SPIRITUAL NOTIONS OF CIRCUMCISION IN ROMANS 2:24–29: REINTERPRETING CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART FOR KENYAN CHRISTIANITY

BENARD N. OMBORI

THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THEOLOGY (NEW TESTAMENT) FROM ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY, LIMURU, KENYA

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DECLARATION

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Name of the Student: Benard N. Ombori
Signature of the Student: DPTLMR275523

……
Date: October 2026

Declaration by Supervisors

This thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as University Supervisors.

The Rev. Prof. Kabiro wa Gatumu

Signature:

……
Date: October 2026

The Rev. Dr. Julius Kithinji Kiambi

Signature:

……
Date: October 2026

DEDICATION

This doctoral thesis is dedicated to my dad, Prof. R. T. Mugerwa, and to my son, Addonay, and daughter, Doxaima, with the prayer that, by God's Grace, my children will successfully climb the academic hierarchy despite the demise of their siblings, the late Xarismy and the late Eliptheos. May the good Lord always bless and be with them.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABH –	African Biblical Hermeneutics
ACK –	Anglican Church of Kenya
AIC –	Africa Inland Church
ANE–	Ancient Near East
AP–	Associated Press
CD–	*Damascus Document (Cairo Damascus Document)*
CKC–	Central Kenya Conference
CMS–	Church Missionary Society
CRVC –	Central Rift Valley Conference
KCCB–	Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops
KJV–	King James Version
NA28–	Nestle–Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th Revised Edition
NAC–	New Apostolic Church
NC–	Nyamira Conference
NCC –	Nairobi Cosmopolitan Conference
NIV–	New International Version
NRSV–	New Revised Standard Version
NT –	New Testament
OT –	Old Testament
PCEA –	Presbyterian Church of East Africa
PSI –	Population Services International
RSV–	Revised Standard Version
SAET –	St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology
SDA –	Seventh–day Adventist
SEKF –	South East Kenya Conference
SIT –	Social Identity Theory
SKC–	South Kenya Conference

ABSTRACT

This study considers Paul's reinterpretation of circumcision in Romans 2:24–29, with particular attention to the concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας and its theological and ethical significance for contemporary Kenyan Christianity. The study confronts the persistent problem of external religiosity and moral inconsistency within Christian communities, which, as Paul argues, results in the public dishonouring of God's name among outsiders. While Pauline scholarship has extensively explored circumcision as a boundary marker between Jews and Gentiles, insufficient attention has been given to its function as a communal and missional critique with particular relevance for African Christianity. The relationship between the dishonouring of God's name in Romans 2:24 and inward transformation in Romans 2:29 remains comparatively underexplored as a sustained Pauline problem–response movement bearing implications for African contextual theology. Using exegetical analysis of Romans 2:24–29, informed by Second Temple Jewish background and guided by African Biblical Hermeneutics, this study correlates Paul's theological critique with selected Kenyan ecclesial practices. This methodological approach enables a dialogical reading in which Paul's critique of Jewish reliance on physical circumcision is brought into conversation with contemporary Kenyan ecclesial practices characterised by ritualism, moral hypocrisy, legalism, and ethnocentric forms of identity. The study finds that Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας functions not merely as an inward spiritual metaphor but also as a transformative ethical and communal reality grounded in the work of the Spirit. Within the logic of Romans 2:24, the study further demonstrates that ethical inconsistency among those who claim covenant identity may function as implied blasphemy because it occasions public dishonour of God's name and weakens Christian witness among outsiders. The study offers a six-fold biblical–theological framework through which περιτομὴ καρδίας addresses external religiosity by integrating ethical renewal, Authentic Witness, Grace–Enabled Obedience, Inward Faith, Covenantal Inclusivity, and Spirit–enabled Renewal. Applied in context, the analysis identifies specific Kenyan ecclesial patterns that may be analogously related to the outward–inward tension Paul critiques, thereby weakening Christian witness in the public sphere. This study contributes to Pauline scholarship and African contextual theology by rearticulating circumcision of the heart as a missional and ethical corrective rather than merely an individualised spiritual concept. The study offers constructive resources for ecclesial renewal in Kenya and advances African Biblical Hermeneutics as a viable approach for interpreting Pauline texts in contemporary African contexts.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

1. Terms Related to Blasphemy

Blasphemy: In this study, blasphemy is used primarily in the qualified Pauline sense found in Romans 2:24, where God's name is dishonoured among outsiders because of the ethical inconsistency of those who claim covenant identity.

Implied/reputational blasphemy: In this study, this refers specifically to the Romans 2:24 pattern in which the ethically inconsistent conduct of those who publicly identify with God becomes the occasion for God's name to be dishonoured among outsiders. It is not identical to every form of public criticism, loss of reputation, or institutional scandal.

Reputational dishonour: The social disgrace attached to God's name as the consequence of implied blasphemy. It is the effect of the contradiction between covenant profession and covenant conduct.

2. Terms Related to Circumcision of the Heart / Spiritual Notions

Circumcision of the heart (περιτομὴ καρδίας): Paul's concept of inward, Spirit–empowered transformation, which defines covenant identity in terms of inner renewal rather than external, ethnic, or merely ritualistic observance (Rom 2:29).

Spiritual Notions: In this study, the term refers to a cluster of Pauline theological themes associated with περιτομὴ καρδίας: Spirit-enabled inward renewal, authentic covenant identity, obedience, moral transformation, and divine approval, in contrast to reliance on outward covenant markers as sufficient in themselves.

3. Terms Related to External Religiosity

External religiosity: In this study, external religiosity refers to reliance on visible religious markers—ritual observance, denominational affiliation, moral display, church membership, sacramental participation, or worship attendance—without corresponding inward, Spirit-enabled transformation.

Ritualism: Overreliance on external, religious rituals, symbols, or actions without inward renewal; a subtype of external religiosity.

Legalism: An excessive dependence on the observance of law, moral behaviour, or ritual performance in establishing one's standing in the covenant, to the detriment of faith, grace, inward renewal, the sanctity of relationships, and the integrity of spiritual life.

4. Terms Related to Ethics

Moral hypocrisy: Discrepancy between Christian profession and practice, which leads to public religious embarrassment and loss of authority and potentially dishonours God's name.

Moral depravity: Moral corruption that exists despite public religiosity and is a rejection of God's truth.

5. Terms Related to Ethnicity

Ethnicity: A socio–cultural grouping based on common language, culture, ancestry, history, and sometimes a common geographic place. It can be a valid structure of communal identity, but when elevated in ecclesial settings, it becomes an alternative identity to the Spirit–formed covenant identity.

Ethnocentrism: Where ethnic/cultural identity tramples Spirit–formed covenant identity in the church. In Kenyan churches, this is evident when membership, recognition, leadership, respect, or status is determined by ethnicity, rather than faith, spiritual growth, or achievement. It is also referred to as tribalism or negative ethnicity in this study, as appropriate.

6. Contextual Terms

Kenyan Christianity: In this study, the term denotes Christianity as historically, socially, and ecclesially situated within Kenya and encompasses the diversity of Christian traditions, institutions, practices, and expressions found within that national context. Where particular ecclesial patterns are discussed, the study identifies and qualifies the specific traditions and settings represented in the cited literature; such patterns are not attributed to all Kenyan Christians or churches.

Kenyan ecclesial context: The selected patterns, practices, tensions, and institutional realities of church life in Kenya are examined through the scholarly literature used in this study. The expression is illustrative and context-specific rather than representative of every Kenyan church, denomination, or Christian community.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study examined περιτομὴ καρδίας (circumcision of the heart) in Romans 2:24–29 and its significance for Christians in Kenya. It investigated how and why Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας serves as a biblical–theological response to the public dishonouring of God's name associated with external religiosity. This chapter introduces the study by outlining the problem statement, research objectives, research questions, study delimitations, the scholarly literature review, and the theoretical and methodological framework underpinning it.

1.2 Background of the Study

Physical circumcision was familiar in the Ancient Near East as a physical and social ritual. Within Israel, however, circumcision had distinctive covenantal significance as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant, marking covenant belonging and identity (Gen. 17:9–14). The importance of circumcision in Israel's Scriptures is not just that it existed within the broader Ancient Near Eastern world, but that it was covenanted to be a sign of promise, obedience, and identity to Abraham (Wenham, 2015:23–25; Gentry and Wellum, 2018:285–289; Walton and Hill, 2019:125–127). The sign was later embedded in Israel's communal life (Exod. 12:43–49; Lev. 12:3). Circumcision language also extended to the heart in the Old Testament (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4), thereby linking covenant identity with inward obedience and transformation (Tigay, 2016:93–95; Stuart, 2017:287–289; Brueggemann, 2018:61–63; McConville, 2020:211–214).

Circumcision was not only a covenantal sign in the Second Temple period but also a potent ethnic and religious marker of difference between Jews and Gentiles (Bird, 2016:144–148). This is a crucial context for Romans 2:24–29, where Paul critiques the practice of relying on the physical mark without covenantal loyalty and shifts focus towards inner transformation (Moo, 2018:173–176; Dunn, 2018:96–105).

Although Pauline scholarship has extensively examined circumcision, covenant identity, and Jew–Gentile relations, less sustained attention has been given to Romans 2:24 and 2:29 as a

connected theological movement from the public dishonouring of God's name to inward, Spirit-enabled covenant renewal. This Pauline tension is contextually useful for selected Kenyan ecclesial discussions where public religious identity and inward ethical renewal do not always cohere (Mumo, 2025:62–63; Muziga, 2021:49–50). Romans 2:24–29 is, therefore, an apt passage for considering the relationship between public religiosity, inward spiritual transformation, and the public witness of God's people, as Romans 2:24 reveals the public dishonouring of God's name through covenantal infidelity, and Romans 2:29 redefines covenantal identity in terms of inward, Spirit–enabled transformation.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Romans 2:24–29 presents a focused exegetical problem. Paul moves from the public dishonouring of God's name in verse 24 to the inward redefinition of covenant identity in verse 29. The study sought to determine how that movement works theologically. Paul does not dismiss the covenantal significance of a God-given sign. He exposes the contradiction that arises when the sign is retained, but the life it demands is absent. This contradiction is the opportunity for the implied dishonouring of God's name among the Gentiles (Rom 2:24). Paul responds by introducing περιτομὴ καρδίας as the true mark of covenant identity, thereby shifting the focus from external ritual to inward transformation. Paul reconfigures covenant identity as an inward reality enabled by the Holy Spirit, rather than as outward signs detached from covenant obedience (Wright, 2002e:466; Moo, 2018:165-167; Dunn, 2018:120-122).

The subjects of circumcision, Law, and Jews and Gentiles in Romans have received considerable attention in Pauline scholarship (Byrne, 1996:98–106; Barclay, 2020:432–438; Bird, 2016:82–91; Jipp, 2023:144–150; Livesey, 2024:167–173). However, comparatively little sustained attention has been given to the relationship between Romans 2:24 and 2:29 as a single theological movement from public dishonour to inward covenant renewal. The specific gap addressed in this study is therefore not the absence of scholarship on blasphemy, circumcision, covenant identity, or περιτομὴ καρδίας, but the limited integration of these themes into a sustained reading of Romans 2:24–29 as a Pauline problem–response movement. Thus, the challenge is not just hypocrisy but the theological problem that covenantal testimonies without obedience dishonour

God's name. Romans 2:24–29 is accordingly important for its connection of public witness, covenant, and inward transformation by the Spirit in the apostle Paul's reasoning.

While circumcision is no longer a direct signifier of salvation in contemporary Kenyan Christianity, Romans 2:24–29 is highly relevant for discussing the tension between public profession and inward transformation. In contemporary Kenyan ecclesial conversations, this tension appears when firm public declarations of faith are not matched by moral and spiritual consistency (Muziga, 2021:49–50; Mumo, 2025:62–63). In this regard, Paul's transition from the dishonouring of God's name in verse 24 to inward covenant identity in verse 29 provides a theological lens for examining analogous tensions documented within selected Kenyan ecclesial contexts. Consequently, Romans 2:24–29 is relevant to this study because it connects the public honour of God's name with the integrity of covenant identity reconfigured through περιτομὴ καρδίας.

The study clarifies the relationship between public dishonour and inward, Spirit–indwelling transformation, and why the transition from the former to the latter is critical for Kenyan ecclesial realities. The Kenyan comparison is therefore analogical. Modern Christianity in Kenya typically does not establish boundaries for salvation based on circumcision. However, other externalising logics may function similarly when ritual participation, moral display, or ethnicity becomes a substitute for inward covenant renewal. The central problem may therefore be stated as a question: How does Paul's movement from the public dishonouring of God's name in verse 24 to περιτομὴ καρδίας in verse 29 function as a theological reconfiguration of covenant identity, and what significance does that movement have for selected Kenyan Christianity?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guided the study:

1. To establish the historical, theological, and cultural context for circumcision in Romans 1–4, especially its Abrahamic-covenantal and righteousness-related dimensions, as the backdrop to Paul's critique.

2. To analyse Romans 2:24–29 to demonstrate how Paul links the dishonouring of God's name in verse 24 to the redefinition of covenant identity in terms of inward, Spirit–given transformation in verse 29.
3. To identify examples of external religiosity among Kenyan Christians and analyse how they may lead to reputational dishonour of God's name.
4. To develop a biblical–theological framework that uses περιτομὴ καρδίας as a transformative paradigm for addressing the dishonour of God's name that arises from external religiosity.

1.5 Research Questions

The following interrelated research questions directed this study:

1. What historical, theological, and ideological background to circumcision informs Paul's critique of external religiosity in Romans 1-4?
2. In Romans 2:24–29, how is covenant identity reconfigured from an external sign to the Spirit–enabled transformation, and how is this significant for the dishonour of God's name?
3. What manifestations of external religiosity are identified in selected Kenyan ecclesial contexts, and how may they contribute to the reputational dishonour of God's name?
4. How can περιτομὴ καρδίας be developed as a biblical–theological framework for addressing the dishonouring of God's name that arises from external religiosity?

1.6 Research Assumptions

There are four methodological assumptions underlying this study. First, the social, theological, and ideological history of circumcision in Romans 1–4 can be appropriately reconstructed through exegetical and theological study. Second, Romans 2:24–29 is a Pauline literary unit that links covenant, conduct, and God's public honour. Third, published scholarship on Kenyan Christianity provides sufficient material for an illustrative contextual-theological analysis of selected patterns of external religiosity and public integrity. Fourth, African Biblical

Hermeneutics provides a contextual hermeneutical framework for engaging Paul's argument in dialogue with Kenyan ecclesial realities while retaining the exegetical findings from Romans 2:24–29 as normative for the study.

