



Sunday, February 2, 2014 Zapping-you Whenever Thoughts Flow

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# ROMANS Part 15

Chapter 2:25-29



Romans 2:25-29

**For circumcision, indeed, is benefiting if you should be putting law into practice, yet if you should be a transgressor of law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. If the Uncircumcision, then, should be maintaining the just requirements of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be reckoned for circumcision? And the Uncircumcision who, by nature, are discharging the law's demands, shall be judging you, who through letter and circumcision, are a transgressor of law. For not that which is apparent is the Jew, nor yet that which is apparent in flesh is circumcision; but that which is hidden is the Jew, and circumcision is of the heart, in spirit, not in letter, whose applause is not of men, but of God.**

I take back what I said last week, that the Jews blaspheming God's name among the nations was the lowest point possible for that people, at least from an objective standpoint. As we of the other nations sit in the bleachers and consider this not-so-entertaining display of religious failure, we cringe at how bad it is. Some of us leave our seats to buy popcorn. On the playing field, Israel remains unaware of its offenses. It's as though they are a college marching band spelling out the phrase, "blind hypocrites." The crowd can read it fine, but the field performers are too close to interpret their own human calligraphy. They wonder at the groans and boos. They wonder why so many seats are becoming unpeopled.

Now picture yourself as the apostle Paul inviting some of the band members up into the press box. You gesture to the members still on the field, where the human-formed words are as clear as pen on parchment. You clear your throat to offer a divine perspective of things that will harrow the Jewish soul.

They're not going to like this. You should be wearing safety equipment, but you're not. Once they digest your words and stare unblinking at the truth on the field, they will shoot the messenger. They will beat you to within an inch of your life; five times, they will administer the prescribed 39 lashes (for blasphemers) upon your bare back.

The above passage—Romans 2:25-29—is the most damaging collection of words available to Israelite ears. This passage alone, I believe, was sufficient to seal Paul's fate.

## WHY CIRCUMCISION?

Why does Paul keep saying, "Circumcision" and "Uncircumcision?" Before progressing further into Romans, let's discuss this.



You're going to *what*?

In Genesis chapter 17, God initiated the rite of circumcision with Abraham. The term “circumcision” itself means, “to cut around.” A surgical cut is made around the male member, relieving it of its foreskin. (Perhaps “relieving” is not the optimal word; the procedure was the penile equivalent of a root canal.)

In Genesis chapter 17, God has just announced His intention to increase Abraham’s offspring. Verse 2: “Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.” To make sure Abraham understood this to be a promise of God rather than a performance of his reproductive tool (though it would certainly be involved), God humbled the reproductive tool at the outset. The rite was to remind the Israelite male (beginning with Abraham) that it was God rather than sexual prowess that would produce the promised progeny.

An Israelite male was subjected to the rite eight days after birth. The number eight, in Scripture, typifies a new beginning. Seven is the perfect number (you can’t get any better than seven), so eight *has* to be something new.

In Hebrew, the number eight is *sh’moneh*, from the root word *shah’meyn*, “to make fat,” “cover with fat,” “to super-abound.” Back in the Bible days, fat was desir-

able. It represented strength and supply, i.e., “the fat of the land.” (Fat is still a good thing; please ignore the USDA food pyramid.)

Used as a noun, this Hebrew word also suggests “superabundant fertility,” as well as “resurrection life.” (Resurrection is the first new thing to happen after death.) How ironic that a new beginning, for a Hebrew male, begins by the excision of part of his baby-making apparatus. That’s God for you. It’s as though God is saying, “At this stage in your national history, you’re going to be reproducing like rabbits. I am going to bring life from your loins at an alarming rate. Not only will I give you a superabundance of offspring, but your people will also eat of the fat of the land.”

The Israelite male, taking all this in, says, “This all sounds good to me!” (Or, if he is an eight-day old baby, he simply gurgles—blowing little spit bubbles—and looks pleased.) But then the Israelite male realizes that a slightly crazed priest hovers over him, fondling a sharp object and staring at his gonads.

This is how God operates. It’s as though He is *now* saying, “By the way, these marvels I’ve just described will all occur, absolutely speaking, via *My* powers of



reproduction, not yours.” (The snipping then begins.)

