

Romans 2:25-29

²⁵ Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

²⁶ If a man who is not circumcised keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ The one who is physically uncircumcised yet keeps the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

²⁸ A man is not a Jew because he is one outwardly, nor is circumcision only outward and physical. ²⁹ No, a man is a Jew because he is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise does not come from men, but from God.

Berean Study Bible

1

Out with the old, in with the new. Romans 2:25-29

Premise. 25

Every symbol needs the backup of substance. 25a "Circumcision has value if..."
Without substance, a symbol is worthless. 25b "but if you break the law..."

Principle. 26-27

The substance is greater than the symbol. 26 "uncircumcision... as circumcision"
The substance can condemn the symbol. 27 "uncircumcised... will condemn you"

Practice. 28-29

Substance is the destination. 28 "not a Jew because he is one outwardly"
Symbol is the signpost. 29 "circumcision is a matter of the heart"

2

It's time to stop playing charades. Get real. Romans 2:25-29

Work only works for perfection. 2:25

If I keep the Law. 25a "if you observe the Law"
If I break the Law. 25b "if you break the Law"

Inward matters more than outward. 2:26-27

Keep the Law. 26 "keeps... the Law"
Break the Law. 27 "law-breaker"

People look outwardly; God looks at the heart. 2:28-29

Heart. 29a "of the heart"
Spirit. 29b "by the Spirit"
God. 29c "but from God"

3

In the name of the Law. Romans 2:25-29

About the Law. 2:25

The law is good. 25a “value if you observe the law”

The law is just. 25b “but if you break the law”

Without the Law. 2:26-27

The Law is about actions. 26a “keeps the requirements of the Law”

The Law is about externals. 27 “even though you have the written code”

Spirit of the Law. 2:28-29

Focus on what is within your heart. 29a “inwardly... a matter of the heart”

Focus on what is given to your heart 29b “by the Spirit... praise from God”

4

Show stopper / Show + go = glow. Romans 2:25-29

Hot rod / motor show theme

Best in show. 2:25

All show. 25a “Circumcision has value if you observe the law”

No go. 25b “but if you break the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision”

Best on the track. 2:26-27

Go is the best show. 26 “not circumcised but keeps the requirements of the Law”

Go is better than show. 27 “you have the written code... you are a lawbreaker”

My daily drive. 2:28-29

Show is no go. 28 “A man is not a Jew because he is one outwardly”

Go is the only show. 29 “circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit”

5

Reality check. Romans 2:25-29

How to look spiritual. 2:25

People look at what you do. 25a “Circumcision has value”

People listen to what you say. 25b “you observe the law”

How to be spiritual. 2:26-27

Your actions are confined. 26 “keeps the requirements of the Law”

Your attitudes are consistent. 27 “you have the written code and circumcision”

How to grow spiritually. 2:28-29

From the inside, out. 29a “inwardly... a matter of the heart”

From the outside, in. 29b “by the Spirit... praise from God”

The religion of relationship. Romans 2:25-29

The purpose of religion

Circumcision indicates covenant. Genesis 17:6, 11
Sacraments indicate salvation. Matthew 28:19

The practice of relationship

Good religion is a good relationship with yourself. Galatians 6:14
Good religion is a good relationship with your Lord. Jeremiah 9:23-25
Good religion is a good relationship with your community. James 1:27

Putting relationship into my religion

Good relationships focus on principles. Micah 6:8
Good relationships focus on priorities. Galatians 6:10
Good relationships focus on practices. Luke 4:18-19. Romans 12:13. 1 John 3:17-18.

Other possible titles

No one got saved by being good.
Your religion is worthless. Try this instead.
You'd be surprised what won't save you.
Look closer. It's an inside job.
Put this on your "Don't Do" list.
Your religion sux!
The sacraments can't save you.
Dump your religion. Here is something much better.
Coming full circle.
What are the rules for being a believer?
Why is the Old Testament still in our Bible?
Valuable rituals and rites
Is the rite right?
Ritual vs Reality
Which ritual gives me righteousness?
Does circumcision hurt?

Cross-references, commentary, quotes, and illustrations

Definition of circumcision

Our English language word 'circumcision' is a compound word made up of two halves. The front half 'circum...' gives us words like circle, circumference, circumnavigate. So it means 'all around, completely around'. The back half of the word, '...cision' gives us words like

‘incision’ meaning ‘to cut off, to slice into’. Hence, ‘circumcision’ means ‘to cut around’ to remove the foreskin from a male’s penis.