1.7 Justification and Significance of the Study

This study is justified by both exegetical and contextual gaps. Exegetically, Romans 2:24 and 2:29 are often treated separately, with limited attention to the theological movement from the dishonouring of God's name to the circumcision of the heart. Contextually, this relationship has not been sufficiently developed for ecclesial reflection in selected Kenyan church contexts. Kenya is selected not because Kenyan Christianity is presumed to be uniquely deficient, but because it is the concrete ecclesial location of this study and because Kenyan theological scholarship documents questions of public Christian identity, moral credibility, ritual practice, and ethnic belonging that allow for a controlled contextual dialogue with Romans 2:24–29.

The study is significant in three areas. First, it contributes to Pauline scholarship by clarifying the theological continuity between Romans 2:24 and Romans 2:29. Second, through African Biblical Hermeneutics, it offers a contextual model in which the exegesis of περιτομὴ καρδίας remains primary. At the same time, Kenyan church realities inform contextual interpretation. Third, for Kenyan Christianity, it offers a biblical–theological perspective for assessing the relationship among public religiosity, inner transformation, and public testimony.

1.8 Scope of the Study

First, this study contributes to Pauline studies, with Romans 2:24–29 as the primary text for exegesis and Romans 1–4 as the broader context for the argument. Romans was chosen because Romans 2:24–29 explicitly links the public shame of God's name (verse 24) with Paul's new definition of covenant identity (περιτομὴ καρδίας in verse 29). Other Pauline texts on circumcision, such as Galatians, are important, but do not link circumcision, public dishonour of God's name, and inward covenant identity in the same way. So, they are considered secondary texts for this study.

Second, the biblical books of the Gospels and Revelation are not included in the study because they do not address circumcision as a covenantal and theological remedy in the same way as Paul does. Thus, including such biblical books would blur the analytical focus. Third, the study situates the first-century Roman context and selected contemporary Kenyan ecclesial discussions within a controlled theological dialogue. The comparison is analogical rather than historical or sociological: it examines how outward religious identity may become detached from inward covenant faithfulness without assuming that the Roman and Kenyan contexts are identical. The study uses exegesis to analyse Romans 2:24–29 and African Biblical Hermeneutics to guide the contextual movement from the Pauline text to selected Kenyan ecclesial concerns. These methodological and contextual factors strengthen the study's scholarly basis and clarify how περιτομὴ καρδίας applies to responding contextually to reputational dishonour arising from such practices in the current church environment. This helps to prevent the study from becoming a general theology of circumcision and ensures that the argument is limited to Romans 2:24-29.

Accordingly, 'Kenyan Christianity' is used throughout this study as a broad contextual designation for Christianity within Kenya. The detailed contextual analysis, however, is limited to the specific ecclesial traditions and settings represented in the reviewed literature and does not generalise the identified patterns to all Kenyan Christians or churches. Furthermore, the Kenyan component of the study is therefore non-empirical and illustrative. It relies on published scholarship and public theological reflection rather than interviews, questionnaires, surveys, or statistical data. Its purpose is to examine the contextual theological relevance of Paul's argument, not to make representative sociological claims about Kenyan Christianity as a whole.

1.9 Literature Review

The literature review is organised into four interrelated areas. The first examines biblical, historical, and Pauline scholarship on circumcision and covenant identity. The second focuses on περιτομὴ καρδίας and inward covenant renewal. The third examines external religiosity, public witness, and ecclesial credibility in selected Kenyan contexts. The fourth considers scholarship that informs a constructive biblical-theological framework for ecclesial renewal. Across these

areas, the review identifies scholarly convergence, disagreement, and underdeveloped questions. It then uses these findings to clarify the research gap and locate the study's distinctive contribution.

1.9.1 External Religiosity and Implied Blasphemy in Romans 1–4

Scholars have extensively explored the biblical theology of circumcision. The discussion begins with circumcision as the Abrahamic covenantal sign (Gen. 17:10–14). It then develops through heart-circumcision traditions (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4) and later theological reinterpretations. Paul later reconfigured circumcision within his wider discussion of covenant identity, obedience, Jew–Gentile relations and justification by faith, particularly in Romans 2:24–29 and Romans 4:9–12 (Dunn, 1998:215; Moo, 2000:56; Wright, 2013:375). These studies have concentrated principally on covenant identity, circumcision, and Jew–Gentile relations. Comparatively less sustained attention has been given to the rhetorical-theological relationship between the dishonouring of God's name in Romans 2:24 and the inward reconfiguration of covenant identity in Romans 2:29. In response to this gap, this study focuses on ethical and theological conflicts in Romans 1–4, including moral depravity, hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism and ethnocentrism as manifestations of human sinfulness (Moo, 2018:98–100; Wright, 2002e:432, 453; Dunn, 2018:89–91).

The relationship between the implied blasphemy in Romans 2:24 and inward transformation in Romans 2:29 is underdeveloped, particularly as a Pauline problem–response dynamic for contextual theology in Africa. This study explores whether such practices can be regarded as implied blasphemy resulting from the gap between external religion and inward transformation. It also asks whether Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας can provide a biblical–theological framework for addressing that discrepancy. Through this analysis, the study links Pauline theology to modern manifestations of blasphemy in the Kenyan church setting, beginning with moral depravity among the Gentiles as a key expression of human sinfulness and the dishonouring of God's name (Rom 1:18–32; Moo, 2000:56; Wright, 2002e:432). The following subsections, therefore, map the major scholarly discussions. However, a detailed exegetical synthesis of these motifs is reserved for Chapter Three.

1.9.1.1 Moral Depravity and Rebellion (Rom 1:18–32)

The interpretation of Romans 1:18-32 that focuses on moral rebellion is the usual approach taken by scholars. The focus of this passage is idolatry, the suppression of divine truth, and the distorted moral life as key elements of Paul's indictment of Gentile humanity (Moo, 2018:98-100; Dunn, 2018:89-91; Wright, 2013:375). For the present study, Romans 1:18–32 provides the wider theological background to humanity's failure to honour God. Romans 2:24 makes the connection more specific by linking covenantal inconsistency with the blaspheming of God's name.

1.9.1.2 Religious Hypocrisy and Judgmentalism (Rom 2:1–3)

Hypocrisy and blasphemy have a relationship that needs to be made conceptually clear. In this study, hypocrisy is understood as an inconsistency between professed belief and actual behaviour. Scholars commonly read Romans 2:1–3 as a rhetorical turn from the indictment of Gentile sin to the self-implicating judgment of the judging interlocutor. However, the precise identity of that interlocutor remains debated. It is widely acknowledged that Paul shows the contradiction between condemning others and committing similar acts of disobedience (Dunn 2018:89-91; Moo 2018:135-139; Wright 2013:402-403). This argument is all-important because it sets the stage for Romans 2:24, which will make the moral contradiction of covenantal people the occasion of the dishonouring of God's Name.

1.9.1.3 Legalism and Moral Inconsistency (Rom 2:17–24)

This subsection reviews Pauline scholarship on law-boasting in Romans 2:17–24. It argues that Paul's critique exposes a contradiction between covenant privilege and moral inconsistency, which reaches its sharpest expression in the dishonouring of God's name (v. 24). In Pauline scholarship on Romans 2:17–24, boasting in the Law is often interpreted as an expression of confidence in covenant privilege that Paul subjects to critique where profession is contradicted by conduct. These studies maintain that covenantal faithfulness does not automatically follow from custodianship of the Law when conduct runs counter to God's moral requirements (Moo, 2018:154–159; Dunn, 2018:97–99; Schreiner, 2018:146–148). This literature is relevant to the

present study because it concerns the dishonouring of God's name among outsiders as stated in Romans 2:24.

1.9.1.4 Religious Ritualism (Rom 2:24–29)

In scholarship on Romans 2:24–29, circumcision is commonly understood as a covenant sign whose value Paul redefines in relation to obedience, the Spirit and inward transformation. Accordingly, Paul does not reject the historical covenantal significance of physical circumcision; he relativises its covenantal value when the outward sign is detached from obedience and inward renewal (Wright, 2002e:466; Dunn, 2018:105-107; Bird, 2016:144-148). This discussion is crucial for the current investigation because Romans 2:29 redefines covenant identity as inward and Spirit-related through the phrase περιτομὴ καρδίας.

1.9.1.5 Ethnocentrism and Religious Superiority (Rom 3:1–9)

Scholarship on Romans 3:1–9 and Romans 4 commonly treats the Jewish advantage, covenant privilege, Abrahamic identity, and Jew–Gentile inclusion as key elements in Paul's wider argument. This argument is significant in that Paul does not deny Jewish privilege but rather relativises ethnic and ritual superiority in light of universal sin and justification by faith (Barclay, 2015:566-570; Dunn, 2018:89-91; Wright, 2013:403-410). This is echoed in Romans 4, where Abraham is shown as the father of circumcised and uncircumcised men. This relates to περιτομὴ καρδίας because Paul's critique of ethnic and ritual superiority prepares the way for Romans 2:29. There, true covenant identity is grounded not in Jewish advantage or physical circumcision, but in the inward transformation of the heart by the Spirit.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that Romans 1–4 constitutes the theological context for reading Romans 2:24-29; nonetheless, the problem–response axis that links the dishonouring of God's name in Romans 2:24 with the term περιτομὴ καρδίας in Romans 2:29 is the primary area of focus for the present study.

1.9.2 Theological Implications of περιτομὴ καρδίας

Romans 2:25–29, and its concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας, does not simply reject physical circumcision. Rather, Paul subjects the outward sign to the covenant faithfulness it should embody. Physical circumcision retains its historical covenant significance. However, its covenantal value cannot be separated from obedience to God (Kruse, 2012:184; Moo, 2018:166–168). In Romans 2:28–29, decisive covenant identity is therefore located in circumcision of the heart, "in Spirit, not letter." Its approval comes from God rather than from human recognition. According to this perspective, God's acceptance is open to everyone, including Jews and Gentiles, without considering ethnicity, ritual, or social status (Longenecker, 2016:274; Wright, 2013:403). Περιτομὴ καρδίας, in turn, implies a theological paradigm shift, in which religious identity ceases to be based on outward ethnicity and is instead founded on a universal, Spirit–led covenantal faith characterised by inner transformation, moral responsibility, and honouring the name of God. It highlights the point that religious identity is spiritual rather than merely ceremonial, and that external religiosity without inward transformation may occasion the public dishonouring of God's name, in light of Romans 2:24.

There are various interpretations of Romans 2:17-29 that have significant implications for the use of the phrase περιτομὴ καρδίας in this study. First, there is disagreement among scholars about who Paul's interlocutor is: an ethnically privileged Jew, a representative Jew, or a Judaizing Gentile (Stowers, 1994:100–101; Elliott, 2007:127; Tobin, 2004:115; Thiessen, 2014:373–391; Windsor, 2014:191–192; Kim and Kim, 2018:8). Second, they disagree as to the worthiness and significance of circumcision itself. This has been interpreted as an outward covenant symbol, a "sign of inclusion" in the covenant community, a sign of Torah obligation, and a symbol of "obedience" to the demands of God's covenant (Johnson, 1997:41; Toews, 2004:85; Moo, 2018:166–168). Other interpreters also go further in their interpretation of the circumcision of the heart, to theological concepts such as the exposure of "the sinfulness of man" or an analogy to "baptism" (MacArthur, 1991:159-161; Morris, 1988:140; Cottrell, 2000:223).

Third, as Moo demonstrates in his discussion of Romans 2:25, the exegetical difficulties are evident: the phrase "if you practice the law" can mean "heartfelt, faith-filled obedience" or

"perfect conformity" to the law (Moo, 2018:168). Thus, περιτομὴ καρδίας remains a *crux interpretum* in Romans 2:17–29. Its importance lies not simply in scholarly disagreement over its meaning, but in the way it shapes the reading of Romans 2:24–29. The passage may be read narrowly as a critique of Jewish ritual confidence, or more fully as Paul's movement from the dishonouring of God's name in verse 24 to Spirit-enabled covenant identity in verse 29. Yet these discussions have not sufficiently related περιτομὴ καρδίας to reputational blasphemy, especially as Paul moves from the dishonouring of God's name in Romans 2:24 to Spirit-enabled covenant identity in Romans 2:29. This study therefore investigates how Paul's notion of περιτομὴ καρδίας can serve as a biblical–theological framework for addressing the dishonour that arises when external religiosity is detached from inward renewal.

The literature, furthermore, shows that περιτομὴ καρδίας is commonly understood as inward covenant renewal rather than external ritual identity. Drawing on Old Testament traditions of heart circumcision, Paul locates true covenant identity in the renewed heart, where covenant faithfulness is formed by the Spirit rather than secured by mere possession of the external covenant sign (Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 4:4; Kruse, 2012:184; Schreiner, 2018:146–148). In this passage, too, covenant identity is not defined by ethnic or ritual privilege, but by inward obedience, faith, and Spirit-inspired renewal (Longenecker, 2016:274; Wright, 2013:403; Jewett, 2007:226–229).

Although these studies clarify the ethical and Spirit-related dimensions of περιτομὴ καρδίας, they less often make its relationship with Romans 2:24—the public dishonouring of God's name—the primary focus of sustained analysis. This study, as a result, examines whether Paul's movement from the dishonouring of God's name in Romans 2:24 to the circumcision of the heart in Romans 2:29 provides a controlled biblical–theological basis for reflecting on external religiosity in Kenyan Christianity.

1.9.3 Selected Kenyan Ecclesial Patterns Relevant to Implied Blasphemy

Moral credibility, hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, and ethnocentric identity are issues that have been raised repeatedly in scholarship and public theological reflection on Kenyan church life (Muziga, 2021:49-50; Mumo, 2025:62-63; wa Gatumu, 2019:194-195). These patterns are not presented as universal findings about all churches in Kenya. They are treated as contextual indicators that show why Romans 2:24–29 remains theologically significant for Kenyan Christianity. Ethnic divisions and other concerns in the life of the church can threaten the integrity of witness and involvement in God's work (wa Gatumu, 2013; 2025:289–309). These concerns remain pertinent within the selected Kenyan ecclesial discussions reviewed in this study. The aim is merely to map the contextual field and to determine the study's relevance at this introductory stage. Chapter Four addresses these patterns in detail through a Pauline critique.

1.9.3.1 Moral Depravity in the Contemporary Kenyan Church

Moral credibility remains a persistent challenge in contemporary church life. Kenyan and African theological discourse has often raised this concern, especially where public profession of Christianity coexists with corruption, financial misconduct, abuse of authority, and ethical inconsistency (Muziga, 2021:49–50; Mumo, 2025:62–63; Alwala, 2020:13–22). Alwala (2020:13–22), for example, identifies corruption, sexual immorality, and financial mismanagement as expressions of moral depravity within ecclesial life. Similarly, Adamo (2021:6–9) describes this pattern as "shallow, unethical religiosity," while Williams (2022) shows how some forms of prosperity theology may weaken accountability, moral values, and socio-economic responsibility.

