

Sermon Growth Guide

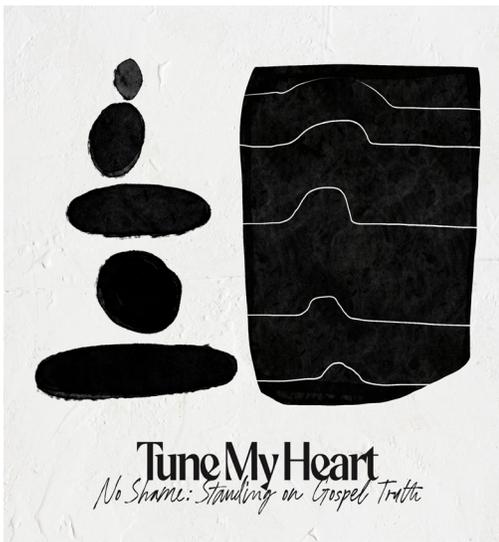
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Tune My Heart | Romans 2:25-3:4

February 15, 2026

Key Verse: “No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart.” (Romans 2:29)

Big Idea: In the Old Testament the heart signifies the center of a person that orients all else. We live not from outward appearances but from who we truly are in our relationship to God.



Foundations

Paul mentions two Old Testament foundational aspects in this passage: circumcision and heart. Circumcision originally was an outward sign of an inward commitment of faith in the covenant, binding agreement with Yahweh:

“You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.” (Gen 17:11)

Thus, circumcision is a sign pointing to something inner and foundational, the essence of that the Old Testament means by heart. We tend to think of heart as emotions, given our cultural usage. When the Old Testament refers to emotions it uses the words kidneys or belly, locating feeling in the part of the body where we feel emotion. In contrast, heart refers to the center of who we are.

“Still Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them.” (Exod 7:13)

Thus, when Paul mentions circumcision and heart in this passage, he is pointing to the sign of our inner and full commitment to Jesus Christ.

Understanding God’s Word

When we read circumcision and heart, we should hear an outward sign of an inward and full commitment. Thus, Paul deepens the definition of Jew to its root as a person who is from the inside out committed to God, to continue the metaphor, from the root through the trunk of the tree to its fruit and leaves.

Applying God’s Word

We can trace outward signs toward our inner commitment. What do we actually do in our daily lives, and how does this tell us about our heart commitment? If our outward behavior does not line up with what we think our inner commitment is, we need a heart tune-up. To do this we need honesty, maybe a few trusted friends, to challenge us to change our heart. When we change, or better, when the Holy Spirit changes us, our outward behavior will follow.

Witnessing God’s Word

Jesus said that where a person’s treasure is, there will their heart be also. Treasure does not only refer to money but to all our time commitments. Where do we spend our time and money? This points to our heart, the inner root of our outward behavior. If our outward signs are off, we need an inner re-tuning of the heart.

Dare I title a message “Tune My Heart” on the day after Valentine’s Day? Oh my. Too late. How did it go? Valentines Day seems like a set up for disappointment; lots of folks stopping off at the grocery store to buy the last set of tired roses. Don’t ask how I know. Tune My Heart. I wasn’t actually thinking of chocolates and “Be Mine” candies. I was thinking of that hymn, “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” Do you know that one? A man named Robert Robinson wrote it in 1757 at the age of twenty-two. Robinson was born poor, raised by a single mother who loved the Lord and prayed constantly that he would one day fill a pulpit. Poverty sent the boy into indentured apprenticeship to a hairdresser who almost fired him for reading too much instead of talking to the customers. When he was seventeen, he went out drinking with friends in London, and they gathered up an old fortune-teller woman and got her drunk to hear her strange predictions about their lives. She looked Robinson in the eye and said, “You will see your children and grandchildren.” He was kind of shaken by this. Just the whole idea of thinking about his life, how it will come and go.

He went to a revival meeting to hear George Whitefield, kind of the Billy Graham of his day. It was a sermon on Matthew 3:7, “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?’” (Matthew 3:7) The seventeen-year-old Robinson was rattled. The coming wrath?! How will it all be for me? He gave his life to Christ. He wrote in his personal journal an entry in Latin. This is the translation: “Robert Michael, son of Marine, Robinson. Born at Swaffham, in the county of Norfolk, Saturday, Sept. 27, 1735. Reborn on Saturday, May 24, 1752, through the powerful preaching of George Whitefield. And having tasted the pains of renewal two years and seven months, full and free absolution, through the precious blood of God, for ever and ever. Amen.”

A few years later, he wrote, “Come, thou Fount of every blessing; tune my heart to sing thy grace; streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise. Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above; praise the mount! I’m fixed upon it, mount of God’s unchanging love!” “Connect me with Heaven, O Lord. Let me hear the music of heaven. Tune my heart.” Like an instrument, the heart needs to be tuned. It needs to be dialed in, set to play the music of Heaven. But Robinson knew himself. He knew that his heart could also fall out of tune. He knew that he was tempted to drift away from the grace of God and its beauty. “O to grace how great a debtor daily I’m constrained to be! Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee. Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love; here’s my heart; O take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above.” A fetter is a leg-iron, a chain. “Bind me, Lord. Grab my heart and lock it in irons and chain me to your grace. Bind my wandering heart. Here’s my heart, Lord. Take and seal it. Put a seal on it. Mark it. Stamp it. Claim it. Like a shipping label. This heart is headed for Heaven. This heart belongs to Jesus. This heart is bound to reach its final destination.”

