

Romans 28:25-29

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[0 : 00] Do you be seated and turn again, if you will, to the end of Romans chapter 2. I've got two big questions for you that I think will help us grasp hold of what the Apostle! So here's question number one. Have you kept the law of God? Have you kept the law of God?

And I think that really hits the nail on the head of what the Apostle is doing here. So look with me at verse 25, okay? For circumcision, that cutting away of the flesh, is indeed of value if you obey the law. But if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.

So if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? The answer is yes. And then verse 27, then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn those who have the written code, uncircumcision but break the law. So on first reading, it's really confusing, isn't it? But what Paul is saying, in some ways, is quite simple. Remember the Jews, they'd come to elevate this badge of circumcision, the sign. And they say, because we've got it, we're all right with God. There's no way that I'm going to be punished by God because I've been circumcised. I'm on my way to heaven. And the question being asked here, Paul is saying, no, have you kept the law of God? And it seems to me that it's really central. He repeats that. He keeps coming back to it.

How are we to understand this? And I think there's two ways we need to understand how we kept the law of God. One is a reminder of our complete and utter inability to keep the law.

It's a statement in this context that's saying, if you think that you can keep God's perfect law in its entirety, you're deluded. He's going to go on and argue with them that they think this badge is so important. They think circumcision demonstrates they are part of the people of God.

[2 : 22] But what God is saying through Paul is it's only a small part of the badge. And if you're going to use that approach to get into heaven, you need the whole badge. So when I was in school, I went to Gowerton Comprehensive School and you wore a blazer because it was a form of grammar school.

You wore a blazer and on the blazer there was a badge and it said on it, Gowerton Comprehensive School and then the kind of crest. And you needed the badge on your blazer to be in school, otherwise you weren't wearing the proper uniform. But imagine I turned up and I just had the G. None of the rest of the words, just a little G, not the crest, just that little letter G. That teacher would have pulled me up, would have said that's not enough, you need the whole badge.

And that's what Paul is saying. He's saying you think that circumcision is going to get you into heaven. Paul says it's just a little pen stroke of the law. Have you kept the whole of the law?

Galatians chapter 5. We've seen it in House Group. It says it really clearly.

Galatians 5.2. Look, I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ would be of no value to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision, you're obligated to keep the whole of the law.

[3 : 43] You're severed from Christ. You would be justified by the law. You've fallen away from grace. He's saying you've not done that. Neither have I. In other words, you're not accepting that this good news of God comes to you by God's kindness alone.

You're saying that it's a gospel by the badge. And are you aware that this little badge of circumcision, you've only got the little g. And you need the rest of the badge, which is the whole of the law of God.

The point I'm making is that it's utterly ridiculous to think that because you've got a little badge on, you're safe. That you're secure. That God is well pleased with you because you've had a certain rite or a certain ceremony.

That you are one of the people of God because you do certain things. And everything is well with your soul. Because actually, when we're exposed to the law of God, we realise we just can't keep it. I fail miserably. And we know we do. And we know it's empty in all of our attempts. We don't live up to our own standards, let alone God's.

[4 : 57] And I think that's partly what the Apostle Paul is saying here. When you look at Galatians and the other text, it informs us a little bit of what God is saying to his people, the Jews.

Circumcision. It is of value to you if you obey the law. So are you obeying the whole law? Well, no. But the other thing he's doing here, which is really important, is he's pointing out to you and I our need of Jesus Christ.

And what it means to believe in him. I don't think he's just saying, you've got to keep the whole law. I think he's saying something deeper to you and I. He's pointing us to someone else.

And I think he's saying to you and I this morning, do you understand what circumcision really means? That are you fulfilling the law in taking this badge of circumcision and applying it to yourself?

Have you followed the whole point of the law? You can do that with the whole of the law, but let's just do it with circumcision. What is circumcision all about? Indeed, the whole of the law called for an internal change.