The studies cited here situate these inconsistencies within broader debates about ecclesial credibility, corruption, negative ethnicity, and public moral responsibility in Kenya (wa Gatumu, 2019:194–195; Muziga, 2021:49–50; Bwire, 2022:159). These sources are used illustratively rather than as evidence that such patterns characterise Kenyan Christianity as a whole. In this regard, K. wa Gatumu's research on negative ethnicity and church transformation highlights how disunity, corruption, and ethnic intolerance hinder the Church's Christian witness and mission in Africa (wa Gatumu, 2019:195; 2025:289–309). These concerns are important for this study

because they show that moral failure is not only a sociological issue of public reputation but also a theological issue of witness. Given such inconsistencies, the question arises whether external religion without internal change is a factor in the public dishonouring of God's name, as in Romans 2:24-29.

1.9.3.2 Religious Hypocrisy in the Contemporary Kenyan Church

Studies on Christianity in Kenya further identify religious hypocrisy as a concern, in which public moral claims are contradicted by ethical inconsistency within the church. Research on the church's role in public ethics, corruption and accountability shows that the church's moral credibility is undermined when its public condemnation of wrongdoing is not matched by integrity in its own institutional life and relationships (Muziga, 2021:49-50; Mwaura, 2018:105-118; Bwire, 2022). M. Mwaniki (2015:88–90) mentions the rise of 'performative righteousness', and K. J. Asamoah–Gyadu (2005:110–112) criticises the 'clerical culture of celebrity' which is concerned with 'outer' rather than 'inner' religion. Religious hypocrisy is significant for this study because it is not itself blasphemy, yet it may create the conditions through which God's name is dishonoured before outsiders. This distinction preserves the study's controlled use of the term 'implied blasphemy.'

1.9.3.3 Legalism in the Contemporary Kenyan Church

In some Kenyan ecclesial contexts, legalistic religiosity appears where norms, doctrinal correctness, institutional regulations, or external conformity are emphasised without corresponding inner transformation and renewal. In such contexts, doctrinal rigidity and structural legalism may encourage external conformity while marginalising those who do not fit established norms. Such patterns weaken living faith, spiritual vitality, and the church's public witness (Nthamburi, 2021:115–120; Omenyo, 2021:3–8; Gatu, 2022:39–45). In places where these patterns are observed, religious identity is judged by outward conformity rather than by the work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life. This concern is relevant to the present study because Paul is not condemning obedience itself. Rather, he critiques the tendency to rely on religious

possession and outward conformity while moral inconsistency persists (Moo, 2018:154–159; Dunn, 2018:97-99; Knight, 2000:56).

1.9.3.4 Ritualism in the Contemporary Kenyan Church

Ritualism remains a concern in Kenyan and African theological literature where ritual, liturgical or charismatic practices are detached from inward transformation, spiritual preparation, and ethical seriousness. However, research on the practice of the Eucharist in the Anglican Church of Kenya, specifically within the ACK Diocese of Thika, reveals that such ritual participation may require greater theological education and spiritual devotion (Kiariem and Joshua, 2016:295–320; Kiarie, 2017:439–456). Nthamburi's critique of theological shallowness in African Christianity suggests that outward religious expression may sometimes displace inner renewal and moral seriousness (Nthamburi, 1991:45–46). This does not deny the importance of Christian rituals. It asks, rather, whether such rituals are accompanied by inner renewal. In this study, the term ritualism serves as a contextual parallel to Paul's worries about circumcision without covenantal fidelity for the context of Kenya.

1.9.3.5 Ethnocentrism in the Modern Kenyan Church

African and Kenyan theological literature has given sustained attention to ethnocentrism, particularly to the ways in which ethnic identity shapes church structures, leadership practices, and patterns of ecclesial belonging (Nthamburi, 1991:44-46; Shorter, 1999:28-29; Gathogo, 2008:123; Kamara, 2010:135). In the Kenyan context, wa Gatumu (2019:194–195) identifies the persistence of negative ethnicity in church life, especially in leadership loyalties, ethnic allegiances, struggles over resources and power relations. Similarly, Makhanu and Kithinji (2024:82–95), using Social Identity Theory, stress the need for a Christ-centred identity that moves beyond ethnic exclusivism.

These studies indicate that ethnocentrism remains a problem in some Kenyan churches, both in theological reflection and in ecclesial practice. It is not merely a social issue, but also a theological one, because ethnic identity can compete with the inclusive covenant identity formed

through the gospel. This observation is significant for this study because ethnocentrism shows how external identity markers may replace covenant faithfulness. In Paul's context, ritual and ethnic privilege could be mistaken for authentic covenant identity; in the Kenyan context, ethnic belonging may function similarly. This is a theological analogy rather than a claim of direct historical correspondence: the contexts differ, but each raises the question of whether an outward identity marker is being granted covenantal significance that properly belongs to inward faithfulness. Therefore, περιτομὴ καρδίας provides a Pauline lens for recasting ecclesial identity beyond ethnic superiority toward Spirit-created unity.

Taken together, these discussions identify several contextual concerns relevant to this study: moral credibility, hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, and ethnocentrism. Chapter One does not attempt a full contextual critique; it introduces these concerns only to show why Romans 2:24–29 is relevant for the Kenyan ecclesial context. It serves to define the literature, to set the problem in context, and to set the stage for the more fully-fledged Pauline critique of the same issue in Chapter Four. This prepares the need for a biblical–theological framework grounded in Paul's argument in Romans 2:24–29 and centred on the concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας.

1.9.4 A Necessity for a Biblical–Theological Framework as a Remedy for Blasphemy

The foregoing literature identifies contextual concerns that bring the study's theological problem into focus. The study addresses these concerns through a biblical-theological framework. It connects the dishonouring of God's name in Romans 2:24 with περιτομὴ καρδίας in Romans 2:29. Although both motifs are discussed in other studies, the theological connection between them as a Pauline problem–response framework is yet to be fully explored (Kgatle, 2020:57; Togarasei, 2022:35), particularly for the contemporary African ecclesial contexts. Likewise, the Kenyan literature reviewed above identifies selected ecclesial settings in which outward religious expression may become detached from inward spiritual transformation. In this context, moral and ethical concerns may arise, including hypocrisy, ritualism, and prosperity-oriented expressions of faith (Alwala, 2020:13–22; Kirimi and Kiboss, 2021:254–259).

In Pauline theology, Christian identity and spirituality are not marked by outward rituals but by inward transformation and grace (Bird, 2007:720–722; Barclay, 2015:566–570). Paul compares this internal focus to views of physical circumcision that saw ceremonial adherence as the main indicator of covenant identity in Romans 2:24–29 (Knight, 2010:71; deSilva, 2018:63). Cranfield (2004:137–142) and Barclay (2015:211), Moo (2018:184–188) and Westerholm (2004:147–150) all variously emphasise the inward, ethical, and spiritual dimension of Paul's concept. But Wright (2018:82–85) emphasises its significance for the inclusivity of the New Covenant community.

Although these Pauline insights are theoretically relevant to modern contexts, their application to the Kenyan Church remains largely inferential and illustrative rather than empirically developed in the existing literature. The literature, therefore, indicates the need for a biblical–theological approach to address the persistent disconnect between ecclesial religiosity and inner transformation. In this respect, περιτομὴ καρδίας is viewed as a promising Pauline concept for articulating Spirit–led renewal, ethical integrity, and heart–centred spirituality in response to the foregoing manifestations of external religiosity. Reinforcing this emphasis, Wright (2002e:466) warns against outward religiosity without inward transformation. A detailed exegetical development of this Pauline concept, however, is undertaken in Chapter Three.

1.10 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study employs exegesis as its primary method. African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH) provides the contextual hermeneutical framework. Social Identity Theory (SIT) serves as a supplementary analytical lens for questions of group identity, boundary-making, and ethnocentrism. These roles are deliberately distinct. The exegesis of Romans 2:24–29 remains controlling. ABH guides the study's contextual engagement. SIT offers supplementary explanation where social identity dynamics are directly relevant. Through these frameworks, this study examines Romans 2:24–29 and interprets περιτομὴ καρδίας theologically as a response to external religiosity expressed through ritualism, ethnocentrism, legalism, religious hypocrisy, and moral depravity. As a result, interpretation is not confined to textual meaning alone, but extended to its applicability within the sociocultural reality of contemporary Kenyan

Christianity. This contextual movement is supported by Maina and Kithinji's postcolonial reading of Luke's socioeconomic parables. They argue that biblical interpretation in Kenya should move beyond inherited missionary frameworks that fail to account for local social realities and instead adopt a context-sensitive, liberative, and transformative approach (Maina and Kithinji, 2021:1). African Biblical Hermeneutics is the main interpretive paradigm of this study. At the same time, Social Identity Theory serves as a secondary analytical tool for explaining group identity, ethnic boundary-making and ecclesial othering.

Initially developed by Tajfel (1979:185–186) and further advanced by Tajfel and Turner (1979:33–47; 1986:7–24), the SIT offers an analytical perspective that aids the understanding of the role of group identity in influencing behaviour and perception. The theory shows how intergroup relations are organised around social categorisation, identification, and comparison, thereby generating bias and exclusion (Tajfel and Turner, 1979:38–41; 1986:9–11; Hogg and Abrams, 1988:14–25; Turner, 1999:8–12; Turner and Reynolds, 2010:16–20). These mechanisms are especially applicable to the Kenyan ecclesial environment, where denominational and ethnic groups tend to shape identity and bolster boundaries between groups, like "us" or "them," that is, who is an "insider" or "outsider" (Tajfel and Turner, 1979:40). Rather than assuming such dynamics, SIT enables a critical analysis of how these identity formations uphold ethnocentrism and social disintegration within the church.

Nevertheless, SIT is analytically secondary to ABH, which offers the normative theological framework for explaining and responding to these dynamics. As postcolonial biblical studies have shown, othering operates not only in the biblical text but also in its interpretation, whereby some groups are constructed as marginal or excluded. In this direction, Kithinji (2019:25458–25463), in his postcolonial reading of John 7:53–8:11, shows how textual and communal constructions of identity can justify othering and exclusion. At the same time, his reinterpretation seeks to reclaim the marginalised identity of the Pharisees against exclusionary readings. Combined with these viewpoints, this suggests that othering is not merely a sociological issue but also a hermeneutical one that must be addressed theologically. In this paradigm, ABH responds to othering through a postcolonial sensitivity that confronts rigid in–group and out–group formations and their expressions in ethnocentrism, denominationalism, and social

exclusion. These dynamics are interpreted as both social vices and theological anomalies that undermine the gospel's vision of inclusivity.

The exegetical interpretation of Romans 2:24–29 in the subsequent chapters, therefore, serves as a critical point of integration. The combination of ABH, exegesis, and SIT thus provides a framework for analysing ethnocentrism and superficial religiosity in some Kenyan churches both theologically and sociologically. This study explores whether Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας can provide a useful theological contrast for understanding external forms of religious life and inner transformation in Kenyan Christianity. This framework, therefore, provides a coherent foundation for addressing the implied blasphemy of God's name by realigning Christian identity with grace, inner renewal, and the transforming work of the Spirit.

1.11 Research Methodology

This study uses exegesis as a method. African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH) offers a contextual framework, while Social Identity Theory (SIT) offers limited additional insights on social identity. The six-fold framework is not a method, but a biblical-theological framework developed later in this study. This study involves a four–part analysis. First, it uses an exegetical approach, incorporating close grammatical, lexical, syntactical, and theological analysis of Romans 2:24–29. This involves discussion of the historical context *(Sitz im Leben*), genre, and theology of the passage, including the concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας. This analysis is important to ensure that the interpretation reflects the text's original meaning and intent (Dunn, 2018:347; Köstenberger, 2021:92–95). The use of rhetoric is also limited to identifying the rhetorical context of Romans 2:24–29 in Paul's argument in Romans 1–4, albeit in a heuristic sense. This exegesis sets the stage for the contextual and theological analysis.

Second, ABH enables the exegesis of a text to be interpreted within the African context, so that Romans 2:24–29 could be read with both textual faithfulness and contextual relevance (Ukpong, 2000:11–13; Mburu, 2019:52). Maina and Kithinji's critique of "Kaburu" biblical hermeneutics argues that Kenyan biblical interpretation should move beyond inherited colonial and missionary frameworks. It should take seriously the social location, power relations, context, and lived

realities of African Christian communities (Maina and Kithinji, 2021:2–3). Following the exegesis of Romans 2:24–29, ABH provides a contextual hermeneutical framework to bring the exegetical findings into dialogue with selected Kenyan ecclesial realities. SIT then provides a supplementary analytical lens for examining group identity, boundary-making, and ethnocentrism. In this respect, wa Gatumu's (2025) missional hermeneutical reading of Romans 12:1–2 is useful because it demonstrates how Pauline theology is brought into dialogue with African realities of negative ethnicity, corruption, and the need for transformation in church life.

In this study, African Biblical Hermeneutics is used to read the Kenyan ecclesial context in dialogue with Romans 2:24–29, while the exegetical findings of the text remain the controlling authority. It thus makes the Kenyan ecclesial context an explicit context that has to be interpreted, but not one that can vitiate Paul's textual argument. Adamo sees African Biblical Hermeneutics as "the principle of interpretation of the Bible for transformation in Africa" (Adamo, 2015:33). Thus, ABH does not replace the exegesis of the Bible text but acts as a contextual extension of it and deliberately takes the African context, perspectives, and cultures into account (Adamo, 2001:5-6; Ukpong, 2002:18). Similarly, Yorke's African reading of the text shows that Scripture can be interpreted from within African contexts. This makes the Kenyan ecclesial context methodologically relevant to the present study (Yorke, 1995:146).

Furthermore, Meenan's caution that the biblical text must be heard in its original *Sitz im Leben* before being introduced to the African realities is important (Meenan, 2014:261). Consequently, the present study does not start from the Kenyan concerns in the churches and impose them on Paul's text. Instead, it first analyses the rhetorical, historical, and theological dimensions of Romans 2:24-29. It then applies African Biblical Hermeneutics to relate Paul's critique of external religiosity to selected Kenyan ecclesial concerns, including moral inconsistency, ritualism, legalism, hypocrisy, and ethnocentrism. It is suitable since it maintains the historical and exegetical integrity of Romans 2:24-29, and then allows for a responsible contextual reading of περιτομὴ καρδίας for today's African, particularly Kenyan, Christianity.

Third, the study also applies the SIT. The SIT provides the social processes used to explain social identity formation and the intergroup bias observed in the ecclesial setting in the African context.

The role of SIT in this study is deliberately restricted. It is used to examine social categorisation, group belonging, boundary formation, in-group/out-group dynamics, and ethnocentrism (Tajfel and Turner, 1986:15–20; Hogg and Abrams, 1988:56–60). It is not used to explain moral inconsistency, legalism, or ritualism as a whole. These remain primarily theological concerns addressed through exegesis and ABH. In this respect, SIT provides analytical tools for examining group identity, belonging, and boundary formation. In another context, Kithinji's work has proved useful in demonstrating how interpretive and contextual dynamics shape Christian exclusion and ethical distortion in Kenya (Kithinji, 2014). Consequently, a combination of ABH and SIT makes it possible to conduct analysis that is grounded in contexts and has a theological basis. This pairing offers a means of analysing the role of identity, ritual practice, and inconsistent morality in the contemporary Kenyan ecclesial context. Such integration, therefore, offers contextually based and theologically sound ground on which to address the tendencies of blasphemy in some Kenyan churches.