Ironically (and tragically), the Israelites turned the meaning of circumcision upside-down. Rather than being humbled by it, they came to take pride in the rite and its result. Get this: they actually *bragged* about having a part of their penises removed. (I can almost hear God saying, “Um, we seem to have had some kind of misunderstanding here.”) But then, we’ve come to expect this sort of sin (“miss”) from a people who miss things (Messiahs, for instance) for a living. It will not always be this way. God will eventually wash their corporate eyes, ending their term of blindness.

So what is “the Uncircumcision?” The Uncircumcision are those folks who aren’t circumcised, that is, the other nations besides Israel. Spiritually speaking, “uncircumcision” describes a group of people who are simply *told* that the flesh profits nothing—and they believe it. This gang—penises intact—merely nod in assent to the truth, gaining personal spiritual insight from the information without requiring bandaging afterward.

God subjected Israel to the painful ritual as an example (a type and a shadow) to the other nations of the unprofitably of human flesh.

It is impossible for exercises of self-determination to make one presentable before a perfect God.

#### BENEFICIAL ... *IF*

**“For circumcision, indeed, is benefiting if you should be putting the law into practice, yet if you should be a transgressor of law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision” (Romans 2:25).**

The law of Moses consisted of 613 commands. Circumcision joined an Israelite to this exclusive club and made him responsible to perform each and every one of these commands. As long as the Jew did all 613 of the laws, God’s smile remained upon him or her. If the Israelite failed, however, he or she could be covered by prescribed sacrifices. If an Israelite thought he or she could walk away from the sacrifices and strain again for perfection, such folks were sorely disappointed. Failing in even one law meant liability for breaking the whole (James 2:10). In Romans 2:25, Paul sets his tongue in cheek when he says, “If you do the whole law perfectly, all the time, then you have bragging rights as a member of the circumcised nation.” No one could do that, of course, and Paul knew it. Therefore, he follows up with, “However, if you do *not* put the law into practice (duh), then you are in reality no

different than a person who hasn’t been circumcised.”

Ouch!—and you thought the actual *rite* of circumcision hurt. Nothing could anger an Israelite more than to be classified with the other nations. They were to be a nation set apart. Here, Paul puts them in the same boat as pigs and dogs, that is, uncircumcised Gentiles.

Not only this, but the boat is sinking.

This did not endear Paul to the Jews.

#### IT GETS WORSE

If only it ended there—but no. Paul continues:

**“If the Uncircumcision, then, should be maintaining the just requirements of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be reckoned for circumcision?” (Romans 2:26).**

This corresponds with Romans 2:14,

For whenever they of the nation that have no law, by nature may be doing that which the law demands, these, having no law, are a law to themselves, who are displaying the action of the law written in their hearts.

Paul now drops the bomb that the man or woman of the nations who, apart from law, manages to perform good works, are actually the *true* circumcision. For what circumcision was hypothetically intended to enact for an Israelite, the nations found themselves enacting by other, more reliable means—the conscience, for instance.

Because the Israelite felt specially segregated from the rest of humanity (as indeed he was), pride rose in





the heart, blocking any hope of morality. By contrast, the nations never did sense God's special care. This worked for their advantage, for apparently it is expedient to start one's moral walk being denominated "a dog." That way, when God does finally begin blessing you—on the heels of Israel's failure—you have no place to go but up.

The nations, having no law, do the things the law purports to produce. This occurs, not through law, but by either appreciating God in nature, or obeying the dictates of the conscience. Paul says of such a person and his works, "Shall not his uncircumcision be reckoned for circumcision?" Their key phrase here is "reckoned for." Doing the things of the law (treating one's neighbor or associate as oneself, for instance) cannot make a man of the nations *literally* circumcised (as if this needs to be stated), but it can move that man, morally, ahead of an Israelite, whose pride swells rather than falls at the coming of law. Such a person is as good as circumcised. In fact, he's even better, because he lives the underlying purpose of the physical rite, without the rite.

## IT GETS WORSE, PART 2

If only it ended there—but no. Paul continues:

**"And the Uncircumcision who, by nature, are discharging the law's demands, shall be judging you, who through letter and circumcision, are a transgressor of law" (Romans 2:27).**

Not only is Paul now making the uncircumcised man equal to the Jew, he is making him superior. Not only is he superior, but he will be *judging* the Jew.