The origin of circumcision

Throughout Europe, the North and South Americas, and the Orient, circumcision was traditionally unknown. In tribal communities of Africa and Australasia circumcision was practiced among some tribes as a rite from childhood to manhood.

The purpose of circumcision

Here is a clarification that must be made. There is no culture anywhere in the world where circumcision is practiced for any assumed health reasons. In the Bible the practice of circumcision is never linked with health or hygiene. Circumcision is only ever a spiritual sign.

In the Bible, circumcision was introduced as the sign of the spiritual covenant between God and Abraham. God’s covenant commitment was: ⁶I will make you exceedingly fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will descend from you. Genesis 17:6. Having given that promise, God then added the sign of this covenant. ¹¹You are to circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and this will be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. Genesis 17:11

The practice of circumcision

¹²Generation after generation, every male must be circumcised when he is eight days old, including those born in your household and those purchased from a foreigner—even those who are not your offspring. ¹³Whether they are born in your household or purchased; they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh will be an everlasting covenant. Genesis 17:12-13. Today, Jews who desire to live under the Old Covenant still practice to circumcise of their males when they are eight days old.

When circumcision was introduced, Abraham was ninety-nine years old. His son, Esau, the father of the Arabic nations, was thirteen years old. Isaac, the father of the Jews, had not yet been born. Today, Arabic culture, and those who follow the Arab’s Muslim religion circumcise their males, usually between six and thirteen years of age.

Circumcision in Ancient Egypt

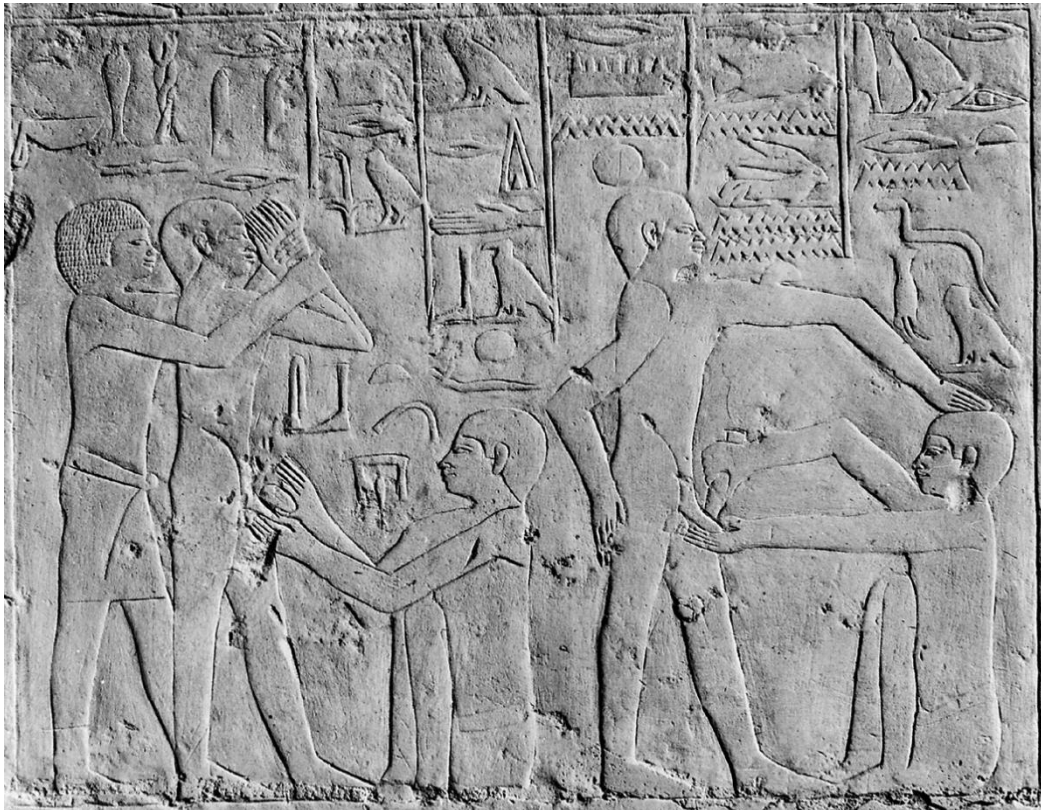
At about the same time that circumcision was given to Abraham, circumcision was being practiced in Ancient Egypt. The Saqqara Relief is an ancient Egyptian wall carving from the tomb of Ankhmahor, dated to Dynasty 6 and reign of King Teti (2355 – 2343 BC) It depicts two men being circumcised. The nude male at right is surmounted by an inscription in which he says: “Sever, indeed, correctly,” and the man kneeling before him says: “I will proceed carefully.” The man on the left, doing the procedure is saying, “Hold him fast. Do not let him faint” whilst the restrainer says, “I will do as you wish.”