Fourth, the study combines the exegetical and contextual insights to explain how Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας serves as a remedy for external religiosity in modern Kenyan Christianity. At this stage, the sixfold theological framework is introduced. It consists of ethical renewal, authentic witness, grace-enabled obedience, inward faith, covenantal inclusivity, and Spirit-enabled renewal. These categories are later used for application and are derived from exegesis and contextual analysis. These inductively derived categories are based on exegesis and contextual interpretation, which is an inductively contextual–theological means of assessing and informing contemporary ecclesial practices. In summation, this systematic procedure begins with exegesis and moves through contextual interpretation, social analysis, and theological application. This progression preserves methodological clarity by distinguishing interpretation, contextualisation, analysis, and application.

Regarding ethical considerations, the study uses secondary sources. But the issues addressed herein are sensitive and require ethical consideration. Five ethical safeguards were utilised. First, regarding confidentiality and generalisation, no specific individuals are mentioned. General tendencies in academic sources are brought to the forefront of discussion (Mbiti, 1991:98–102; Gathogo, 2008:135–138). Second, it is the credibility of scholarly sources. The interpretations

are based on reliable peer–reviewed scholarly work to maintain accuracy and reduce bias (Köstenberger, 2021:92–95; Adamo, 2015:33). The third ethical implication is balanced and non–judgmental analysis. Challenges like ethnocentrism, ritualism, and moral inconsistency are viewed as structural and theological problems rather than individual failures.

The fourth ethical issue is reflexivity. Admittedly, the researcher acknowledges that subjectivity and theological viewpoints could affect impartiality. Nonetheless, the best efforts were made to achieve scholarly objectivity (Adamo, 2015:33; Olatudun & Olatudun, 2020:60). Fifth, it is the ethical consideration of academic integrity. This study provides proper citation and accurate representation of sources, which guarantees credibility and scholarly responsibility (Israel and Hay, 2020:102–105). Therefore, such steps made the study academically rigorous, culturally sensitive, and theologically responsible. This interdisciplinary methodological approach enabled a systematic, contextually relevant, and theologically significant discussion of Romans 2:24–29. This permitted a combination of textual faithfulness, African contextual sensitivity, social interpretation, and application.

The study adopts thematic and exegetical synthesis in its analysis of the relevant scholarly literature. Romans 2:24–29 provides the primary Pauline text for this study, while African and Kenyan traditions are used to illuminate the contextual significance of Paul's argument. Sources are compared on the grounds of their relevance to circumcision, external religiosity, public dishonour, and transformation as mediated by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In summary, the utilisation of the ABH in this study proves a suitable methodological approach. This is because it combines biblical interpretation with attention and contextual sensitivity to the specifics of the African ecclesial reality. The strategy allows the analysis of Romans 2:24–29 to be approached in a way that contextualises the issues of external religiosity and internal change within selected Kenyan churches, through acknowledging the communal aspect of religion in African societies (Mbiti, 1991:167–170). Paul's criticism of outward religiosity in Romans 1–4 is regarded as the relevant historical prism for understanding the corresponding problems of the contemporary church (Gathogo, 2008:75–78). As a result, the concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας serves as a means of studying the correlation between the inner change and the outer religious

manifestation (Dunn, 1998:347). Based on this, ABH is therefore the appropriate methodological paradigm for this study. This is because it is a paradigm that strictly integrates exegetical fidelity and contextual relevance in addressing the theological and ecclesial implications of Romans 2:24–29.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter established the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological basis of this study. It has clarified the study's exegetical gap, contextual problem, research design, and methodological controls. It also identified a gap in the scholarship: the relationship between the implied blasphemy of God's name (Rom 2:24) and the inner heart transformation (Rom 2:29). In response, the chapter establishes περιτομὴ καρδίας as the study's central biblical-theological category. It links Spirit-enabled inward renewal with covenant identity and ethical conduct. These, in turn, bear directly on the public honour of God's name. This chapter has established the context for the historical, exegetical, theological, and contextual analyses in the subsequent chapters, thereby preparing the study to address its research objectives.

CHAPTER TWO
HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF EXTERNAL RELIGIOSITY AND IMPLIED BLASPHEMY IN ROMANS 1–4

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the socio–historical and rhetorical background for reading Romans 2:24–29. It considers historical, social, and theological influences on Paul's argument, such as authorship, audience, and the significance of circumcision in the covenant relationship. It advances the argument from Chapter One by situating Paul and his audience in their socio–historical context. It demonstrates that Paul's critique of the implied blasphemy is connected to the Jewish–Gentile tensions of the first century. The chapter narrows the historical background to what is necessary for interpreting Romans 2:24–29. It focuses on circumcision, covenant identity, obedience, Jew–Gentile relations, and public honour. It does not yet undertake a detailed exegesis of the passage. That task belongs to Chapter Three. The present chapter establishes the historical and theological setting for that close reading. This section is not yet a detailed interpretation of Romans 2:24–29. It establishes the historical, social, and rhetorical backdrop that makes Paul's critique of blasphemy and his view of circumcision intelligible. This sets the stage for the exegesis in Chapter Three, which considers the relationship between blasphemy (Rom 2:24) and the circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:29).

2.2 Authorship, Date, Place and Composition of Romans

The Epistle to the Romans is universally acknowledged as Paul's letter. Patristic authors such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement of Alexandria attributed the epistle to Paul, a view supported by modern scholarship based on both internal and external evidence (Irenaeus, 1885; Tertullian, 1885; Clement of Alexandria, 1885; Moo, 2018:1–2; Gaventa, 2024:1–3; Metzger & Ehrman, 2005:52–55). Paul is named as the author (Rom 1:1), and the letter shows close theological and linguistic parallels with Paul's undisputed letters, especially on issues of justification, the law, and Jew–Gentile relations (Longenecker, 2016:25–30; Bird, 2016:12–15). Some challenges to Pauline authorship have been put forward (Price, 2012:89), but they are not methodologically compelling. The mention of Tertius (Rom 16:22) aligns with standard epistolary conventions

rather than imposture (Gamble, 1995:89–93; Dunn, 1998:13–15; Richards, 2004:34–38). Pauline authorship is therefore best viewed not as a critical issue but as a hermeneutical assumption, as Beverly Roberts Gaventa (2024:1) affirms: "There is no substantive challenge today to Pauline authorship." Its importance is in concluding that Romans 2:24–29 presents Paul's theological reasoning on the themes of covenant, ethics, and Jew–Gentile relations.

The date of its composition is most likely c. 56–58 CE, and the location is probably Corinth during Paul's third missionary journey. This is confirmed by Paul's intention to visit Jerusalem (Rom 15:25–26), his anticipated ministry in Spain (Rom 15:24, 28), and his naming of Phoebe and Gaius (Rom 16:1, 23). Other theories relating to the location of composition, such as Athens or Asia Minor (Kümmel, 1975:311; Fitzmyer, 1993:830), are less persuasive because they lack comparable textual support (Moo, 2018:2; Longenecker, 2016:23; Gaventa, 2024:3).

Herein, the context is hermeneutically determining. Rome was a prominent multi–ethnic imperial metropolis in which community behaviour had reputational implications. The Christian community, therefore, was socially on display, amplifying tensions between Jewish and Gentile Christians (Barclay, 2019:4–6; Gaventa, 2024:5–7). Paul's intention was most likely integrationist – missionary, pastoral, and apologetic (Longenecker, 2016:23–28; Dunn, 2018:lv–lviii; Gaventa, 2024:5–7). Missionarily, he hoped to gain backing for his Western mission. Pastorally, he sought to address Jew–Gentile divisions in the covenant community. Apologetically, he answered accusations that the gospel nullifies the law (Rom 3:31; 6:1–2). These tensions come together in the matter of public testimony, where inconsistent ethics led to the implied blasphemy of God's name among the Gentiles (Rom 2:24).

This historical and social backdrop is important for understanding Romans 2:24–29. This is because Paul's critique of blasphemy and his notion of περιτομὴ καρδίας flow out of these Jewish–Gentile tensions and issues of covenant identity. The concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας (Rom 2:29) is a theological remedy for this challenge, since it redefines the covenant in terms of inner transformation through the Spirit rather than by external rituals. Thus, the historical context explains both the problem of implied blasphemy and Paul's solution.

2.3 Paul's Socio–Cultural Background

The author Paul is best understood as coming from a socio–cultural background with three interwoven identities: Jewish, Roman, and Hellenistic. Saul (also known as Paul) was influenced by multiple cultures rather than a single culture as a Greek–speaking Jew from Asia Minor in the Roman Empire (Pate, 2013:29; Punt, 2018:3; Roetzel, 2023:3–4). This training enabled him to grapple with issues of law, identity, covenant privilege, Jew–Gentile relationship, and obedience across cultures. This background is particularly relevant to the analysis of Romans 2:24–29 and Paul's discernment of the place of outward covenant signs (such as circumcision) and the refocusing of covenant identity on inward obedience. His own journey from Pharisaic self–confidence to Christ–centred faith also helps to explain the forcefulness with which he critiques outer religiosity without inner obedience and Spirit–enabled transformation (Jewett, 2007:96; Dunn, 1998:402; Cranfield, 2004:1–2). Paul's multi-layered identity is important for this study because his critique of circumcision was neither an attack on Judaism as such nor merely a personal ethical appeal. Rather, it was an intra-Jewish and missionary argument about public covenant witness.

2.3.1 Paul's Jewish Ancestry and Religious Formation

Several scholars (Bruce, 1977:70–72; Witherington, 1998:65–67; Polhill, 1999:29–30; Murphy O'Connor, 2004:12–15; Wright, 2005:19–22) recognise Paul's Jewish background and Pharisaic upbringing. Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer (1997:2–4), James G. Dunn (1998: xl) and Ed Parish Sanders (2015:32) affirm that Paul was born into a Jewish family around 5 CE. He was born in Tarsus (modern Turkey), a city in Cilicia. He was a "citizen of no mean city" (Acts 21:39; 22:3). N. T. Wright (2013:149) notes: *"*Paul, though Jewish by birth, was also a Roman citizen—a fact he uses strategically in Acts—and this status was inherited, not purchased." Paul identified himself as "a Hebrew of Hebrews" and as a member of the tribe of Benjamin (Phil. 3:5). This shows that his critique of Jewish privilege came from within Jewish identity, not from hostility toward it. Being a member of the Pharisaic sect (Dunn, 2018: xl), which was distinguished by its stern observance of Jewish customs and the Torah (Acts 23:6), he studied under Gamaliel in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). His Pharisaic background and training (Acts 23:6; Phil. 3:5) were part of his social life that shaped him greatly (Sanders, 2015:34; Conybeare,

2023:27–28; Murphy–O'Connor, 2004:12–15; Wright, 2005:19–22). Paul's Pharisaic background deeply influenced his views on law, sin, righteousness, and the potential tensions between Jew and Gentile in Jewish covenant identity.

Paul's Jewish background and Pharisaic training are important for understanding his arguments in Romans 2:24–29. His critique is not directed against Judaism itself, but against reliance on the law and circumcision where these are not matched by obedience. Paul is a Hebrew, a descendant of Benjamin, and a Pharisee, shaped by the traditions of Israel's Law (Phil 3:5; Acts 22:3; 23:6). This background gave him insight into the concepts of covenant, Torah, sin, righteousness, and the symbolic significance of circumcision in Jewish identity (Dunn, 1998: xl; Sanders, 2015:32-34; Wright, 2013:149). Paul's critique of reliance on circumcision in Romans 2:24–29 does not come from outside Judaism, but from within Jewish covenantal reasoning. He recognises the seriousness of the covenant sign, yet insists that outward covenant identity must be accompanied by inward obedience and the transforming work of the Spirit. His argument is therefore not a trivialisation of Jewish piety, but a covenantal reorientation of a God-given sign.

2.3.2 Paul's Graeco–Roman Identity and Roman Citizenship

The Graeco–Roman culture was part of Paul's socio–cultural background. According to James G. Dunn (1998:142–145), Hengel (1989:57–59), and Malherbe (2006:68–72), the Hellenistic culture of the Roman Empire had a significant influence on Paul, even though his Jewish identity remained his primary source of identity. Given that his birthplace, Tarsus (Acts 21:39; 22:3), was the centre of education and culture, Paul would likely have been introduced to Greco–Roman culture early on. As such, in addition to his Jewish upbringing, Paul seems to have been well prepared for interacting with various audiences in the Greco–Roman world. He was able to navigate diverse civic, philosophical, and religious circles with ease.

Owing to his Graeco–Roman exposure, Paul was at ease even when he was indicted before governors and kings (Acts 24–26). In addition, he drew on Greco–Roman rhetorical and philosophical idioms in communicating the Christian message. As an example, he was familiar

with Hellenistic literature and culture, as evidenced by a quotation of a Greek poet in Acts 17:28, as he addressed the Areopagus in Athens.

Paul's Roman citizenship gave him access to certain legal rights and benefits not available to non–citizens. This privilege was one of the most important components of his sociocultural background. He was born a Roman citizen in Tarsus (Acts 22:25–28; Sherwin–White, 1973:171–174; Riesner, 1998:83–85; Noy, 2000:147–149; and Wright, 2018:92–94), which had been chosen in 67 BC to serve as the provincial capital of the Roman province of Cilicia (Bornkamm, 1995:3).

James G. Dunn (1998: 45) writes: *"*Roman citizenship by birth meant Paul's family likely had some prominence, possibly having received it during Pompey's settlement of the East." Paul and his ministry benefited from Roman citizenship. Paul, as a Roman citizen, had rights that included protection under Roman law, a fair trial, and the ability to petition Caesar (Acts 22:25–29, 25:10–12). This position was essential to his missionary work, as it enabled him to move more freely across the Roman Empire and provided some security when interacting with Roman authorities. The book of Acts also shows Paul as a citizen of Tarsus (Acts 21:39; 22:3). In Luke's presentation, this aspect of Paul's identity helps portray him as a person of social standing and explains his self–assurance in civic, legal, and cultural contexts (Jung, 2018:110–121; Brélaz, 2021:485–507). So, Paul's critique of circumcision speaks to the mixed Jewish and Gentile setting of Roman Christianity, where outward signs of covenant allegiance could either support or undermine the public honour of God's name before outsiders.

