

# By the Spirit, not the Knife

7.14.24

Message 11

Romans Series

## Introduction: What's the Password?

- A. When we were kids, we would have secret clubs.
  - 1. Sometimes, we would form them on the playground and sometimes with some of the other boys in town.
  - 2. Especially when we were young, there were no girls allowed.
  - 3. Usually, there was some rite of passage or secret handshake.
  - 4. Being part of the club was a big deal, and being left out was the worst.
- B. To be Jewish was to be part of this special, favored group.
  - 1. And the sign, the initiation for every male, was to be circumcised.
  - 2. It wasn't a matter of where you were born or even who your parents were.
  - 3. All sorts of people were accepted into the family as long as they were circumcised.
- C. To be a Jew is more than nationalities and bloodlines.
  - 1. It refers to a relationship with God.
  - 2. In the Old Testament, the Jewish people are favored and blessed while being entrusted with telling the world about God.
  - 3. The outward, physical sign of this was that every male was circumcised 8 days after their birth.
- D. But the Jews had missed what it meant to be Jewish.

1. Amazingly, the Apostle Paul, who was the most Jewish of the Jews, tells us that circumcision by the knife is not what puts a person in a special relationship with God.
2. It was obedience, delivered through faith, that puts us in a relationship with God.
3. True circumcision, the true cutting, is not a work of the flesh but a work of the Spirit.

### Romans 2:25–29 (CSB)

<sup>25</sup> Circumcision benefits you if you observe the law, but if you are a lawbreaker, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. <sup>26</sup> So if an uncircumcised man keeps the law's requirements, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? <sup>27</sup> A man who is physically uncircumcised, but who keeps the law, will judge you who are a lawbreaker in spite of having the letter of the law and circumcision. <sup>28</sup> For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, and true circumcision is not something visible in the flesh. <sup>29</sup> On the contrary, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart—by the Spirit, not the letter. That person's praise is not from people but from God.

#### 1. The Law works if you keep it perfectly. Vs. 25

<sup>25</sup> Circumcision benefits you if you observe the law, but if you are a lawbreaker, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

A. Paul doesn't say circumcision is wrong.

1. Because this was God's idea and God's sign to Abraham.
2. God did not make a mistake.

B. Paul's argument is that if you observe the law, circumcision is powerful.

1. BUT nobody can keep the Law.
2. Everyone has sinned.
3. All are lawbreakers.

4. No one can keep it.

C. No matter who you are or where you come from, no one is a perfect lawkeeper.

1. This is a struggle that I relate to.

2. I grew up in church and avoided all of the “big sins.”

3. I’ve lived a pretty good, clean life so far, and it’s tempting to fall into the trap of thinking I’m good enough.

D. Romans reminds me that only Jesus is sinless.

1. Only Jesus kept the law perfectly.

2. Only Jesus fulfilled the standards without fail.

3. That is how Jesus could offer Himself as the perfect, sinless Lamb of God, the perfect and undefiled sacrifice.

4. My sacrifice would have never been enough to fulfill God’s righteous standard.

## 2. The flesh is a poor substitute for the Spirit.

A. The Jews had placed their hope in signs of the flesh.

1. Keeping commandments, obeying Sabbaths, and circumcising males provided a false sense of security.

2. It is possible to obey Sabbaths and circumcise males and NOT worship God.

a. Outward forms of religion are no guarantee of inner transformation.

b. The outer work only has value if there is inner integrity.

3. We like physical expressions because we are comfortable seeing and touching these things.

B. Yet, breaking the law was as good as becoming uncircumcised.

1. Obedience through faith is what sustained God’s people.

2. Unless we are changed by the Spirit of God, we are not right with God, no matter who we are or what we do.

C. The message for us is similar: **The flesh is a poor substitute for the Spirit.**

1. All of the church attending, singing, giving, or fasting will never save us.

2. These actions don't make us People of God, they don't save us.

3. Instead, they are public expressions of worship.

Because Jesus has saved me and is changing me, I go to church and I worship with intensity, and I give of my time, talent, and treasure, and I practice spiritual disciplines like fasting and prayer.

4. I don't do these to save me, but because I am saved.

3. *As great as circumcision was, it was merely a sign, not the goal.*

A. The Book of Galatians deals heavily with this topic.

1. In Galatia, there were a group of Messianic Christians who demanded the Gentiles to be circumcised.

2. They taught that, just as a man cannot be a Jew if he wasn't physically circumcised, Christians were not part of the family of God if they weren't either.

B. Paul gets very angry because of this, because these Jews were not leading new believers into freedom but back into bondage.