[6 : 11] Internal change in a person. Internal change inside. And we know, don't we, that no ceremony, no circumcision, or the law could accomplish that change inside of us.

So Romans 8, Paul says, the law was weak through the flesh. It couldn't achieve what it was meant to do.

And circumcision is pointing to the fact that you and I cannot get right with God on our own. That's the whole point of the sign.

It isn't enough just to have the badge. What did circumcision mean? It meant that a man, when he was born, was unfit to enter the kingdom of heaven.

There was a certain sense in which we were unclean. And circumcision was a sign of that uncleanness in the sight of God. It was a bloody sign. That there needed to be a shedding of blood.

[7 : 15] That you needed the work of God in you. It pointed to the work of God that was needed in your heart. And that's always been the case. Let me try and explain that to you.

In Deuteronomy 10, verse 16, God says to the people, circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart. And be no longer stubborn. Deuteronomy 36 said, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring.

So that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live. That theme is picked up in Galatians 6. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision but a new creation.

Philippians 3, verse 3, We are the circumcision who worship by the spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus. And we put no confidence in our flesh. And so all of these things are pointing to the meaning of that badge.

And God is showing the absurdity of the Jewish position. You're proud of that badge. You don't know what that badge means. That badge tells you that you're not right with God and you need his work in your heart.

[8 : 26] And you need the grace of God in your heart. And you're saying, we've got the badge. Do you know what the badge points to? Do you know what the badge is a symbol of?

There's no point standing under the sign and saying, I'm secure. Because the sign is pointing you to the reality. And it's pointing you to Jesus Christ.

And the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus. And the whole law, it points to him. And it points to your inability to satisfy God. And so God meets that inability.

In the Lord Jesus. And you think, but what about today? Well there are people out there sitting in churches this morning.

And they're really proud of their identity in the same way that the Jews spoke of their identity. And so they may say, I've been baptised, you know. But the big question is, have you been baptised in the Holy Spirit?

[9 : 31] Have you realised what your baptism is saying about you? Or it might be saying, I'm a member of the church, you know. I'm a holder of the office in the church.

And we might make our list of things that we're really proud of. We might say, well my parents are believers. These are the things I do. The badge of your member.

You say, I'm a church member. The badge of your church membership. What is it a sign pointing to? Let's suppose you're travelling somewhere.

Let me try and illustrate it. You're travelling somewhere and you feel really, really sick. You're far from home and you become really, really ill, uninjured. And you need to find a hospital. And so you're able to drive.

So you get out into the car. And you find a sign which says, with a big H on it. It's got a big H on it. For hospital. And so you find the sign.

[10:32] You're driving along. You pull over. And you stand by the sign. And you stay there.

There's another person. They've got a massive cat on their head.

They're bleeding to death. But somehow they can drive. And they see the sign H for hospital. And they pull over. And they get out. And they stand by the sign.

Blood everywhere. And there you are throwing up. There's someone else with a heart attack. And they, amazingly, they're able to drive as well. And they come out on their chest.

They see the sign. They jump out of the car. They stand by the sign. And there's the three of you. Dying. Standing by the sign. What are you doing? You've completely misunderstood it, haven't you?

And so here's a sign. With H with hospital on it. Sick and dying people of Israel. Standing around the sign. And they say, we're fine. We're alright.

[11:31] We've got the sign. And then they uproot the sign. And they carry it along their shoulder. And they say, we're okay. We've got the sign.

Everything's going to be fine now. The dying in sin. Carrying around a massive H. But look what's happening on the other side.

Look what's happening on the other side. This is what Paul's saying. He says, look at all these Gentiles. People who are not part of the people of God. And they're not by the sign. They are all crushing into the A&E.;

And they are all under the hands of the doctors. The great healers. And they are being healed. Of their bleeding. Of their heart attacks. Of their illness. And they're being healed.

Because they've gone to the right place. They have got to the reality. You've just gone to the sign. What are you carrying around? The big issue is this.