The ancient Egyptian author named “Uha” was circumcised in a mass ritual. He wrote:

“When I was circumcised, together with one hundred and twenty men, there was none thereof who hit out, there was none thereof who was hit, and there was none thereof who scratched.”

Uha probably mentioned this as a matter of bragging about his circumcision group’s collective discipline. In an era long before anaesthesia, a surgeon could expect to be the target of reflex action blows by those who were overcome by pain.

The Greek historian Herodotus, writing in the mid fifth century BC, stated the Egyptians “practise circumcision for the sake of cleanliness, considering it better to be clean than good-looking.”



The Saqqara Relief, showing circumcision being performed

Circumcision prior to the Promised Land

The sons of Jacob used circumcision as a military ruse. They told the Hivites they could intermarry with the Israelites only if all Hivite men were circumcised. The Hivites agreed, but while their men were recovering and in pain on the third day, Jacob’s sons attacked the city, Genesis 34:1-31

The Exodus from Egypt occurred in the year 1420 BC. Before Moses could lead the people out, his own son needed to be circumcised, Exodus 4:25.

The Israelites had continued to practice circumcision while they were slaves in Egypt. But the generation born during the wilderness wanderings were uncircumcised. When they crossed into the Promised Land, at Gilgal, their first task was to circumcise the younger

generation. ⁵Though all who had come out were circumcised, none of those born in the wilderness on the journey from Egypt had been circumcised. ³So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel, Joshua 5:5, 3.

Circumcision explained by the Old Testament prophets

When circumcision was introduced, God explained, this action will be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. Genesis 17:11. However, the Israelites fell into the mistake of relying on the outward act of circumcision and missing the fact that it was primarily a sign that they were in a covenant relationship with the Almighty.

Even before the Israelites got to the Promised Land, while they were still at Mount Sinai, God explained the deeper meaning of circumcision. “if their uncircumcised hearts will be humbled, and they will make amends for their iniquity, ⁴²then I will remember My covenant,” Leviticus 26:41b-42a.

As the people were poised to enter the Land, through Moses, the Lord said, “Circumcise your hearts; and stiffen your necks no more.” Deuteronomy 10:16. Explaining that the outward action symbolising the covenant relationship needed to be matched with the inward attitude of covenant living. That same Scripture went on to further explain the deeper meaning of circumcision, stating, “The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, and you will love Him with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.” Deuteronomy 30:6

Later prophets would echo the same message, that true circumcision involved the attitude of the heart. “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and remove the foreskins of your hearts,” Jeremiah 4:4a. Also, “For all these nations are uncircumcised, and the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart.” Jeremiah 9:26

Circumcision in the New Testament

Jesus was circumcised as a child, Luke 2:21, because He lived under the Old Testament covenant. However, His crucifixion and resurrection changed everything, including circumcision. Now, “Was a man still uncircumcised when called? He should not be circumcised. ¹⁹Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commandments is what counts.” 1 Corinthians 7:18b-19

Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant. He said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matthew 5:17. With the Old Covenant having served its purpose, Jesus introduced the New Covenant.

The need for circumcision has passed. This is repeated in the Scriptures which state:

³Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. ⁴This issue arose because some false brothers had come in under false pretenses to spy on our freedom in Christ Jesus, in order to enslave us. ⁵We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the Gospel would remain with you. Galatians 2:3-5

¹⁴But as for me, may I never boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵For neither circumcision nor

uncircumcision means anything. What counts is a new creation. ¹⁶Peace and mercy to all who walk by this rule, even to the Israel of God. Galatians 6:14-16

²⁸A man is not a Jew because he is one outwardly, nor is circumcision only outward and physical. ²⁹No, a man is a Jew because he is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Romans 2:28-29a (this text)

It is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh. Philippians 3:3

In Him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of your sinful nature, with the circumcision performed by Christ and not by human hands. Colossians 2:11

Circumcision in history, and on to today

A journey through the art and sculpture of Renaissance Europe provides us with numerous examples of male nudes. This allows us to see the theology of Europe in the Sixteenth Century. Perhaps the best-known example is the statue of David by Michaelangelo, which you can visit today in *Galleria dell'Accademia*, in Florence, Italy.