**Galatians 5:1–6** (CSB)

For freedom, Christ set us free. Stand firm, then, and don't submit again to a yoke of slavery. <sup>2</sup>Take note! I, Paul, am telling you that if you get yourselves circumcised, Christ will not benefit you at all. <sup>3</sup>Again I testify to every man who gets himself circumcised that he is obligated to do the entire law. <sup>4</sup>You who are trying to be justified by the law are alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace. <sup>5</sup>For we eagerly await through the

Spirit, by faith, the hope of righteousness. <sup>6</sup>For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision accomplishes anything; what matters is faith working through love.

Galatians 6:15 (CSB)

<sup>15</sup>For both circumcision and uncircumcision mean nothing; what matters instead is a new creation.

C. What were they doing?

1. They added requirements to salvation that didn't lead to freedom.
2. They were adding law to grace, and that isn't what Jesus came to do.
3. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Law so we could live in freedom, life, grace, and mercy.

What does it mean to have a circumcision of the heart?

1. It means obedience to a Law greater than yourself.

A. What I mean is that we are called to obey a standard that isn't ours.

1. We don't set the rules or the standards.
2. Instead, it is God's Law, God's plan, and God's purposes.
3. And when we are part of the Body of Christ, we declare that we are following God.

B. We are saved by grace through faith.

1. But faith without works is dead, according to the Book of James.
2. Obedience is part of the Christian walk and the Christian life.

C. How's your walk with Jesus?

1. For all of us, old or young, new believers or veterans, staying obedient is a daily choice.

2. How's your walk?
3. Are you walking in obedience to what God has said?
4. Are you walking in obedience to what God is saying?
5. Circumcision by the Spirit requires obedience.

It also requires trust.

2. Circumcision by the Spirit **means trusting the Holy Spirit.**

A. An 8-year old boy doesn't have a choice to be circumcised.

1. A 38-year-old does.
2. Circumcision by the Spirit, to be marked by Him in an unmistakable way is a big decision
3. To obey God and trust in Him in this is hard.

B. It isn't easier as an adult.

1. The hard part about adulthood is that we know things.
2. Adulthood is being constantly confronted with decisions and hoping we make the right ones.
  - a. You hope you are raising your kids right.
  - b. You hope you are working at the right job.
  - c. You hope you bought the right house or right car or right hot-water heater.
3. But more than that:
  - a. Is Jesus really real?
  - b. Can God really help me with my pain, or my decisions.
  - c. Should I really be going to church instead of working on Sunday?
  - d. Is tithing really an avenue to blessing, or is it just a way for the church to take my money?

C. To be circumcised by the Spirit means we permit the Spirit to work in us.

1. To cut away what needs to go.
2. To be still and let God cut.
3. To embrace the pain that brings LIFE.
4. It's like when you have a bad splinter in your hand, and your dad or friend pulls out the pocket knife.
  - a. The worst thing you can do is to jerk your hand or move.
  - b. You have to trust the person with the knife.
5. I can confidently say that the Spirit is working in all of your lives.
  - a. The work that is happening in your life is painful but necessary.
  - b. God is working, and you have to trust that He knows what He is doing.
  - c. Trust and Obey is our theme in this season.
  - d. God, I TRUST you and I will OBEY your leadership.

Because the Good News is that the cutting means

3. It means you're family.

A. Exclusion hurts.

1. But God has more than enough room for all of us and so many more.
2. He didn't stop with the Jews.
  - a. He didn't stop with the 144,000 in Revelation.
  - b. He didn't stop 100 years ago.
  - c. He hasn't stopped with you.

B. We all know the pain of being on the outside looking in.

1. We know what it feels like to be uninvited and excluded.
2. Perhaps this morning you feel like you don't belong either.
3. But as Paul told the Jews and I'm telling you:
4. It isn't the works of the flesh and religion that matters but the work of the Spirit.
5. Thankfully, we enter into the Body of Christ not by the knife but by the Spirit.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, I invite you to work in my life.

A. This morning, we all need the Holy Spirit to work in our lives.

1. We need God's help to be obedient.
2. We need God's help to TRUST Him.
3. We need God's help to remind us that we DO belong and we ARE loved.

B. As we take a few minutes to pray this morning, I believe it's appropriate to ask God to help each one of us to be obedient and trusting.

1. If you are walking through a season where you need physical healing, ask God for help to trust in this process.
2. If you are walking through a season where you need financial provision, ask God to provide and to help you trust Him.
3. If God is correcting you, changing you, or challenging you, ask for help and faith to do all that He asks of you.