2.3.3 Paul's Hellenistic Education and Cultural Engagement

As a Diaspora Jew with Hellenistic and Palestinian Jewish upbringing, along with his Roman citizenship, Paul was well–positioned to engage with various cultures in the Greco–Roman world in the context of his missionary service (Dunn, 1998:142–145, 402; Pate, 2013:29; Punt, 2018:3; Jung, 2018:110–121; Roetzel, 2023:11–16). As Edwin Arthur Judge (1960:22–23) explains, Paul belonged to "the privileged group of Hellenistic families which had also been accorded Roman

citizenship in return for services rendered". Yet, his interactions with Rome did not wipe his Jewishness from his memory.

Paul initially attacked the disciples of Jesus (Acts 8:1–3; Gal. 1:13–14; Dunn, 2018:246–247, 277). However, his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–19; Longenecker 1997:37–39) inspired him to embark on multiple missionary missions and travels across the Mediterranean (Acts 13–21). His profession of tent–making financially sustained his preaching throughout (Acts 18:3; Hock, 1980:68). Paul's Jewish, Graeco–Roman and early Christian upbringing helped shape the scope, vocabulary and cross–cultural appeal of his letters.

Paul's Graeco–Roman identity and Roman citizenship also influenced the rhetorical and public aspects of his argument. Paul was a Jew from Tarsus and a Roman citizen (Acts 21:39; 22:25-29; Jung, 2018:110-121; Brélaz, 2021:485-507). This helped him speak to Jewish and Gentile audiences in the broader civic, legal, and cultural context of the Roman Empire. This background is important for Romans 2:24–29 because Paul shows that the conduct of God's people has public theological consequences: how they live impacts how God's name is perceived among others. So, his criticism of circumcision resonates in a mixed Jew–Gentile context of Roman Christianity, where external expressions of covenant status might either honour or displease God in the sight of outsiders.

Paul's Jewish, Graeco–Roman and Hellenistic heritage provides a context for understanding how he was able to bridge cultural barriers and talk about covenant identity, law, obedience, circumcision and relations between Jews and Gentiles. This background is not used as a general biography in this study, but as historical preparation for understanding Romans 2:24–29. It was not socially invisible conduct among covenant people; rather, it affected how outsiders perceived the God they professed in such a mixed situation. It explains why Paul could raise the issue of outward signs of covenant status apart from an inward life of obedience, and why such inconsistency might lead to the discrediting of God's name among the Gentiles.

2.4 Multicultural Composition and Socio–Religious Background to Romans

The epistle to the Romans is significant here because it was written to a mixed Jewish and Gentile Christian community, where questions of covenant identity, religious privilege, inclusion, and public witness were contested. While Romans was central to Luther's theology, its importance for this study lies not only in its doctrinal impact, but also in its concern with how inconsistent covenant conduct can dishonour God's name before the world (Luther, 1960: xiii; Nygren, 1980:1, 3; Cranfield, 2004: i; Sumney, 2012:1; Pate, 2013:29).

Consequently, Pauline scholars (Gager, 1975:4–7; Meeks, 1983:3–6; Dunn, 2018: iii–iv; Wright, 2002e:413–417; Esler, 2003: 1–6; Campbell, 2024:1–10) contend that to properly comprehend it, one must be aware of the sociocultural context in which it was written. It is necessary to understand the social and religious context of this letter to better grasp how Paul develops his argument in Romans 2. This section, then, identifies the socioeconomic factors that play the most prominent role in Paul's discussion of law, boasting, circumcision and Jewish–Gentile relations. Thus, the sociocultural background of the Romans is evaluated to assess the reader's milieu, particularly the reader's religious and cultural background. This is a significant factor in explaining how the Roman context contributes to Paul's concern that covenantal boasting without obedience leads to dishonouring of God's name among Gentiles (Rom 2:24).

In addition to the ethnic diversity of the early Christian community (Campbell, 2006: 45–48), scholars such as Christopher D. Stanley (1997:11–22) and William S. Campbell (2024: 112–115) note that early Christians were a motley crew of Greek, Oriental, and Roman origins. Michael A. Milton (2009:309–330) introduces a concept of reconciliation as the theological necessity of the church in relation to ethnic diversity. This offers a clue as to how early Christians were able to incorporate Jews, Greeks, and Gentiles into the community. In the opinion of Karen L. Holdsworth (2009:277), this Epistle was a multi–ethnic document that shaped how early Christians understood their religion and community within a Roman cultural environment, while renouncing issues of cultural and ethnic plurality. The Jewish community had a substantial presence in ancient Rome (Munck, 2021:200; Marxsen, 1968:95–109; Guthrie, 1990:405; Schnelle, 1998:118–119; Jewett, 2007:6). They lived side by side with the Gentiles. They had synagogues and distinctive religious practices that preserved their separate identity as a people.

This is in line with the description of Jewish rights and communal life in Rome postulated by Josephus (*Ant*. 14.10.1; *Ant*. 17.11.1), who also elaborates how the Jews were able to maintain synagogues and adhere to the ways of their ancestors. This resulted in religious conflicts among the Jewish–Gentile community.

The ethnic identity, struggle, competition, and social status of ancient Rome were re–emphasised by the multiplicity of the early Christians. This blended the elements of Greeks, Judeans, and Romans. Rome was a multicultural and multi–religious metropolis at the heart of the huge Roman Empire, and class, ethnicity, and religious identity all had a significant impact on its social dynamics. They frequently held ethnocentric views toward "out–groups," or other tribes. Paul's repeated allusions to "Jews" and "Greeks" (or Gentiles) should be interpreted in light of the historical interethnic and interreligious tensions that existed between these ethnicities in the eastern Mediterranean context (Rom 1:16; 2:9–10; 2:17; 3:9; 3:22; 3:29; 10:12; Stanley, 1997:13). The effect of ethnic and social strife in the Roman house–churches that was pre–conditioned by intergroup conflict in the past (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.241–242; 16.27–65; *Aristeas* §§139–142; Stanley, 1997:13) impacted Paul's teachings about the law, grace, and identity. Whereas Jews were proud of the Torah and physical circumcision, something Gentiles considered alien, unneeded, or even invasive (Dunn, 2018:101). Romans chapter 2 is Paul's argument for covenantal boasting without obedience in this multi–cultural Roman context. Paul addresses an implied Jewish interlocutor in Romans 2:17–24 in the mode of internal accusation, thereby heightening the contrast between covenantal boasting and obedience. This culminates in Romans 2:24 and leads to his redefinition of circumcision in Romans 2:25–29.

The composition of the Roman Christian communities marked by Greek–Jewish ethnic relations was analysed to reveal how early Christianity adapted to a divided, multicultural world. The main question was whether the Roman community consisted of Gentile Christians, Jewish Christians, or a mix. In reference to their multicultural nature, the house churches in Rome were comprised of Jewish and Gentile Christians from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.3.1; *Ant*. 12.241–242; *Ant*. 18.3.5; Toews, 2004:25–26). This is evidenced by references to Jews/Greeks or Israel/Gentiles (Rom 1:16; 2:9–10; 3:9, 29; 9:24, 30–31; 10:12), circumcision/uncircumcision (Rom 2:25–29; 3:1, 30; 4:9–12; 15:8–12), "you–they" language

(11:28, 31) and "strong" and the "weak" (chapters 14–15); besides addresses to Jewish Christians (Rom 2:12, 17; 3:1, 29; 4:1; 7:1, 4) and to Gentile Christians (Rom 1:5, 6, 13; 2:12; 11:13, 17–18, 20; and 15:14–15). In Romans, Paul responded to this reality by calling on disparate believers to recognise and live together harmoniously. He cautioned the Gentiles against arrogance and the Jews against seclusion (Rom 11:13–31). The logical inference is that house churches in Rome were composed of various groupings—some purely Jewish, some purely Gentile, some with more Jews than Gentiles, others with more Gentiles than Jews, others an equal mixture of Jews and Gentiles (Jewett, 2007:62–64; Toews, 2004:25–26).

Consequently, scholars such as Paul Sevier Minear (1971:45), Lloyd-Jones (1985:19), D. C. Duling and N. Perrin (1994:239), and James G. Dunn (2018–xlix) support the view that the Roman Christian community was ethnically and religiously mixed. Besides, they point out that tensions between the two groups were caused by the Gentile majority who were in leadership as returning Jews attempted to regain influence within the church (Rom 2:17; 3:15; 4:15; 7:14). It is reported that: "The Greeks were angry at the Jews... about the privileges granted to them." (Josephus*, Ant.* 12.3.1). According to other scholars, the Gentile community was refusing to be marginalised by the Jewish Christians' insistence on physical circumcision as they fought for their inclusivity and dignity (Stendahl, 1963:112–130; Hengel, 1989: 150–168; Sanders, 1990:311–320; Dunn, 2006: xv–xx; Gruen, 2012:65–80; Wright, 2013:340–350). Conflicts between Jewish and Gentile Christians could have been a painful reality for the house churches in Rome (Josephus, *Ant.* 18.3.5; Jewett, 2007:62–64), which frequently stemmed from matters about the Law, culinary customs, and physical circumcision (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.2.5; Dunn, 2018:531–533; Wedderburn, 1988:5). The Roman audience is important for this study because the Christian assemblies were part of a multi-ethnic imperial context in which communal behaviour had public repercussions. Such a context would not have allowed for private conflict over Jewish identity, law, and covenant privilege, for it influenced outsiders' perception of the God to whom believers confessed.

The Roman house–churches were ethnically and socially mixed. The interrelations between Jewish and Gentile members were influenced by such crucial historical and cultural occurrences as the expulsion of Jews under Claudius (Acts 18:2; Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4; Josephus, *Ant*.

18.3.5). Significantly, Acts 18:2 states: "...because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome." Gentile Christians remained while Jewish members were expelled (Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4; Josephus, *Ant.* 18.3.5), most likely meeting in home assemblies as the principal places of worship (Acts 18:7–11, Rom 16:3–5, 14–15). Initially, according to Thomas Fahy (1959:183), Xavier Léon–Dufour (1963:17–19) and Ernst Käsemann (1980:26–28), the Roman Christian community was predominantly of Jewish Christians. Its formation was facilitated by early Jewish converts, such as those at Pentecost (Acts 2:10; Tacitus *Ann* 15:44). However, Romans (1:5–7; 11:13; and 15:15–17) points to a community of house churches that, overall, was predominantly Gentile in the post–Claudius era (Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4; Schnelle, 1998:12; Jewett, 2007:6; Longenecker, 2016:23).

A key aim of the epistle was to resolve conflicts between Gentile and Jewish Christians in the Roman churches, particularly following the return of Jews to Rome (Rom 3:29–30; 11:17–24). These disputes often arose from disagreements over food, observance of rituals and the Mosaic Law. Josephus also records disagreements between the Jewish communities in the diaspora and those in Rome, who remained faithful to their ancestors' traditions, dietary laws, and the purity of their rituals (Josephus, *Ant*. 14.10.1; *Ant*. 17.11.1; *Ant*. 16.27–65). Paul opposed Roman social constructs. He promoted equality based on the gospel by declaring the inclusiveness of the gospel between the ''Jews and the 'Greeks' (Rom 1:16). These conflicts were made worse by the multicultural dynamics of house–churches in Rome prompting and culminating in a call for respect between the "strong" and the "weak" (Rom 14–15; Jewett, 2007:841–843; Moo, 2018:846–848; Schreiner, 2018:708–709; Dunn, 2018:807; Wright, 2002b:719–721), unity (DeSilva, 2018:16) and harmony and understanding between ethnicities (Wedderburn, 1988:5).

The epistle to the Romans affirms God's just judgment and the universality of the gospel in a way that breaks down ethnocentric confidence and relativises "covenant elitism." Romans 1, 3, and 4 are read alongside Romans 2 in this study because they help clarify the broader context of the argument, in which issues of covenant identity, Jewish–Gentile tensions, and circumcision are discussed. Yet Romans 2:24–29 remains the focus of this study because it explicitly addresses the nexus of outward circumcision, inward transformation, and covenant. Paul emphasised that righteousness attained by faith, rather than by observing the Mosaic Law (Rom 1–3), could bring

these disparate groups together. He insisted that all were justified by faith (Rom 3:29–30). Both categories were condemned for their actions, not for their tribe (Rom 2:6–11). Paul did not disown Israel to favour the Gentiles. Rather, he recognised Israel's ongoing role in God's plan (Rom 9–11). He imagined a community of faith whose source and identity are not ethnic or external but faith and fidelity to God's covenant. He encouraged people to overcome ethnic and cultural boundaries (Romans 12-15; Keener, 2009:20, 50, 75, 200–210, 280–300). He challenged them to be one in Christ as a new humanity and to outgrow the outward signs of religiosity. Thus, Paul's gospel endeavoured to reconcile Jews and Gentiles in the transforming grace of God.

In brief, the letter to the Romans sought to bring about unity and transformation in the Roman house churches (wa Gatumu, 2025:289–309). Romans, as wa Gatumu (2025:291, 300) further argues, presents God's mission as redemptive, reconciliatory, and transformative, while the renewal of the mind results in changed behaviour and relationships. This partly explains why unity was so important to the Roman Christian communities. The fracture lines were moulded by cultural pressures, as well as legal, covenantal, dietary, and physical circumcision debates in Paul's day. There were cultural conflicts in early house churches in Rome.

However, the house churches in Rome were not all the same: some had a Gentile majority, some had a Jewish majority, and some had both groups in various proportions. In this context, it was hard for Jewish and Gentile Christians to reconcile their ethnic identity and their newfound identity in Christ (Holdsworth, 2009:277). For example, disputes about food and eating practices (such as the strong–weak debate, Rom 14:1–15:7) were connected to issues of community identity and boundary–setting (Dunn 2006: xv–xx). As a result, Nanos (2015:29–56, 103–138) sees these issues as an extension of the Jewish–Gentile debate. Similarly, Thiessen (2016:45–60) and Willitts (2009:6–8) demonstrate that physical circumcision was still a major marker of early Christian divisions. These controversies help explain Paul's condemnation of Jewish boasting in external religiosity in Romans 2:17–29.

Paul's real concern is not with ethnic identity or rite possession in and of itself, but with the spiritual reality to which the signs of covenantal identity point, namely, a transformed heart (Rom 2:29; Moo, 2018:175–178; Keener, 2009:75, 280–300). This posed a challenge to both Gentile

exclusion and Jewish pride. Paul encourages believers not to rely on external signs of righteousness, but to live in covenantal faithfulness and unity, where outward religiosity is matched by obedient living (Rom 2:6–11; 3:29–30; Mugambi, 2002:89–91). Therefore, the multicultural makeup of the Christian communities in Rome is not merely background information. It is central to interpreting Paul's discussion of law, Jew–Gentile relations, boasting, and circumcision in Romans 2. The issue is a public controversy about covenant identity.