[12:28] Are you under the hands of the healer? The great physician of souls. The Lord Jesus Christ. Or are you walking around carrying a great big badge? Circumcision is of some value if you obey the law.

But if you break the law. Your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. What's the use of having the letter H over your shoulder? Because it's not the hospital.

It doesn't count. Because you didn't go to where it was pointing you. But if a man who is uncircumcised. Keeps the precepts of the law.

In other words. He goes to where the law was pointing him. Which is Jesus Christ. Will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?

Do you see that? The one who is physically uncircumcised. But keeps the law will condemn you. You who have the written code. Uncircumcision.

[13:27] But you break the law. In other words. There are people that didn't have. The sign. But they're in the A&E.; And they are being healed by the doctor.

And the very fact that they are there. Condemns you who are sitting outside. With the sign. Have you kept the law? Well. On one level. God is saying to you.

You know you can't. And I know I can't. But on another level. God is saying. Have you followed the sign of the law? Have you followed the sign of circumcision? That points you to the one.

I am pointing you to. Who is Jesus Christ. Why are you not there? Why have you not gone to him? Why have you not believed in him? He's the one the sign is pointing you to.

That's the first question. Second question is. Have you kept the law of God? The first question is. Have you kept the law of God? Second question is this. Has the Holy Spirit worked in your heart? Has the Holy Spirit worked in your heart?

[14:33] If all of your religion is outward. And man-made. And drawn from the motive of pleasing people. And of causing people to think well of you.

Then you're just like the Jews of Paul's day. And God is saying of them. They might have the name Jews.

But they are not true Jews. He goes on later in the book of Romans. To speak about an olive tree. And he says.

There's an olive tree. But there are dead branches on it. And I'm going to chop those branches off. Because they are dead. And so in an outward sense. They may be able to say.

Well I'm part of the people of God. But in reality they weren't. And that can be true of us this morning. In an outward sense.

[15 : 31] You can attend the people of God. You can attend church. You can hear the gospel being preached. You've been baptized. In an outward sense. You're part of the people of God.

But in the inner sense. In the spiritual sense. God's grace hasn't worked in your heart. What's the evidence of that?

Because this people in his day. Did not follow. The word of God. To its end. Which is Christ. They satisfied themselves.

With rites. And with ceremonies. And so when Jesus preaches. In the Sermon on the Mount. They hear the command. You shall not murder. And they think.

Well I've done that. And then Jesus explains to them. What it means. He goes into their hearts. To look at their anger. And the words that they've used. Of each other. And he says. This actually is murder. Oh I'm guilty of that.

[16 : 35] And he talks about adultery. And lust. And theft. And in those ways. Jesus takes the law of God. And he takes it into our hearts. And he exposes them. And he says.

You say that you keep it. But there's no life of God. In your soul. And you're dead to God. And to his truth. But here is where he goes on.

To speak about his grace. And his kindness. He says. For no one is a Jew. Who's merely one outwardly. Nor is circumcision. Verse 28. Outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly.

And circumcision is a matter of the heart. By the spirit. Not by the letter. And his praise is from. Men. But from. Not from men.

But from God. And so the Jews are satisfied with people. Thinking well of them. But Paul says. I'm not going to praise you.

[17 : 30] For your outward conduct. And God says. I don't praise you for that. That praise is from men. All the outward ways. That you seem to be behaving.

Well that's wonderful. But I can see your heart. And I don't praise you. For what is in your heart. That's what he's saying. Here is the grace of God. That he's willing. To do a work.

Inside of you. And inside of me. That we cannot do ourselves. So do you see what the command was? The command was.

Circumcise your heart. What? How do you circumcise your heart? And the answer is this. When you receive the gift.

Of the Holy Spirit. The Lord your God. Will circumcise your heart. So that you will find yourself.

[18 : 25] Loving the Lord your God. With all your heart. And with all your soul. He works deep inside of us. He deals with our hearts. And he does that. By the promise of the Holy Spirit. And the gifts.