The Biblical David, depicted in the sculpture, was born almost on thousand years before Christ. As a Jewish male he was circumcised when he was eight days old.

However, Europe had received the New Testament theology stating that the Old Testament covenant that required circumcision had been superseded, and circumcision was no longer necessary. Therefore, David is depicted uncircumcised.

Today, physicians never routinely perform circumcisions. Any baby boy who undergoes circumcision will only have it done at the insistence of his parents. This is either because his father was circumcised, and the parents insist 'like father, like son.' Or parents may insist on circumcision under the mistaken idea that God still requires it. Or the other mistaken idea that it is somehow for health reasons.



Modern return to circumcision

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Christians began to reintroduce circumcision in the Nineteenth Century. This coincided with the popularisation of the Neo-Pentecostal movement, and the rising tide of Premillennialism. Pentecostalism fuelled a renewed interest in prophecy, especially Old Testament prophecy; while Dispensationalism led to growing support for Israel as a nation restored to the Promised Land. These movements

were then joined by Seventh Day Adventism that promoted a return to the practice of Old Testament laws and the widespread supposed health benefits of an ancient diet.

These three modern developments spurred on a resurgence in circumcision; at least among English-speaking communities where Pentecostalism, Premillennialism and Adventism exercised some influence.

Circumcision as a perpetual procedure

In the Old Testament, God introduced circumcision as a procedure that was to be practiced in perpetuity. ¹²Generation after generation, every male must be circumcised... My covenant in your flesh will be an everlasting covenant. Genesis 17:12-13. But in the New Testament, salvation is by grace through faith, without circumcision, Ephesians 2:8-9.

This new teaching created problems for some. ¹Then some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." ²And after engaging these men in sharp debate, Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question... ⁴On their arrival in Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and apostles and elders, to whom they reported all that God had done through them. ⁵But some believers from the party of the Pharisees stood up and declared, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." ⁶So the apostles and elders met to look into this matter. Acts 15:1-6

Can an "everlasting covenant" Genesis 17:13, ever be nullified, cancelled, fulfilled, or replaced? Obviously, it can! The New Testament says 'Yes'. The leaders of the early church met at Jerusalem to address this very question. ⁷After much discussion, Peter got up and said to them, "Brothers... we believe it is through the grace of the Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are." Acts 15:7-11.

¹³When they had finished speaking, James declared, "Brothers... ¹⁹It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not cause trouble for the Gentiles who are turning to God." It was agreed that circumcision was no longer required. The covenant under which circumcision was required had been replaced by the New Testament.

Let us return to the initiation of the rite, Genesis 17:13. The translation for the Hebrew word עולם [Strong's 5769] (pronounced oh-lahm) into English as, "everlasting" creates problems when Scripture itself states that circumcision is limited rather than being everlasting. So, a better translation would be to replace "everlasting" with a legitimate and clearer alternative such as "ongoing". (NASB translations include: forever, perpetual, ancient, long, old, and continual.) Thus, while ever the Old Covenant was in place, circumcision, which was the sign of that covenant, also remained in place. But when Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant, and introduced the New Covenant by His crucifixion on Calvary, circumcision, as the sign of that Old Covenant, was also replaced.

Circumcision has value if you observe the Law, 25a

²Take notice: I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³Again I testify to every man who gets himself circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴You who are trying to be justified by the law have been severed from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the hope of righteousness. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. What matters is faith expressing itself through love. Galatians 5:2-6

²⁸ A man is not a Jew because he is one outwardly... ²⁹ No, a man is a Jew because he is one inwardly, 28a, 29a

The Jewish people in the nation of Israel are not the real Jews any more (if they ever were!). Even though the apostle, Paul, was born and bred as a Jew, once he became a Christian, he no longer considered himself to be a Jew, even though he continued to reach out to people in the Jewish community. He differentiated himself from the Jews when he wrote, "To the Jews **I became like a Jew**, to win the Jews." (1 Corinthians 9:20) This makes it clear that he considered himself to be, not a Jew, but a Christian.