2.5 Social–Cultural Background of Circumcision

This section discusses the socio-cultural history of circumcision because it is important for understanding Paul's redefinition of circumcision in Romans 2:25–29. Paul's argument cannot be fully understood apart from the broader context of circumcision as a bodily practice, an identity marker, a boundary marker, and a covenant sign. This section, therefore, follows a funnel-shaped movement: Ancient Near Eastern circumcision practices, the re-signification of circumcision in Israel, heart circumcision in the Old Testament, circumcision as a boundary marker in the Second Temple period and Greco-Roman Jewish contexts, the early Jewish–Gentile debate, Kenyan traditional circumcision as a contextual analogy, and Paul's critique of circumcision in Romans 2.

2.5.1 Circumcision in the Ancient Near East

Circumcision was not unique to Israel. In the Ancient Near East, it was already established as a bodily practice related to identity, passage, and cultic affiliation (Sasson, 1966:473-476; Faust, 2015:273-290). The uniqueness of Israel's Scriptures lies not in the invention of circumcision, but in the new covenantal meaning given to it as a sign for the descendants of Abraham in Genesis 17:9–14. This is important for the present study because Paul's argument in Romans 2:25–29 concerns more than a Jewish ritual practice. It concerns circumcision as a practice known beyond Israel, yet given covenantal meaning within Israel's Scriptures. Romans 4:9–12 reinforces this point by showing that Abraham was justified before receiving the sign of circumcision (Wright, 2013:207–241).

2.5.2 Israel's Covenantal Re-signification of Circumcision

Circumcision was elevated in Israel for covenantal purposes and was no longer a cultural or medical procedure. Genesis 17:10-14 introduces circumcision as the sign of the covenant, and Leviticus 12:3 includes circumcision as part of Israel's communal life, instructing male children to be circumcised at eight days old. The Hebrew verb מוּל (*mûl*, "to circumcise") emphasises the act by which the sign of the covenant was performed. But for Israel, the act took on a theological connotation of covenant obligation and belonging to Abraham. As such, it was a symbol of Jewish identity, setting Israel apart from those around them and underscoring their covenant relationship with God. Circumcision was therefore not only a physical act, but a material symbol of the covenant relationship, of belonging to the covenant, of obedience and of community (Hamilton, 1990:468).

But circumcision cannot be absolutised as the basis for righteousness because in Romans 4:9-12, it is stated that Abraham was considered to be righteous before he was circumcised. Paul does not dismiss the covenantal significance of circumcision (Rom 2:25–29). Rather, he argues that the physical act cannot secure covenant identity when it is detached from obedience and inward renewal. In later Jewish tradition, the rite of circumcision was described in high terms of its significance for covenant identity, communal belonging, and divine promise (Morris, 1988, pp. 139-140). Recent research has also indicated the value of circumcision in the Jewish community's identity and continuity, especially in the Orthodox and conservative Jewish world (Zampieri, Pianezzola and Zampieri, 2008:1306; Laumann, Masi and Zuckerman, 1997:1053). However, Paul's argument depends on the alignment between the outward sign and inward covenant faithfulness. The outward sign has value only when it is matched by the covenant obedience it signifies. It is not an automatic guarantee of righteousness.

2.5.3 Old Testament Heart-Circumcision Traditions

The Old Testament already links circumcision with the inner life of covenant faithfulness. Israel may be marked externally as the covenant people, but the covenant also requires a heart responsive to God. Deuteronomy 10:16 calls Israel to circumcise the heart, while Deuteronomy 30:6 develops the theme as God's own work, enabling his people to love him and live in covenant

obedience. Deuteronomy 30:6 deepens the theme by presenting heart-circumcision as God's own renewing work, through which His people are enabled to love Him and live in covenant obedience. These Deuteronomic texts show that covenant identity was already being interpreted beyond the external sign toward inward covenant fidelity (Tigay, 2016:93–95; McConville, 2020:211–214).

The prophetic tradition supports this inward movement through themes of covenant identity, repentance, moral cleansing, and divine renewal. Jeremiah 4:4 uses similar imagery, calling Judah to repentance because outward covenant identity is not matched by moral and spiritual renewal. Thus, already in Israel's Scriptures, circumcision moves beyond the bodily sign toward the inner disposition of covenant fidelity. Besides Jeremiah 4:4, Ezekiel 36:26-27 speaks of the need for a heart circumcision before God's people can enjoy His statutes; having a new heart and a new spirit enables them to walk in His statutes. Ezekiel 44:7-9 makes it clear that the lack of response to the law was also linked to covenantal uncleanness and rejection of pious practice. The prophetic texts do not reject the covenant sign itself. They challenge the separation of outward covenant identity from inward repentance, moral integrity, and faithful obedience. This prophetic context helps to understand the shift in Paul's thinking toward the term "true Jew" in his later writings (Rom 2:28-29), who is one whose circumcision is of the heart, "in Spirit and not in letter" (Brueggemann, 2018:61–63).

Accordingly, the Old Testament path is important in the present context because Paul does not use the word περιτομὴ καρδίας out of nowhere in Romans 2:29. It is based upon an earlier biblical paradigm that points to the fact that the physical sign and mark of the covenant is not a denial of it, but that it is found inadequate if it is not accompanied by obedience, love for God and Covenant faithfulness. Paul's reinterpretation does not deny Jewish identity or the Torah in and of themselves, but it does demonstrate that the outward evidence of the covenant is not enough without faithful obedience and inner renewal. It is not Paul's concern with anti-Jewish polemic but rather the theological inadequacy of external covenant identity without corresponding covenant faithfulness. In this way, περιτομὴ καρδίας is the Pauline intensification of the Old Testament call to internal transformation. A call insisting that an authentic member of the covenant is defined not only by possession of the outward sign but by a heart transformed by the

Spirit. This then paves the way for the fuller exegesis of Romans 2:24-29, for Paul's argument is contained within Israel's scriptural logic of obedience, repentance, and covenant fidelity within the heart (Dunn, 2018:123; Bird, 2016:111–112; Schreiner, 2018:328–329).

2.5.4 Circumcision and Jewish Boundary-Marking

This subsection explores circumcision as a Jewish boundary marker in Second Temple and Greco-Roman contexts, focusing on both the covenantal and the public play of circumcision as a sign of identity, belonging, and difference in Jew-Gentile relations. Circumcision meant the same thing as covenant membership and community demarcation in Second Temple Jewish writing. For instance, Jubilees 15:25–27 presents circumcision as integral to covenant participation, while Qumran documents link covenant identity with moral purity and community holiness. Circumcision also influenced the debates over proselyte incorporation, as male proselytes were expected to be circumcised as part of their incorporation into the covenant community (Schiffman, 1994:98; Cohen, 1999:230; VanderKam, 2001:153). Later, Jewish and rabbinic traditions also elevated the value of circumcision, elevating it from a simple private act of the flesh to a public declaration of covenant belonging and communal identity (Hayes, 2017:189; Sanders, 1990:202). This Second Temple and early Jewish background provides a background for the controversy regarding the meaning of circumcision in the early Jewish–Gentile Christian communities.

By engaging in boundary-making, circumcision was not only a physical process but also an important culturally and religiously meaningful sign that established and marked the social and communal difference between insiders and outsiders, Jews and Jewish–Gentile relationships (Byrne, 1996:58; Cohen, 1999:230). As a result, earlier biblical examples show that circumcision could function as a boundary marker in the context of contested relationships between insiders and outsiders (Whitley, 2010:67; Gollaher, 2000:27).

The discussion of circumcision's social implications for status, hierarchy and exclusion in selected historical contexts is not intended to develop a gender, violence, or masculinity analysis. Rather, it is used only to clarify circumcision's boundary-marking function (Sev'er, 2011:74–

75). However, the point here is not thematic, but analytical: Circumcision is brought into account because it indicates belonging, difference, and communal boundaries. The focus keeps the conversation centred on Romans 2:24-29: What about outward covenant identity in relation to genuine obedience, public witness, and inward transformation?

The Greeks and Romans also used circumcision to mark Jews as socially and culturally different. This difference was particularly stark in Hellenistic environments such as the gymnasium, where the nude male body served as a symbol of civic identity, bodily completeness, and cultural dignity (Cohen 1999:37; Barclay 1996:79; An 2019:129–176). In such a setting, the practice of Jewish circumcision might be seen in some Greco-Roman settings as mere bodily mutilation or cultural difference, leading to the possibility of Jewish men being ridiculed, ostracised, and pressured into assimilation (Barclay, 1996:444; Gruen, 2002:164). The Hellenised Jews reportedly sought to undo circumcision through epispasm so they would not be shamed and would seem more acceptable to Greek civic culture (1 Macc. 1:11–15; Josephus, *Ant*. 12.241; Barclay, 1996:79; Parks, 2024:1–20). On the other hand, the Jewish resistance in the face of Antiochus IV's prohibition on circumcision (and the Roman prohibitions later on) shows the importance of circumcision to the covenant and to the community's survival (1 Macc. 1:48; Josephus, *Ant*. 13.257; Tcherikover, 1959:170; Goodman, 1994:32; Soon, 2020:156–161). This background demonstrates that circumcision was not only a private ritual mark, but also a public boundary marker in Jewish–Gentile relations, used to negotiate, defend, and contest Jewish covenant identity.

2.5.5 Circumcision in Early Jewish–Gentile Christian Debate

Paul's redefinition of circumcision in Romans 2:24–29 is set against the theological backdrop of Jewish–Gentile debates in the early Christian communities. Circumcision became significant as Gentiles were brought into the Christian community, because it raised questions about Jewish covenant identity, Gentile inclusion, and the boundaries of the people of God. In the New Testament contexts, circumcision remains a contested marker of Gentile inclusion and, for some Jewish-Christian groups, a claimed requirement for salvation. Paul resists this logic by refusing to circumcise Titus, rejecting circumcision as the basis of covenant standing, and subordinating

the bodily sign to faith working through love, union with Christ and the new creation (Gal. 2:3–5; 5:2–6; 6:12–15; Eph. 2:11–13). Acts 10–15 shows that the early church had to address whether Gentiles needed circumcision for full covenant membership, while Galatians 5:6 relativises circumcision by focusing on faith active in love rather than the bodily sign. Recent scholarship confirms that Paul's argument in Romans 2:17–29 belongs within wider discussions of Jewish identity, Gentile inclusion, covenant membership, and moral obedience (Tobin, 2014:373–391; Storbakken, 2024; Wilson and Blois, 2023).

Romans 2:24–29 contributes to this wider debate in a more specific way. Paul's concern is not simply whether Gentiles must be circumcised, but whether outward covenant identity can be trusted when obedience and inward transformation are absent. Circumcision remains meaningful where it corresponds to covenant faithfulness, but it cannot secure covenant status when moral inconsistency dishonours God's name. Windsor's study is useful here because it connects Romans 2:17–29 with the public dishonouring of God's name, while Wilson and Blois help clarify the importance of inward obedience in Romans 1:18–2:29 (Windsor, 2021:229–248; Wilson and Blois, 2023). Therefore, while Galatians 5:6 and Acts 15 show that circumcision became a major issue in Gentile inclusion, Romans 2:24–29 focuses more precisely on outward covenant identity, obedience, public dishonour and περιτομὴ καρδίας.

2.5.6 Kenyan Traditional Circumcision as a Contextual Analogy

Kenyan traditional circumcision provides a limited contextual analogy for visible identity, belonging, and boundary formation. It is not a theological equivalent of Paul's περιτομὴ καρδίας. It can either shape a sense of belonging, maturity, and communal responsibility or create a sense of exclusion, gender hierarchy, or ethnic superiority. In some Kenyan communities where circumcision is practised, circumcision has served as a symbol of adulthood, community belonging, moral responsibility and recognised social status (Mbiti, 1991:120–121; Njoroge, 2019:88). It thus represents an example of a visible bodily mark that might help configure identity, belonging and moral expectation in a community. The analogy is helpful because it demonstrates that circumcision could be meaningful beyond a physical act.

Similarly, traditional circumcision also acts as a system of boundaries in which insiders differ from outsiders, and sometimes gives rise to exclusion, hierarchy, and identity based on status. In some settings, bodily rites give honour to the uncircumcised, their status and their belonging while at the same time creating social distance (Spear and Waller, 1993:16; Brendmo, 2012:59–60; Kimani, 2015:46–47). This background shows why visible identity markers matter for the present study.

Specific examples are provided herein to illustrate this identity-creating and boundary-making role in Kenya without lengthy cultural description. For the *Agĩkũyũ*, circumcision was linked to *irua* and entry into the *riika*/*mariika* age-set system, including generational groups such as *Maina* and *Irungu* (Kenyatta, 1938:134; Kimani, 2015:28–29, 41, 45–48). The term *emuratta* was used to refer to boys who were given the initiation ceremony to join the warrior age-grade *ilmurran/moran* in the wider Maasai age-set organisation (Saitoti 1986:1 (quoted in Kotowicz 2013:104); Spear and Waller 1993:42; Spencer 1988:94–95). Circumcision was associated with the *chimbara/chimbaka* age-set and communal recognition, among the Babukusu (Bunche, 1941:294; Wanyonyi, 1995:20; Were, 2014:47-48, 89). Other localised age-set or initiation structures of social belonging and communal responsibility, including *riika rimwe*, *konrianga*, *king'onde* and *bakok*, further illustrate how initiation could organise belonging, responsibility, and recognised social status (Bunche 1941:294; Spear and Waller 1993:39; Wanyonyi 1995:20; Were 2014:47–48; Kimani 2015:28–29, 45–48).

The foregoing examples illustrate the usefulness of circumcision as an analogy: visible bodily signs can help establish identity, belonging and social expectation, but they can also serve to exclude when used as determinative markers of status. Kimani's research on *Agĩkũyũ* initiation demonstrates that circumcision might give recognised social status, while the uncircumcised might be considered as socially immature and denied full communal authority (Kimani, 2015:47).

Moreover, these examples are not intended to be representative of Kenya as a whole. Consequently, the theological relevance of Romans 2:29 does not depend on the practice of physical circumcision in a Kenyan community. The Kenyan examples illustrate the social role

of visible identity markers. Paul's theological concern is inward covenant identity. Its relevance therefore extends beyond communities that practise circumcision. Rather, they are given to illustrate how circumcision might serve as a public symbol of status, belonging, and exclusion in Kenyan communities. It thus reinforces the analogy: visible bodily marks can help form a community, but when the criteria of value, voice, or belonging are reduced to the body, they can become problematic. This supports the central argument of this study, namely that no visible identity marker can replace the covenant renewal that Paul describes as "circumcision of the heart" (περιτομὴ καρδίας) in Romans 2:29.

However, this analogy is used cautiously. This is because Paul's περιτομὴ καρδίας refers to the Spirit's transformation of covenant identity, not social initiation, or ethnic belonging. Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας is not a term for social adulthood, masculinity, ethnic identity, or initiation into a traditional community. For that reason, Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) falls outside the scope of this study. It is not treated as an analogue of Pauline circumcision. The comparison is limited to the identity-forming and boundary-marking functions of the selected male circumcision practices discussed above. Instead, it describes the change in covenant with God as a Spirit-enabled process. Kenyan traditional circumcision, then, makes visible the symbolic significance of external identifiers, but it is Romans 2:28-29 which has the final say on the theological interpretation. What's actually being compared is not whether the African rites are equivalent to Paul's theology, but whether Paul's theology leads to internal transformation.

