

Romans 2:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

Analysis

And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee—καὶ κρινεῖ ἡ ἐκ φύσεως ἀκροβυστία τὸν νόμον τελοῦσα σέ (kai krinei hē ek physeōs akrobystia ton nomon telousa se). Ἐκ φύσεως (ek physeōs, "by nature") describes Gentiles naturally born uncircumcised, contrasting with Jews circumcised on eighth day. Τελέω (teleō, "fulfill/complete/accomplish") means bringing law to its intended goal. Κρίνω (krinō, "judge/condemn") here means the obedient Gentile's life condemns the disobedient Jew by comparison.

Who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?—τὸν διὰ γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς παραβάτην νόμου (ton dia grammatos kai peritomēs parabatēn nomou). Γράμμα (gramma, "letter") refers to written Torah (2 Corinthians 3:6 contrasts letter that kills with Spirit that gives life). The Jew possesses both letter (Scripture) and circumcision (covenant sign) yet remains parabatēs (transgressor). The Gentile with neither fulfills law's intent; the Jew with both violates it.

This reversal is stunning: the judge becomes judged, the insider becomes outsider, the privileged becomes condemned. Jesus made identical argument in Matthew 12:41-42—Ninevites and Queen of Sheba will condemn Jesus's generation because they repented/sought wisdom while Israel rejected greater revelation. Obedient response matters more than privileged position. This anticipates 9:30-33: Gentiles attained righteousness by faith while Israel pursuing law-righteousness failed.

Historical Context

Jewish confidence rested on possessing 'the letter' (Torah scrolls, systematic teaching) and circumcision. These were irrevocable advantages distinguishing them from Gentiles. Paul here argues these advantages become liabilities when violated—worse to possess truth and disobey than lack revelation. This echoes prophetic tradition: Amos 3:2 ("You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities"), Jeremiah 7:4-11 (temple presence doesn't protect), Malachi 2:1-9 (priests who dishonor God).

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How might my life be 'judged' by believers with less spiritual privilege—new Christians, those from difficult backgrounds—whose simple obedience exposes my hypocrisy?
2. Do I presume on 'the letter' (biblical knowledge) and Christian 'circumcision' (baptism, membership) while transgressing God's will?
3. What would it mean for me to 'fulfill the law'—not earn salvation by works, but demonstrate faith's genuineness through transformed living?

Interlinear Text

καὶ κρινεῖ ἡ ἐκ φύσεως ἀκροβυστία τὸν νόμου
And judge which is by nature uncircumcision G3588 the law
G2532 G2919 G3588 G1537 G5449 G203 G3551

τελοῦσα σὲ τὸν διὰ γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς
if it fulfil thee who by the letter And circumcision
G5055 G4571 G3588 G1223 G1121 G2532 G4061

παραβάτην νόμου
dost transgress the law
G3848 G3551

Additional Cross-References

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

Romans 2:29 (Parallel theme): But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

2 Corinthians 3:6 (Parallel theme): Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.