To the Jew, such a thing would be unthinkable. The fact that Paul even thought it—let alone wrote it—would be sufficient to boil Israelite blood and haul the messenger, Paul, before the courts or—better yet—accost him in the streets and disembowel him. The most humiliating thing that could happen to a man, who was supposed to be the judge *of* the nations, is to subject him to judgment *by* the nations. In the whole of Romans, this is Paul's most dangerous, most damning (for him) statement.

Paul's words to the Jews mirror our Lord's words to the high priests. Our Lord told the religious leaders in Matthew 21:31--

Verily, I am saying to you that the tribute collectors and the prostitutes are preceding you into the kingdom of God.

Sayings like this eventually led Him to the cross. Not only did Jesus Christ never repent of such inflammatory sayings, He elaborated upon them. From the same passage, in verse 32:

For John came to you on the road of righteousness, and you do not believe him. Yet the tribute collectors and the prostitutes believe him. Now you, perceiving it, did not even regret subsequently, so as to believe him.

## THE JUDGED BECOME JUDGES

Our Lord also referenced the "crazy," unthinkable notion of dogs judging Jews in Matthew 12: 42—

The queen of the south will be roused in the judging with this generation and will be condemning it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and lo! more than Solomon is here!

I love this verse. It aids and abets me. Rejecting God's messengers is a consequential enterprise. The problem with God's messengers is that the generation to whom they are sent are much too close to them to fathom their glory. Familiarity breeds contempt. This popular saying is verified by our Lord when He says in Mark 6:4, "A prophet is not dishonored, except in his

own country and among his relatives and in his home.”

I know what happens to you, because it happens to me. You bring your relatives and friends the words of God, Christ and Paul—and they reject you. The recipients of your message are those of worldly reputation. They belong to the largest and most respected religion on the planet, Christianity. Within that religion, they attend the biggest, brightest, and most expensive churches. Who are you to compete with that? You study Scripture in your bedroom. You minister to the cashiers at Wal-Mart. The people to whom you attempt to bring the truth therefore stand in judgment of you. Their standards are *here*, and your sorry, unconsecrated ass is *here*. To them, you are nothing. You have neither a system of religion nor its wealth or reputation to support your words. (Only the despised Christ is at your disposal.)

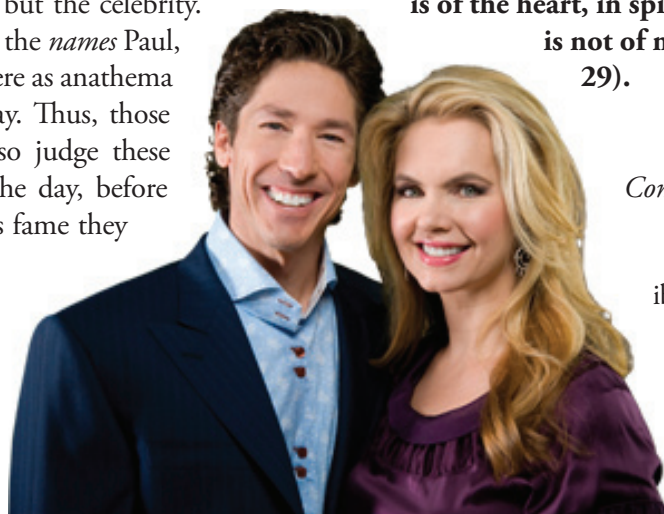
When the arrows pierce your liver and your bowed head threatens to scrape bottom, remember this: In the resurrection, you will be judging those who now judge you. With God, this is how

“It is not the truth these people love, but the celebrity.”

it works. The last become first, and the first last. They had you in their midst, yet the hour of their visitation passed them by like a vapor in the night. Again, you are inconsequential to them. Yet if they were to hear that Paul, or Jesus, or Timothy, or Titus were raised from the dead and

walking around in Jerusalem, they'd spare no expense making tracks toward these people. They'd board the first plane. Yet Jesus, Paul, Timothy, Titus and Luke would tell them the precise words you told them at the kitchen table there in Wisconsin, or wherever you live. You see, it is not truth these people love, but the celebrity. They love the *names*, and yet the *names* Paul, Timothy, Titus and Luke, were as anathema in their day as yours is today. Thus, those now judging you would also judge these now-famous men back in the day, before they were famous. Again, it's fame they love, not truth.