2.5.7 Transition to Paul's Critique in Romans 2:24–29

This study examines circumcision across its layered historical development, with attention to its social, covenantal, and theological significance. Circumcision was a broader ancient Near Eastern practice that was covenantally re-signified in Israel, developed through Old Testament heart-circumcision traditions, intensified in Second Temple and Greco-Roman Jewish contexts as a sign of covenant identity, contested in Jewish–Gentile Christian debates, and analogically illuminated by Kenyan traditional circumcision as a visible marker of identity and belonging. This background prepares the reader for Paul's critique in Romans 2:25–29, where the outward

sign is not rejected but shown to have value only when joined to obedience, inward transformation, and the honour of God's name. Romans 2:24–29 therefore brings together covenant identity, public witness, and inward transformation under the wider concern of God's public honour.

2.6 Honour, Shame, and Patronage in Paul's Concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας

The language of honour-shame and patronage is used here descriptively rather than as a method in its own right. It explains the public dimension of Romans 2:24, namely that the actions of God's covenant people affect how God's name is understood among the Gentiles. Honour and shame were public values which affected social identity, moral values, and status within the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds in the first century (Malina 2001:32; deSilva 2000:29). Honour (τιμή) was public recognition of worth or communal value, and shame (αἰσχύνη) was disgrace, moral failure, and/or exclusion (Moxnes, 1996:23–24; Neyrey, 1998:25). Honour and shame were more social in nature than personal; the behavioural actions of an individual or group could impact the reputation of their community and the community itself (Pilch and Malina, 2007:109; Rohrbaugh, 2007:31). Therefore, Paul's statement that "God's name is blasphemed because of you" is not merely a personal moral charge against an individual. It is a public charge of a theological character: When those who publicly claim covenant identity act inconsistently with that profession, their conduct may cause God's name to be dishonoured among outsiders. This description, in honour–shame language, is therefore not 'theory' but rather a fundamental part of the interpretation of Romans 2:24.

In the Mediterranean world, honour had a societal assertion of value. It had to be acknowledged and established by society. Shame, by contrast, was the societal negation or failure of that assertion (Malina, 2001:28–33). In this study, however, honour and shame have significance only in their connection to the public nature of the relationship between God's name and the covenant community's blasphemous actions. God's name would be honoured among the peoples through Israel's fidelity to the covenant and dishonoured in other nations through Israel's failure to be faithful to the covenant (Ezek 36:20-23; Rom 2:24). Romans 2:24 presents covenantal inconsistency as an occasion for the public dishonouring of God's name. The verse does not

itself label Israel "hypocrites." It climaxes Paul's indictment of the person who boasts in the Law while transgressing it (Rom. 2:17–23). Paul therefore shows that the contradiction between covenant profession and conduct has public theological consequences. As for the explanation of Paul's thinking, one reason he described Israel as "hypocrites" in Romans 2:24 is that he believed they were dishonouring God's name in a society where divine honour was linked to the good or bad conduct of the covenant people. Hence, this research is focused on honour and shame as a contextual lens for examining Paul's emphasis on public dishonour in Romans 2:24. It is not intended as a stand-alone method. The public honour of God's name is the topic, but the focus is on how the covenantal inconsistency of God's people affects it.

In the honour–shame world of the first century, public conduct could bring honour or shame upon both the community and the one it claimed to represent (Malina, 2001:93–97). However, the covenant point of Romans 2:24 is more specific: inconsistency in the covenant community can bring public dishonour upon the God it represents. The focus of Paul's concern, therefore, is not to produce a general theory of divine kingship or sacral authority, but rather to demonstrate that when one's outward identity is not accompanied by obedience, it is dishonouring God's name before the nations. This is in line with Paul's citation of Isaiah 52:5 in Romans 2:24, where misbehaviour of God's people led to the dishonouring of God's name before outsiders' eyes. Thus, περιτομὴ καρδίας in Romans 2:29 functions as Paul's corrective to covenant identity that is externally marked but ethically inconsistent (Dunn, 2018:117–119; Cranfield, 2004:174–176; Jewett, 2007:230–232; Schreiner, 2018:143–145).

In this collectivist honour–shame culture, circumcision and Torah observance functioned as visible markers of covenant identity and communal honour within Judaism (Elliott, 1990:123; Sanders, 1977:99; Rohrbaugh, 2007:31; deSilva, 2004:125). In Jewish and broader Mediterranean culture, the conduct of the covenant community reflected directly upon the honour of its deity. Jewish and, more generally, Mediterranean cultures held that any moral incompetence, hypocrisy and covenantal unfaithfulness in the community inevitably meant a personal disgrace of divine honour, since the name of the deity could not be separated in any way from the conduct of the group that bore his name (Neyrey, 1998:34–38; deSilva, 2000:31–33).

In this study, blasphemy is taken in a qualified way. It is not primarily an abuse of God but is rather a dishonouring of God's name in public by the inconsistent actions of those who claim covenantal membership. If, in an honour-conscious culture, someone engages in public covenantal boasting and fails to keep the covenant, then their boasting dishonours God. Ezekiel is brought into the discussion in Romans 2:24 because Paul has maintained that outward boasting in their religious privileges would bring shame to God among the nations, if not accompanied by covenantal faithfulness.

Paul's shift of honour from public ritual inclusion to inward, spirit-enabled dependability in Romans 2:24–29 significantly alters the dynamics of honour. The concept of covenantal honour in the first–century Jewish world was often linked to physical circumcision and to observing the Law in public (Dunn, 2018:120–123). However, according to Paul, real membership in the covenant is not marked by an external rite but by the renewal of the heart through the Spirit. It is a question of the heart, not the letter (Rom 2:29).

Against this honour–shame background, Romans 2:29 appears to relocate praise from outward ritual distinction toward inward renewal recognised by God rather than by human observers (Wright, 2002e:398; Hays, 2014:61–63); the fuller exegetical implications of this shift are examined later in Chapter Three. Paul, in this theological re–evaluation, dismantles claims to ethical prestige based on ethnicity, observance of the law, and external religiosity, and instead grounds moral order and covenantal faithfulness in divine grace (Barclay, 2015:142–147; Barclay, 2020:89–91). Honour is found in God's approval, not in human applause (Dunn, 2018:142).

This also affects Paul's notion of shame. Shame, in his argument, was no longer tied to uncircumcision or to the obvious marginalisation of covenant members. In his view, shame was tied to the moral inconsistency that disgraces God's name, particularly when the boasters of the Law are not practising it (Rom 2:24). Only hypocrisy and moral failure are forms of disgrace that place the reproach of the covenant community on those who have no ritual marks. Thus, περιτομὴ καρδίας is Paul's response to covenantal inconsistency as it reestablishes the link

between honour and ethical fidelity (Dunn, 2018:145). Using the inner change as the foundation of covenant identity, rather than the outer observation, Paul establishes a new moral order in which Spirit–enabled obedience prevails over social arrogance, ritual supremacy, and ethnocentric self–esteem (Wright, 2013:398; Barclay, 2015:187). Thus, Paul redefines honour in terms of divine approval rather than ritual or ethnic status.

Likewise, favour, loyalty and public honour are ancient concerns that may be clarified through patronage language, but they remain secondary to the exegetical issue in Romans 2:24, where Paul links covenantal inconsistency to the public dishonour of God's name. The first–century Mediterranean world was structured around patronage relationships involving favour (χάρις), loyalty, and public honour between patrons and clients, which established a widespread structure in the political, economic, and religious spheres (Malina, 2001:98). Paul subverted this system by redefining divine favour apart from social status and ritual performance. He insisted that divine χάρις was not secured through ritual performance or social status, but through faith in response to divine grace (Rom 2:25–29; Gal. 6:15). His concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας overturns merit–based religiosity, locates honour in the inner transformation effected by God rather than in human achievement, which exposes the barrenness of social rank. These dynamics shed light on the nature of public and religious honour and status in the ancient world. The contemporary relevance of this pattern is examined later in this study.

Read in this honour–shame context, Romans 2:24 names the public dishonouring brought upon God through covenantal inconsistency, while Romans 2:29 relocates covenantal honour from outward ritual status to inward, Spirit–shaped fidelity. In this light, Romans 2:24 may be read as a statement about public dishonour: the conduct of God's covenant people brings dishonour to God's name. Romans 2:29 then points toward the proper ground of honour, namely, inward transformation recognised by God. This honour-shame material is relevant here only as background to the fact that Romans 2:24 portrays covenant inconsistency as the public dishonouring of God's name; it is not a second method or an alternative theory.

2.7 Literary and Rhetorical Placement of Romans 2:24–29 within Romans

Romans can be read, in large part, as a rhetorical composition. While not forcing the letter into a strict rhetorical mould, Romans 1:1–17 constitutes the *proem*/*exordium*, and Romans 1:16–17 is the programmatic thesis (*propositio*) of the letter, in which Paul highlights his concern with the gospel, righteousness of God and salvation of Jew and Gentile (Kennedy, 1984:153; Witherington, 2004:17, 40; Jewett, 2007:58, 82; Hultgren, 2011:70; Eastman, 2025:7, 12). Romans 1:18–3:20 then forms the major indictment of the argument, before the letter fleshes out its theological and ethical arguments. The rhetorical approach is not treated as an end in itself here, but rather as a convenient hermeneutical tool for situating Romans 2:24–29 within Paul's broader argument (Dodson, 2023:235; Storbakken, 2024:1564).

In Romans 1:18–3:20, Romans 2:17–29 is best understood as a discrete section in which Paul indicts Jewish confidence in the law and circumcision as outward signs of covenant status (Kennedy, 1984:24, 79; Watson, 2007:90; Windsor, 2021:229–248). Its rhetorical force lies in overturning false confidence: the outward status of Jews is relativised, while the true covenant identity is grounded in inward transformation, that is, περιτομὴ καρδίας, "in Spirit and not in letter" (Rom 2:29). In this sense, it serves as a pivotal point between Paul's critique of misappropriated covenantal privilege and his broader argument that no one may claim righteousness with God based on ethnicity or ritual (Jewett, 2007:213–216; Wilson & Blois, 2023:579; Windsor, 2021:246–248).

This study reads Romans 2:17–29 in the context of Paul's argument in Romans 1:18–4:12, in which he progresses from a universal exposure of human sin to a redefinition of covenant identity in terms of the law, circumcision, and the inward work of God. For the sake of clarity, this argument is read in order: Romans 1:18–32 lays out universal sin; Romans 2:1–16 indicts the judging moralist; Romans 2:17–24 critiques Jewish boasting in the law; Romans 2:25–29 redefines covenant identity through circumcision of the heart; Romans 3:1–9 returns to Jewish privilege; and Romans 4:9–12 places Abraham's righteousness before circumcision. Collectively, these observations provide the literary and theological backdrop for Romans 2:25–29, where Paul's redefinition of Jewish covenant identity shifts the focus from external signs to Spirit–enabled inner renewal.

Paul's broader argument moves from the exposure of universal sin to the critique of covenantal boasting, culminating in Romans 2:24–29, where outward covenantal privilege is shown to dishonour God's name when detached from obedience and inward transformation. Paul condemns in Romans 2:17–24 those who boast in the law and teach it but do not observe it themselves. Because of this incongruence of boasting in the law and transgressing it, God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles (Rom 2:24). Knowledge of the Torah and the authority to teach it allowed some Jews to see themselves as moral authorities, despite their breach of the commandments in which they boasted (Rom 2:21–23). Likewise, Colin G. Kruse (2012:146) suggests that outward covenantal privilege without obedience to the law weakens Israel's witness to the Gentiles. Hypocrisy, then, undermines the witness they supposedly bear to the covenant and publicly shames God.

2.8 Circumcision, Law, and Covenant Identity in Romans 2:17–29

Building on the literary flow outlined above, Romans 2:17–29 is interpreted within Paul's broader argument in Romans 1:18–4:12, where covenant identity is progressively redefined in relation to law, circumcision, and the inward work of God. Paul is forceful in his critique of Gentile moral laxity in Romans 1:18–32, the judging moralist in Romans 2:1–16, and Jewish pride in the law and circumcision in Romans 2:17–29. In the Second Temple context, physical circumcision was a powerful symbol of covenant belonging and Jewish identity. Paul's concern in Romans 2 is that it could be used to claim confidence in covenant status without the corresponding life of obedience (Sanders, 1990:213). In Romans 2:24–29, Paul contends that the misplaced confidence in circumcision as a physical sign of covenant privilege, without corresponding obedience to the commandments, is part of the reason why God's name was being blasphemed among the Gentiles (Rom 2:24). Thus, the question is not whether or not one is physically circumcised, but rather whether or not one depends on covenantal privilege devoid of obedience. This rhetorical move prepares the way for Paul's reference to περιτομὴ καρδίας in Romans 2:25–29, which is analysed in Chapter Three. Therefore, Paul's appeal to περιτομὴ καρδίας needs to be understood in the context of covenantal inconsistency in Romans 2:24–29.

Paul begins with Gentile idolatry and immorality (Rom 1:18–32) before he continues in Romans 2 to critique the arrogance of the judging moralist and the covenantal braggart. He seeks to expose the assumption that covenantal obedience or possession of the law is the path to salvation by showing that the judge of others who practices the same acts is still under judgment (Rom 2:1–3; 2:17–24). Moo (2018:147) argues that Paul does not reject covenant privilege. He challenges confidence in covenant privilege when it is detached from obedience. This includes confidence in possession of the Law and circumcision. This sense of moral superiority concealed the absence of inward transformation. As a result, immorality could flourish beneath the cover of religious identity. According to Sanders (1990:213), some forms of covenantal confidence could give a false sense of security when the sign was separated from covenant obedience. Physical circumcision, when used as a license to claim covenant status without obedience to the moral law, would no longer play a positive role in Paul's argument, because its misuse violated the morality of the covenant and led to the implied blasphemy against God's name.

Paul condemns those who boast in the law, teach it, and yet do not practise the very commandments they teach (Rom 2:17–24). This inconsistency between boasting and disobeying leads to blaspheming God's name in front of the Gentiles (Rom 2:24). Their knowledge of the Torah and boasting in it allowed some Jews to consider themselves as teachers, even as they disobeyed the commandments in which they boasted (Rom 2:21–23). Likewise, Colin G. Kruse (2012:146) suggests that, in the absence of obedience, outward covenantal privilege weakens Israel's covenantal witness to the Gentiles. Thus, their hypocrisy undermines the covenantal witness that they are supposed to bear and publicly embarrasses God's name. Paul, therefore, describes such hypocrisy as deceitful and immoral, ineffectual when unaccompanied by obedience and inner transformation.