And the graces of the Holy Spirit. So that's what he's talking about. In the Old Testament. When he speaks about. Circumcision. He says. This is the big point. Deuteronomy. 30 verse 6. Circumcision of the heart.

Means that we come to love God. In other words. It's by the work of God. In you. That you've come to have. True affection for God.

And you will never come to that. Without the work of God himself. In you. You will never come to love God.

Or to express your affection. For God. And adoration. And exaltation in him. Until he does that work. In your heart. That's why in Jeremiah 31 verse 33.

[19 : 24] Where he looks forward. And he speaks of the new covenant. He says God will write his law. On your heart. And so we thank God for that. The law then becomes.

Not like a letter that we read. Oh I must remember. I must not murder. No he. He takes that. And he puts it. On our hearts. And he starts to churn.

And to move. And he works in our hearts. So that we. We want to deal with our sinful anger. And our words. And our contempt. And those things.
Start to come forward. And we begin to deal with them. And he starts to work on us. And so the Christian. Gradually changes. And he writes. His law. On our hearts.
So that we are able. To obey. From the heart. And we're able to say. Oh hi. Oh how I love your law. So that it's not just. An outward right. And it's not just a duty.
[20 : 22] And it's not just a practice. And not just a ceremony. But from the heart. And he gives us. Saving affections. For God. And a true love for God.

And a delight in God. And an obedience to God. And I think Romans 2.29. Is really helpful. Right at the end of the chapter. Because it does something else.
It frees us from the praise of men. And we live in a culture. That is crippled by that. It's crippled by looking for the praise of others.
It's what keeps formal. Ritualistic religion going. That we can be so captivated. By the need to be praised by men. That we put on an outward show.
And we never dare admit. I'm a sinner. And I need to be cleansed. By the Lord Jesus. And that God needs to come.

[21 : 22] And send the Holy Spirit. To cut the foreskin of my heart. That he would send the Spirit. To baptize me. Thoroughly. And fully by his grace.

And by his mercy. And so we know. That we all naturally. We want people to think well of us. But it is only the grace of God.

That delivers. Us into that freedom. Where we think more and more. Of the praise of God. And delighting in God. And God delighting in us.

Than being well thought of by others. So Deuteronomy 30. Is saying true affection. Is a work of the Spirit. And Jeremiah 31. Is saying true obedience of the heart.

Is a work of the Spirit. And Romans 2.29. Is saying freedom. From this crippling fear. And need for the praise of others. Rather than God delighting in us. Can be dealt with.

[22 : 18] By a work of God's Spirit. Philippians chapter 3. Verse 3. Adds another stand to this. It says. We are the true circumcision. Who worship in the Spirit of God. And glory in Jesus Christ.

And we put no confidence. In the flesh. We worship in the Spirit. And glory in Christ Jesus. We don't glory in some little badge.

That pointed to the reality. But we glory in the reality. We glory in the saving presence. Of Jesus Christ.

He is our boast. He is the only thing we have to boast. So have you kept the law? Well the answer is no. But have you kept the law. In the sense that it points you. To Jesus Christ.

Well that points us to the second question. Has the Holy Spirit worked in you. And created a new person? Has he dealt with your heart? Has he changed you.

[23 : 18] And transformed you? And are you a worshipper of Jesus Christ. This morning? Nothing else. And no one else.

So my prayer. That from this sermon. That the Holy Spirit will be gracious to us. And he will capture us. And he will bring us.

To Jesus. This very day. And I can urge you. To come to Jesus Christ. This very day. The Holy Spirit persuades you. He draws you. He attracts you. As the Holy Spirit.

Shows you. What you're really like. And he repels you. Away from yourself. And we turn to Jesus. And we embrace him.

As he is freely offered. To pardon you. And me. Of all our sin. And to make you new. And to give you his Holy Spirit.

[24 : 14] So that you can change. And you can be freed. Freed from the fear. Of living. To look good. And so that you might worship.

And you might enjoy God. Forever and ever. Let's pray.