Today finishes our first section of Romans. No Shame: Standing on Gospel Truth. Paul has opened the letter with a clear declaration of the gospel, the good news about the events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This gospel, this good news, is for everyone because everyone needs it. The Roman church was made up of Jewish background believers and Gentile believers. They had different experiences, different cultural upbringings, and different ways of looking at the world, and they all, all, needed Jesus to save. Today we see clearly, it isn’t about external identity, it isn’t about what group you are in, what culture you come from. Do you know what it’s about? It’s about the heart, your heart.

“Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have

become as though you had not been circumcised. So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?" (Romans 2:25-26) The key symbol defining the people of God joined to a covenant with God under Abraham is this external symbol of circumcision. Why? Heavens, don't ask me. But you find it on page after page of the Old Testament. Now, in the New Covenant, baptism replaces this rite. It's an external symbol and sign of belonging in the people of God, and it is evenly inclusive of both men and women. But it's an outer sign. We have all known people who have been baptized and never gave Jesus a second thought their whole lives. Do you call such a person a Christian? There is a mysterious work of God in baptism. It is a sacrament, not just a human act. But we are not saved by baptism. We may be saved by God's unmerited grace and baptism is an external sign of that, but you can't bring a person into salvation just by dipping them in water with prayers. It is the heart that matters.

In the Roman church, the Jewish background believers were proud of their status as the long-standing people of God, marked by the covenant of circumcision. But that's not the defining characteristic of a child of God. Paul claims their behavior says much more. He is leaning back on a lot of Old Testament teaching to say it. Time after time, the people of God were counseled that it was not the external markings that mattered, but the internal. When they were disobedient, it proved that the externalities meant nothing. "But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors—their unfaithfulness and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies—then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land." (Leviticus 26:40-42) The way they acted revealed

that their hearts did not belong to God. Externally they belonged to God, but internally... Or, here in Deuteronomy: "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul... Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer." (Deuteronomy 10:12,16) Where is your heart? That's what matters.

"The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live." (Deuteronomy 30:6) Stop putting so much freight on externalities when your heart is lost to God. "A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God." (Romans 2:28-29) It isn't outside markers that define whether you belong to God or not. It's the heart. And, Paul is implying, your Roman brothers and sisters are just as much a part of this new community of faith in Christ as you are. We all equally give our hearts to God. Then he builds the Jewish background believers back up a bit at the beginning of chapter three. Yes, the Jewish people were entrusted with the word. They were marked as God's special people. That matters too. Your culture and background always matter to God, but he is after your heart.

God doesn't want your external symbols. It isn't about your external display of association or performative displays. "I'm a member of First Pres." I mean. That's great. You should be! But nobody is going to ask that when you walk up to the pearly gates. Do you believe? That's how you become a child of God. John said of Jesus, "He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he

gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:11-12) Faith. Same with baptism, again. Jesus said, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:16) It is faith that matters. Belief. Where is your heart? And in this new church, because of what Jesus has done, because of the good news of the gospel, it is possible for a Roman to experience the same fidelity, the same open heart, the same union with God, that the children of Abraham enjoyed and symbolized in the external markings.

God wants your heart. God is after your heart. The heart is the seat of our human being, the center of who we are, the core. The heart is the seat of our intellect, our mind. The heart is the seat of our will, our direction. Where your heart is will determine your direction. What your heart belongs to will define your destination. Robert Robinson said, “Tune my heart.” Is your heart in tune? To tune an instrument, you use a tuning fork or another means of setting the note. As a hack guitar player, I learned just enough to lead worship songs as a youth pastor, I could tune a guitar to itself but regularly had the experience of finding out the whole thing was out of tune when compared to a piano or a standard. It isn’t just about getting your internal emotions in balance with one another. Is your heart in tune with God? “Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above.” How do I do that? How do I get my heart in touch with God’s song? God reaches us through love.

The first and primary duty of every Christian is exactly the same. Do you know what it is? People ask, “how do I get started with this? I need more religion in my life. I need to find some spiritual foundation, some grounding, some centering. Where does it start? What’s the first thing I need to do?” Some say you better join a church. You need more time in the halls of the church. Actually, that isn’t first. Some say, the first thing you need to do is get out there and make a difference in the world. Get out there and fight for

justice, stand up against what doesn’t seem fair. Well, that’s important, but it isn’t first. Do good. Promote mercy. Reach out and care for those in need. That’s good. But it isn’t first. Build up a solid job and career, provide for my family, love my wife or husband and kids. Yes. But that is not first. The first and primary calling of every Christian is this: to fall deeply in love with Jesus. To love him. To know him. To wonder and marvel at him. This is where it all begins.

Your heart will determine everything else. “My son, give me your heart and let your eyes delight in my ways.” (Proverbs 23:26) If your heart is right, your eyes will see right, your life will go right, your will will be drawn right, your mind will think right. Tune my heart. Where is your heart? Will you trust it into the hands of Jesus? Give me your heart, says the Lord. Robert Robinson did on May 24, 1752. Having tasted the pains, he said. Having tasted the pains of transformation, renewal, renovation of the heart, the pains. Having wrestled on his pillow at night, having opened his eyes morning after morning to the dropping feeling in the stomach of another day facing these challenges, having tried to find relief in partying and drinking and the rest, having tasted the pains two years and seven months, he said yes and gave his heart to Jesus. And what did he say? “Full and free absolution, through the precious blood of God, for ever and ever.”

When Jesus died on the cross, his heart was pierced by the spear. Blood and water flowed out. The death Jesus died would cause fluid to build up around the pericardium that rushed out along with the blood from his heart when it was pierced with the spear. Jesus died for us so we could know absolution, full and free. From his heart forgiveness flows. Will you give your heart to him? I want us to take a minute now and do just that. “Here’s my heart, Lord. Lord, I give you my heart, I give you my soul. Lord, have your way in me.”