Truth is found in Scripture. Even Jesus interpreted Himself, with the men from Emmaus, from the Scripture (Luke 24:27).



I've experienced a measure of the persecution I've described here. People from all over the world write to me, seeking the wisdom I've received from God via the gifts of communication He has given me. Yet some of those closest to me think that I'm a goofball, a dreamer, even an evildoer. You and I are God's ambassadors of Christ Himself to this world (2 Corinthians 5:20). To the same world, we are God's very mouthpieces (same verse). We speak of peace, and of Christ's success against sin. Our reward in this life? No one can stand to hear what we have to say. Why? We are not part of the mainstream. Our names are not famous. We have no reputation. Our truths clash with popular opinion. Those in our own country (our relatives, our family, some of our intimates) disdain us to the point of spitting. (Familiarity breeds contempt, always and everywhere.) Yet to those given greater measures of God's spirit than these, we are lights in the present darkness. We are God's chosen means of dispensing His richest treasures. Either they listen to us, or they die for the eon. This is how it is.

#### HUMANS APPLAUD WHAT GOD DETESTS

Paul continues hammering the Jews into the ground. (He wants them to look up from the ground and be saved; he bleeds for them; faithful are the wounds of a friend.) He will backpedal a little beginning in chapter three—but we are not there yet. (We shall arrive at that destination next Sunday, God willing.) In the last three verses of this segment, Paul sums up his dangerous soliloquy:

**“For not that which is apparent is the Jew, nor yet that which is apparent in flesh is circumcision; but that which is hidden is the Jew, and circumcision is of the heart, in spirit, not in letter, whose applause is not of men, but of God” (Romans 2:28-29).**

A.E. Knoch writes in *Concordant Commentary to the New Testament*:

In the judgment, the outward visible tokens will count for nothing. Only that which is vital, in spirit, will meet the scrutiny of God and receive recognition. Men may applaud many an action which God detests, and may condemn





that which God approves. Human standards and outward appearances will weigh little in the judgment.

It will do no good for a Jew, on the day of judgment, to boast of his or her pedigree, or of the number of lambs he or she brought to Jerusalem, or the number of temple rites he or she accomplished. “Visible tokens will count for nothing.” Only true acts of God, sourced in spirit, count with God. Titles, diplomas, degrees, membership—chuck them all into the trash can now. Better now than to have God trash them before an attendant universe. Be like Paul, who said in Philippians 3:7-9,

But things which were gain to me, these I have deemed a forfeit because of Christ. But, to be sure, I am also deeming all to be a forfeit because of the superiority of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, because of Whom I forfeited all, and am deeming it to be refuse, that I should be gaining Christ, and may be found in Him, not having my righteousness, which is of law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is from God for faith.

Thus also with Christianity. At the Great White Throne, boasting in a denomination will go over like the Hindenburg. Such an announcement (“But I belonged to the largest church in a tri-county area!”) will be met with uncomfortable silence. Boasting in a theological degree will suffer a similar fate. Boasting in regular attendance at a mega-church like Joel Osteen’s will have the opposite effect as that supposed. (Even angels will look down at their angel shoes, mortified at the mere mention of the name “Osteen” and the supposed worth of it.)

Here is a rule of thumb, free of charge: *If it’s popular, it’s wrong.* Jettison all of your religious baubles now; toss them overboard. Follow your spiritual instinct rather than your eyes. God does not judge as man judges. He chooses the ugly things, not the beautiful. He chooses things that are despised, not popular. He has never switched methods. If you are in the middle of a popular movement, surrounded by hundreds of good-looking people, consider pulling the rip-cord. Friend, you stand on the precipice of imminent destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

#### FORGET “SPIRITUAL ISRAEL”

When God brings Israel into her kingdom, she will already be spiritual. Thus, we have no need for modern-day “spiritual Israelites” who are not even blood members of the chosen race.

