; all your outward religious forms and traditions are meaningless if they are simply outward and works of the flesh. Your circumcision, your church going, your baptism, what do these outward forms amount to in the eyes of God?

As we look at the issues of circumcision and what God has said about outward traditions, it's easy to see then what Paul is saying. What is circumcision? It is an outward sign and amounts to nothing by itself. The heart must be turned toward God. Our ears must be open to His holy Word. We must have the desire to walk in His truth. Listen to what Paul says in Galatians 6:15 "For neither is circumcision now anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation or new birth". This is saying the outward traditions are nothing; the only thing that matters is the new birth by faith.

Paul is saying this is the definition of a true Jew-even though I am born a Gentile, I have the right to call myself a true Jew because I have seen my sin, I have turned my heart to Israel's

Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ and moved by His love I have yielded my heart to God in order that He could circumcise my heart-that is remove the useless flesh so I can live for righteousness and holiness.

This circumcision of the heart is a lifelong process, which is often painful, but God is faithful, He will continue the process until we are perfected, He who has begun a good work in you will perfect or complete it until the day. Warning, this process will go on until death because dying is the only way to finally get rid of the flesh.

If you have the smile of the world and the frown of God at the judgment what will your material goods or the approval of people do for you?

Chapter 3 of Romans; in Romans 1 and 2, Paul has described the sinful condition of mankind. In the third chapter he is going to talk a little bit about the benefits of being Jewish. Don't forget, Paul was Jewish, had been a Pharisee. He would have been at the top of the ladder in the Jewish society, married and most likely affluent. He told us he suffered the loss of all things for the sake of the gospel so I conclude his wife must have left when he became a follower of Christ.

Paul is going to remind his Jewish brothers that God has been faithful even though they have been unfaithful. I think the Jewish lack of faithfulness as described here in Romans is a clear witness to the absolute need for a Messiah, a Savior. No one can save himself; God's faithfulness is our only hope.

Keeping in mind this text is a letter and the chapters and verses have been added later. So this first verse of chapter three hangs together in thought with Romans 2:29

Romans 3:1

After all we have discussed regarding traditions and rituals, this seems like a logical question doesn't it?

Paul has a ready answer;

Romans 3:2

John Calvin said this "if the name Jew has ever been give a bad sense on the lips of any man, it is because Satan hates the name, since God Almighty has forever been ennobled (elevated) it by writing over the cross of the Lord Jesus Chris that He was Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. And the hope of Heaven that every Christian may posses is bound up with the Jews, and the glorious promises which God made through Abraham".

However we must examine here the statement they were given the oracles (message or wisdom) of God.

A better translation would be the whole revelation or words of God. Friends, not only the Law of Moses but the entire revelation of God was first Entrusted to the Jews.

Romans 3:3-4

God's great gift to the Jews in entrusting them with His revelation for the world, which they preserved and gave to us. So God's faithfulness to them was not nullified by their faithlessness to Him. Most Jews have rejected the good news of the gospel and so they do not understand their own scriptures. Have you ever heard "the New Testament is in the Old Testament concealed, the Old Testament is in the New Testament revealed? Do not ever forget, God's covenant with Abraham was an unconditional covenant and God will keep it no matter how unfaithful they are to Him.

As Paul has said, "let God be true and every man a liar". Friends, if many people are unfaithful by suppressing the truth, exchanging the truth for a lie and rejecting the truth it doesn't change the fact that God is true. If you bow your knee to Jesus today you will find Him your Savior, if you wait you will find Him your Judge.

Romans 3:5-6

Now the prosecutor, Paul, sees there can be more objections. He understands that people are more willing to rationalize than repent. So here is what they might say; "if my sin makes God look good why shouldn't I sin more?" This is said to make it seem like God is unfair-WOW we hear a lot about fairness don't we? Just remember, God judges based on His character, not on some person's idea of fairness. The final judgment will be based on what you have done about Jesus. God will judge sin and if your sin has not been covered by Jesus by faith, then you will be accountable and have to pay the price for it yourself. God has the right to judge because He is God. No person is an exception to God's law.

Romans 3:7

And this is the same question asked in verse 5, just posed another way. The root problem is misunderstanding God's righteousness. We have learned that He is patient with unfaithful Jews and sinful Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles are in the same predicament, they both need Jesus Christ and His provision for their sin or else face God's wrath for their sin.