This important principle: that the ethnically Jewish people are no longer the real Jews in God's eyes, in that they no longer hold a privileged position in the spiritual realm; and that they have been replaced by the church in God's present and future dealings, is a principle that will anger many believers. We need to inch forward graciously and pastorally to show, from Scripture, the wondrous treasures of God are by grace, not race. This principle will be developed more thoroughly in Romans chapters 9–11.

by the Spirit, not by the written code. 29

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. John 14:26

The Holy Spirit seals our redemption

In Him you also, when you heard the Word of Truth, the Gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, Ephesians 1:13

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30

The Holy Spirit helps us pray

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, Jude 1:20

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for

words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. Romans 8:26-27

The Holy Spirit helps us be Christ-like

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. Romans 15:13

The Holy Spirit equips us with gifts to serve

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:7

Quotes and illustrations

As an aid to application of this text: substitute the word “circumcision” with a Christian alternative such as “baptism, testimony, partaking of the Lord’s Supper, or church membership”; and substitute “Law” for a more readily grasped alternative such as “Scripture”.

...the LORD does not see as man does. For man sees the outward appearance, but the LORD sees the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7b

A wedding ring is a symbol, not the reality, of marriage.

Religion is a curse, not a cure! Chuck Swindoll

Do not condemn the lost sinner for doing what lost sinners do.

I’m just one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread.

Religion is spelled “D.O.” Christianity is spelled, “D.O.N.E!”

Cross-references regarding circumcision

Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked. Deuteronomy 10:16

The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, and you will love Him with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. Deuteronomy 30:6

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, remove the foreskins of your hearts, O men of Judah and people of Jerusalem. Otherwise, My wrath will break out like fire and burn with no one to extinguish it, because of your evil deeds. Jeremiah 4:4

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will punish all who are circumcised yet uncircumcised." Jeremiah 9:25

You stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit, just as your fathers did. Acts 7:51

since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Romans 3:30

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also. Rom.4:11-12

Again I testify to every man who gets himself circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole Law. Galatians 5:3

For the circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. Galatians 6:13

For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything. What counts is a new creation. Galatians 6:15

Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commandments is what matters. 1 Corinthians 7:19

Church service based on Romans 2:25-29

Outcome

The aim of this service is not to have people leave knowing more about circumcision. Instead, the aim is to move people beyond outward compliance, (the stereotypical, don't smoke, don't drink, don't wear makeup; or even the more spiritual, get baptised, read more of the Bible, pray more, circumcise your sons.) The aim is to develop each person's relationship with Jesus based on His grace, love, mercy, and redemption.

Intro to a prayer of repentance

When Barbara went to the store to buy brown sugar, she always bought the brown sugar that came packaged in a cardboard box. Last week, she saw new product line sitting alongside her usual cardboard boxes. It was brown sugar, but it was packaged in plastic bags. She immediately knew this was a better idea. The plastic made an airtight seal to keep the brown sugar fresh.

She hesitated for just a moment, then reached for the brown sugar that came in - the usual cardboard box. When she returned home and was restocking her pantry, she reflected on her purchase. She prayed, Lord, why did I buy the cardboard box when I knew the other one was better? What is it that keeps me stuck in my old ways of doing the old things? I don't want to be tied down by my past, but am I

brave enough to risk something new? O Lord, help me to move forward, and please Lord, forgive my cardboard boxes.

Benediction

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:14

Music and songs

Songs about obedience from the heart

I lift up my head... I will obey, Lord, Ot 111
Live for the Kingdom... Gladly obeying His call, Ot 15
Refiner's fire... Purify my heart
Seekers of Your heart
Trust in the Lord
When we seek Him
When we walk... trust and obey, H 711

Songs about falsehood

The great pretender, The Platters (secular)

Thought starters for personal reflection or group discussion.

1. Why do you think God chose such an intimate sign as circumcision for the covenant with Abraham?
 2. How important is circumcision today, 1 Corinthians 7:18b-19, Galatians 5:2-6?
 3. What signs of salvation do we have today?
 4. Based on v28-29a, are you Jewish; why or why not?
 5. Read the second half of v29. From whom do you prefer praise?
 6. Why would God praise a person; why would He praise you?
 7. Which of the following roles of the Holy Spirit is most significant for you? a) Sealing our redemption (Eph. 1:13, Eph.4:30) b) Helping us pray (Jude 1:20, Rom.8:26-27) c) making us Christlike (Gal.5:22-23, Rom.15:13) d) Giving gifts to serve (1Cor.12:7)
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