The phrase “that which is hidden is the Jew” in Romans 2:29 (specifically the word “Jew”) ought never to be used to “prove” the untenable position of “spiritual Israel.” This teaching claims that, because Israel disobeyed God and failed to fulfill His appointments for them, God discards them forever and now counts the nations as “spiritual Israel.” In other words, the believers today, who are actually non-Jews, are now somehow *actually* Jews, or, to use the language of these inadvertent deceivers, “spiritual Jews.”

The word “Jew” in this passage is figurative for a non-Jewish person doing what a literal Jew is supposed to do, that is, fulfill the dictates of law. This is the figure of speech known as “Implication” (Latin, *hypocatastasis*), which by definition is an implied likeness. The Greek word for this is *katastasis*, whose English elements are DOWN (*kata*) and STATIONING (*stasis*). Thus, this figure of speech is literally “a putting down underneath.” It is implied representation or likeness, thus the “underneath.” In other words, the likeness is not stated on the surface.

The figure of speech known as *simile* is easier to see. If Paul only had employed a simile here, no one would have misunderstood: “That which is hidden is *like* the Jew,” or

“People who do what the Jews were supposed to do are *like* Jews.” Easy. Got it. It’s a simile.

\* \* \*

I wish now to compare similes, metaphors, and the figure of likeness (Implication).

Let’s say that a female acquaintance of mine has many feline characteristics. I say to her, “You are like a cat.” This is a *simile*. It is plainly (by use of word “like”) stating a likeness. But now I tell her, “You *are* a cat.” This is a metaphor. A metaphor is a bolder form of simile, and harder to discern as a figure. Instead of saying that something is like another thing (*simile*), a metaphor boldly states that a thing *is* another thing. Obviously my friend is not a cat. A metaphor is true as to feeling, not fact. It’s a literary device designed to arouse the mind and excite the attention.

Now, however, I point at my female friend and say, “Cat!” This statement is bolder even than a metaphor. Talk about arousing the mind and exciting the attention! I have

**“Figures of speech do not eliminate literal, divine promises.”**

just executed a random act of *katastasis* (Implication), because the meaning is only implied and not stated—not even in the subtler metaphor form. Thus, it’s harder to see. It ought to be common sense that my friend is not a literal cat—and that a man or woman of the nations is not a literal Jew—but I

find common sense anything but common these days. How does a person of the nations suddenly swap out their bloodstream by a mere declaration? Your guess is as good as mine.

That a man or woman of the nations could be *like* a Jew (if only Paul had used the *simile*) does not eliminate the fact that God will fulfill His literal promises to His literal people.

Figures of speech in no way eliminate literal, divine promises.

An ignorance of this common figure has caused many well-meaning believers to buy into the “spiritual Israel” deception. They use Romans 2:29 (and similarly constructed verses) to do it. Such linguistic crimes ought to be punishable by jail time. Instead, the offenders write books.

Don’t be surprised, then, if one day I see you doing some righteous thing, and I point at you with great feeling and say, “Jew!” It will be a test of your grasp of the figure of Implication. If you wink at me, you will have passed the test. If you hurl a rock at my head, you will have failed the test and will be expected to drive me to the hospital. —MZ

## YOUR LETTERS. THANK YOU!

**H**ello Martin, You have to know how wonderful your writing is.

The beautiful truths that totally obliterate all the wrong undercurrents of what we used to believe about God, are all here. Understanding universal salvation alone has given me such great hope and awe. Thanks Martin for all your work. The world needs you. I hope many will see the wonderful way you represent God and His purpose.

You know you also just crack me up. I love your humour and the way you see things and put it out there.

—Anna

**J**ust before clicking on the play button to listen to your show today, I thought something like, “How great it is to have Martin everyday on this show! How wonderful to be able to have ‘contact’ and ‘fellowship’ with other believers.” And I loved hearing you say how much you treasured doing the show and speaking to us all every day.

You are so treasured, brother! I only learned about you and your website about a month ago. Feel our love and our profound “thank you” for doing this for the body of Christ! —R.

**D**ear Martin: Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all the hard work you do for the sake of Christ and truth. I want to encourage you to keep pressing forward and I want you to know that your labor is not in vain in my life. Thank you! I got a copy of *Martin Zender Goes To Hell* and I’m reading through it for the second time! :) —N.P.