

Romans 2:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?

Analysis

Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?—ἐὰν οὖν ἡ ἀκροβυστία τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου φυλάσῃ, οὐχ ἡ ἀκροβυστία αὐτοῦ εἰς περιτομὴν λογισθήσεται (ean oun hē akrobystia ta dikaiōmata tou nomou phylassē, ouch hē akrobystia autou eis peritomēn logisthēsetai). Τὰ δικαιώματα (ta dikaiōmata, "righteous requirements") are law's moral imperatives. Φυλάσσω (phylassō, "guard/observe/keep") means careful obedience.

Λογίζομαι (logizomai, "reckon/count/credit") is Paul's justification term (used 19 times in Romans 4), meaning God credits righteousness to one's account. The rhetorical question expects "yes": if an uncircumcised Gentile obeys God's law, won't God count him as circumcised—covenant member? This inverts Jewish categories: covenant status depends on heart righteousness, not ethnic identity or ritual. Obedient Gentiles are 'in'; disobedient Jews are 'out.'

Paul here articulates radical inclusion of Gentile believers. This anticipates chapters 9-11's explanation of Gentile grafting into Israel's olive tree. The principle: God judges hearts, not foreskins; reality, not ritual. This demolishes ethnic exclusivism while maintaining moral standards. It's not that obedience earns salvation (Paul will show none perfectly obey, 3:9-20), but that faith-produced obedience—not ethnic identity—determines covenant standing.

Historical Context

This argument would scandalize Jewish listeners. Circumcision was THE covenant sign—indelible, irreplaceable. Gentiles could become proselytes through circumcision, Torah observance, and ritual immersion, but 'counting uncircumcision as circumcision' reversed the categories. Paul essentially argues that God-fearing Gentiles who lack the ritual sign but possess heart righteousness stand accepted, while circumcised Jews who violate Torah stand condemned. This foreshadows Acts 15's Jerusalem Council decision that Gentile believers need not be circumcised.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does this verse challenge ethnic, denominational, or cultural boundaries I've erected around who belongs to God's people?
2. If God 'counts' heart obedience as covenant membership, what does this teach about the nature of true Christianity?
3. In what ways might I exclude or look down on believers who lack my 'circumcision'—my theological tradition, worship style, or cultural expressions?

Interlinear Text

ἐάν	οὖν	ἡ	ἀκροβυστία	τὰ	δικαιώματα	τοῦ
if	Therefore	G3588	the uncircumcision	G3588	the righteousness	G3588
G1437	G3767		G203		G1345	
νόμου	φυλάσσει	οὐχί	ἡ	ἀκροβυστία	αὐτοῦ	εἰς
of the law	keep	not	G3588	the uncircumcision	his	for
G3551	G5442	G3780		G203	G846	G1519
περιτομὴν	λογισθήσεται					
circumcision	be counted					
G4061	G3049					

Additional Cross-References

Colossians 2:11 (Parallel theme): In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

Romans 8:4 (Righteousness): That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.