

Romans 2:25

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.

Analysis

For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law—περιτομὴ μὲν γὰρ ὡφελεῖ ἔὰν νόμον πράσσῃς (peritomē men gar ὥphelei ean nomon prassēs). Περιτομή (peritomē, "circumcision") was the covenant sign given to Abraham (Genesis 17:9-14), identifying Jews as God's people. Ωφελέω (ōphelēō, "profit/benefit") acknowledges legitimate value—circumcision does benefit when accompanied by Torah obedience. But the conditional ἔὰν (ean, "if") introduces the devastating qualification.

But if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision—ἔὰν δὲ παραβάτης νόμου ἦς, ἡ περιτομή σου ἀκροβυστία γέγονεν (ean de parabatēs nomou ēs, hē peritomē sou akrobystia gegonen). Παραβάτης (parabatēs, "transgressor") describes one who crosses God's boundaries. The shocking claim: disobedience cancels circumcision, making the circumcised man functionally ἀκροβυστία (akrobystia, "uncircumcised/foreskin")—a Gentile outsider.

This would outrage Jewish hearers: circumcision was irrevocable physical mark guaranteeing covenant inclusion. Paul here argues the unthinkable—ritual without righteousness is worthless, even negative. He anticipates verses 28-29: true Jewishness is inward (heart circumcision) not outward (physical mark). This parallels Jeremiah 4:4 and 9:25-26, which condemned uncircumcised hearts. Mere

ethnicity or ritual observance cannot save; only transformed hearts matter (Galatians 5:6, 6:15).

Historical Context

Circumcision defined Jewish identity—the covenant sign separating Abraham's seed from Gentiles. It was performed on eighth-day infants (Leviticus 12:3), creating permanent physical distinction. By Paul's era, some Jews viewed circumcision almost magically, as guaranteeing salvation regardless of behavior. The Maccabean crisis (167-160 BC) intensified this when some Jews underwent surgery to reverse circumcision to assimilate into Greek culture—seen as ultimate apostasy. Paul's claim that lawbreaking 'uncircumcises' was shocking reversal.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What Christian 'rituals' or 'signs' do I trust in—baptism, communion, church membership—treating them as automatic guarantees rather than calls to transformation?
2. How does this verse challenge the notion that any external religious act secures salvation apart from heart change?
3. If disobedience can 'cancel' the covenant sign, what does this teach about the nature of true covenant relationship with God?

Interlinear Text

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|--------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------|--------------|-----------|----------------|
| περιτομή | μὲν | γὰρ | ώφελεῖ | έὰν | νόμου | πράσσῃς· | έὰν |
| circumcision | verily | For | profiteth | if | of the law | thou keep | if |
| G4061 | G3303 | G1063 | G5623 | G1437 | G3551 | G4238 | G1437 |
| δὲ | παραβάτης | νόμου | ἥς | ή | περιτομή | σου | ἀκροβυνστία |
| but | a breaker | of the law | G1510 | G3588 | circumcision | thy | uncircumcision |
| G1161 | G3848 | G3551 | | | G4061 | G4675 | G203 |
| γέγονεν | | | | | | | |
| is made | | | | | | | |
| G1096 | | | | | | | |

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 4:4 (Parallel theme): Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

Acts 7:51 (Parallel theme): Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

Deuteronomy 30:6 (Parallel theme): And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

Galatians 6:15 (Parallel theme): For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.