In parallel, there is the risk of legalistic confidence, where outward obedience to the Torah and the mark of circumcision could be mistaken for a basis for righteousness. In Dunn's (2018:354) view, many Jews erroneously believed that devotion to the Torah was the route to justification, and that physical circumcision signalled the start of a meritorious religious system. Paul disputed such notions of legalism by stating: "no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law" (Rom 3:20). In the misuse Paul critiques, possession and observance of the

Law could be treated as grounds of covenant confidence rather than as expressions of faithful obedience to God. This misinterpretation of covenant theology moved the focus from God's Grace to outward human performance (Sanders, 1990:213). Paul stressed that justification comes through faith in Christ rather than through ceremonial status (Rom 3:22). This is because all, both Jews and Gentiles, were sinners (Rom 3:9). Consequently, the concept of legalism, which was based on physical circumcision, perverted the meaning of the law and the message of grace. Thus, Paul warned against legalistic boasting, in which outward obedience to the Torah and circumcision could be mistaken for evidence of righteousness.

Intimately connected to legalism was ritualism—observing religious rites without an inner counterpart. The physical circumcision was now the most important ceremony of being a Jew and, in many ways, was considered a promise of salvation. But Paul made it clear that those who had been circumcised and had not obeyed the circumcision had become uncircumcised (Rom 2:25). This meant that ritual was insufficient without Spirit–enabled transformation. In Paul's argument, physical circumcision becomes theologically inadequate when it is treated as sufficient apart from Spirit-enabled obedience. Such ritualism allows moral degeneration to flourish (Gifford, 2009:72–74). Paul argued that true spirituality required inward integrity expressed through obedience to God rather than dependence on ritual performance.

The most socially and theologically destructive behaviour grounded in circumcision was ethnocentrism and exclusivity. The physical circumcision served as a demarcation line between Jews and Gentile. In some Jewish contexts, circumcision served as a visible marker of covenant identity. It also distinguished Jews from Gentiles. In some settings, this distinction could become a basis for claims of ethnic or religious privilege. As a result, it promoted a sense of ethnic and religious superiority (Wright, 2009:125). By declaring that "there is no difference between Jew and Gentile" (Rom 3:22–23), Paul challenged ethnocentric confidence grounded in physical circumcision. To put it differently, physical circumcision could be misused to reinforce ethnocentrism and exclusivity, thereby turning a covenantal symbol of grace into a tool of segregation, defaming God's comprehensive design for humanity. In the gospel of Paul, J. D. G. Dunn (2018:120) argues that the gospel challenged Jewish exclusivism by asserting that redemption was universal, since sin was universal.

In Paul's broader argument, the value of circumcision is further relativised by the case of Abraham (Romans 4:9–12), in which he is counted righteous before circumcision. This does not negate the historical significance of circumcision as a covenantal sign; it blocks an absolutisation of the sign as the basis of covenant security and righteousness. In this context, Romans 1–4 gradually focuses on the tension between covenantal privilege and obedience, with circumcision as the condensed sign of that tension in Romans 2:25–29. Paul's argument therefore shifts from outward covenantal markers to an inward, Spirit-related identity (Rom 2:28–29). It is only in this context that Romans 2:24–29 may be understood as the point in Paul's broader indictment of wrongful confidence, immorality, covenantal boasting, and public dishonour where these themes converge into theological focus. This redefinition, especially of περιτομὴ καρδίας, is further analysed in Chapter Three.

2.9 Conclusion

The historical, social, rhetorical, and theological context for the reinterpretation of Romans 2:24-29 has been set. It has been demonstrated that Paul's argument developed in a mixed Jewish–Gentile environment where Law, circumcision, covenant privilege, honour, and public witness were intimately intertwined. In this context, Romans 2:24 is comprehensible as a public theological statement: inconsistency among the covenantal people dishonours God's name. Chapter Three thus moves from background to a careful reading of Romans 2:24-29, with primary attention given to the text's progression from the dishonouring of God's name in verse 24 to the redefinition of covenant identity through the inner, Spirit-enabled transformation in verse 29.

CHAPTER THREE
PHYSICAL CIRCUMCISION VERSUS SPIRITUAL CIRCUMCISION—AN EXEGESIS OF περιτομὴ καρδίας

3.1 Introduction

Having established the historical, literary, and rhetorical context for Romans 2:24–29 in Chapter Two, this chapter offers a close exegesis of the text. It examines the Greek text through grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and theological analysis to clarify Paul's argument concerning blasphemy, circumcision, and περιτομὴ καρδίας. Romans 2:24–29 therefore functions as the study's primary exegetical unit, while Romans 1–4 provides the broader rhetorical and theological context.

3.2 Exegesis of περιτομὴ καρδίας in Romans 2:24–29

The wider literary and rhetorical context of Romans 2:24–29 has been discussed in the previous chapter. It is enough for the present exegesis to note that the passage is part of Paul's wider argument in Romans 1:18–3:20 and, more specifically, his critique of Jewish reliance on the law and circumcision in Romans 2:17–29. Therein, Paul argues that mere possession of the covenant signs does not guarantee righteousness when it is separated from genuine obedience. As a result, this anticipates the redefinition of covenant membership in terms of the heart in Romans 2:28–29 (Storbakken, 2024:1564; Sloan, 2023:516–518). The following discussion turns to the Greek text and to the verse–by–verse commentary on the passage.

3.2.1 Romans 2:24–29 in Koine Greek with Literal Working Translation

This section presents the text of Romans 2:24–29 in *Koine* Greek (from NA28, Aland et al., 2012) with a literal translation in square brackets. Although the argumentative context of Romans 1–4 provides the broader context, the specific passage Romans 2:24–29 is chosen for detailed exegesis because it explicitly associates the implied blasphemy of God (2:24), the conditionality of circumcision (2:25–27), and περιτομὴ καρδίας (2:29).

24 τὸ γὰρ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ δι' ὑμᾶς βλασφημεῖται ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, καθὼς γέγραπται. [For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, just as it is written].
25 περιτομὴ μὲν γὰρ ὠφελεῖ ἐὰν νόμον πράσσῃς· ἐὰν δὲ παραβάτης νόμου ἦς, ἡ περιτομή σου ἀκροβυστία γέγονεν. [For circumcision is beneficial if you follow the law; nevertheless, if you violate the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision].
26 ἐὰν οὖν ἡ ἀκροβυστία τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου φυλάσσῃ, οὐχ ἡ ἀκροβυστία αὐτοῦ εἰς περιτομὴν λογισθήσεται; [Therefore, if the uncircumcised person keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be considered circumcision?]
27 καὶ κρινεῖ ἡ ἐκ φύσεως ἀκροβυστία τὸν νόμον τελοῦσα σὲ τὸν διὰ γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς παραβάτην νόμου. [And the one who is uncircumcised by nature and fulfils the law will judge you who, through the letter and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law]
28 οὐ γὰρ ὁ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ Ἰουδαῖός ἐστιν, οὐδὲ ἡ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ ἐν σαρκὶ περιτομή· [For he is not a Jew who is one externally, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh]
29 ἀλλ' ὁ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαῖος, καὶ περιτομὴ καρδίας ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι, οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ [but he is a Jew who is one inside, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter, whose praise comes not from men, but from God].

3.2.2 Translational Issues in Romans 2:24–29

This section considers only those translation problems that impact Paul's argument about culpability, blasphemy, the conditional value of circumcision, divine reckoning, and the difference between relying on written codes and on the presence of the Holy Spirit. The discussion is thus limited to five expressions in Romans 2:24–29 that are directly relevant to this study as translated in the KJV, NIV, RSV, and NRSV: δι' ὑμᾶς, βλασφημεῖται, πράσσῃς, λογισθήσεται, and περιτομὴ καρδίας ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι. This study does not attempt a vernacular translation analysis; the comparison is limited to selected English versions commonly used in academic discussion. This poses no major translational difficulty, since the discussion of translation hereafter serves the exegesis of Romans 2:24–29, while the Kenyan contextual reading is developed later in Chapters Four and Five. These differences between the English versions are mainly stylistic. Despite this, they are useful in explaining Paul's line of thought on

issues of responsibility, the conditional nature of circumcision, divine reckoning, reversal, and inner transformation.

In Romans 2:24, the main aspect of the translation concerns δι' ὑμᾶς. The KJV translates it as "through you," but the NIV, RSV and NRSV translate it as "because of you." This more explicitly implies culpability and is therefore more consistent with Paul's prosecutorial logic, in which the dishonouring of God's name is attributed to the addressees' behaviour (Dunn, 2018:117; Jewett, 2007:225). The verb βλασφημεῖται is regularly translated as "is blasphemed," and thus the difference is not lexical but a variance in the sense of agency expressed by the prepositional phrase.

The determinative verb in Romans 2:25 is πράσσῃς, which indicates the practice or observance of the law. While the KJV rendering of "keep the law" and the NIV's "observe the law" are both generally accurate, the Greek verb more emphatically implies regular ongoing practice and active engagement, rather than passive possession or nominal compliance (Fitzmyer, 1993:297–298; Jewett, 2007:214; Barclay, 2013:131). As such, the question of translation is relevant to Paul's point that circumcision is valuable only on the condition of genuine obedience, not as a guaranteed covenant privilege.

In Romans 2:26–27, the primary translation issue concerns λογισθήσεται, rendered as "reckoned" in more formally equivalent translations such as the KJV and RSV, and as "regarded" in more dynamically equivalent translations such as the NIV. Both convey the sense, but "reckoned" makes more explicit the forensic and reversal aspect of Paul's point, because uncircumcision is still reckoned as circumcision, but under certain conditions (Fitzmyer, 1993:326; Moo, 2018:173). The judicial force is important because Paul was not just talking about perception but about God's reckoning within a reversal of trust in outward covenantal signs.

Romans 2:29 provides the central expression for this study: περιτομὴ καρδίας ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι. The main translation issue concerns how the versions render the contrast between πνεύματι and γράμματι. The KJV, RSV and NRSV preserve the more formal wording, "not in

the letter … in spirit," while the NIV renders the contrast more interpretively as "not by the written code … by the Spirit." The distinction between formal and functional approaches to translation is well established (Fee and Strauss, 2011:25–44; Moo, 2018:177–181). The KJV, RSV, and NRSV all convey the structure of the Greek text, while the NIV boldly sets out to make the contrast more apparent. The NIV renders πνεύματι as "the Spirit" and γράμματι as "the written code." This makes its interpretation of the contrast explicit. More formally equivalent versions preserve greater lexical ambiguity. The present study adopts the Spirit-reading and defends it through the exegesis of Romans 2:29 (Wright 2013:252). For this study, the most significant thing about the phrase lies in the shift in focus from external to internal, Spirit–enabled transformation.

3.2.3 Exegetical Analysis of Romans 2:24–29

This is an exegesis with two movements. First, Romans 2:24–26 already establishes the paradox of circumcision and blasphemy: a person may possess circumcision and yet dishonour God's name, so covenant privilege is compromised when external identity is separated from inward obedience. Second, Romans 2:27–29 presses the contrast toward inward, Spirit-enabled circumcision, namely, περιτομὴ καρδίας.

3.2.3.1 Romans 2:24–26 Blasphemy and Circumcision's Paradox

The formula for the citation "as it is written" most likely refers to Isaiah 52:5. That prophetic passage presents the dishonouring of God's name among the nations as the result of people's ethical failure. Consequently, Paul carries that charge into Romans 2:24, making it more potent than the profaning of God's name. The repercussion of an inconsistent covenant is that it brings dishonour to God's name among the Gentiles (Rom 2:24). Romans 2:25–27 then builds on the paradox that circumcision is of no value to faith if it is not connected with genuine obedience. The final verses (28–29) present Paul's discussion of true Jewishness as inward and Spirit–enabled.

In verse 24, the phrase τὸ γὰρ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ (the name of God) functions as a Semitic idiom, revealing God's reputation, character, holiness, and covenantal faithfulness. The definite neuter article, τὸ, marks out the uniqueness and sacredness of God's name in the Jewish economy. This denotes God's nature and presence in the Jewish economy (Ps. 79:9; Exod. 20:7; Isa. 48:9; Fitzmyer, 1993:328), yet God's name was tarnished in the Gentiles' eyes (Ziesler, 1997:92; Wright, 2002e:439). In support of this view, J. Cottrell (2000:214) states: "… in the Scripture the name of God stands for everything that God is. Thus, to blaspheme God's name is to blaspheme God Himself."

The causative phrase δι' ὑμᾶς ("because of you") places the blame squarely on the addressees and intensifies the verse's accusatory tone. The use of the second-person plural pronoun (ὑμᾶς) enhances the rhetorical force of Paul's charge. This is also in line with prophetic tradition in Ezekiel 36:20–23 (Cranfield, 2004:177; Moo, 2018:165). As J. D. G. Dunn (2018:117) argues, the foregoing rendering (as in the NIV, RSV, and NRSV) is stronger and more appropriately conveys culpability and accusation, in contrast to the KJV's "through you."

The prepositional phrase ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ("among the Gentiles" or "among the nations") situates the dishonouring of God's name within Israel's public mission to the nations. It suggests that the problem in Romans 2:24 is not merely an internal inconsistency but a covenantal one with public consequences that extend beyond the covenant community. Thus, Paul emphasises the communal and mission implications of covenant inconsistency.

Remarkably, βλασφημεῖται is placed between two prepositional phrases δι' ὑμᾶς (because of you) and ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (among the Gentiles). βλασφημεῖται is the third-person singular present passive indicative of βλασφημέω. Here, the passive voice makes God the object of scorn in the world, and the present tense indicates a continuing effect on the world's reputation. It is not the case that Jewish failure necessarily leads to Gentiles' blasphemy; the point is rather that covenantal inconsistency is a public opportunity for God's name to be blasphemed (Cottrell, 2000:214). His name is introduced in the passive construction as the object of dishonour, the occasion of which is provided by the conduct of the covenant people among the Gentiles (Ezek. 36:20–23; Dunn, 2018:112).

But Paul, theologically, points to a great irony when he comments that instead of being the people of praise (Isa. 43:21), they had become the people of blasphemy in the eyes of the world (Cranfield, 2004:176; Moo, 2018:165; Dunn, 2018:112). To put it differently, Paul argues that the noticeable discrepancy between Jews' external religiosity and moral behaviours was blasphemous to God among Gentiles. In this study, the term 'blasphemy' in Romans 2:24 is employed technically to refer to the dishonouring of God's name among Gentiles as a result of the inconsistency of those who boast of their covenant relationship with God. Related matters, such as hypocrisy, loss of the ability to witness and public scandal, are understood as effects or symptoms of this dishonour rather than synonyms for blasphemy.

Paul's citation formula καθὼς γέγραπται (v. 24) connects his indictment to the scriptural tradition of Israel (most likely Isaiah 52:5 and Ezekiel 36:20–23), in which God's name is dishonoured among the nations because of the failure of God's people. Thus, not only does Paul claim that the current problem repeats a familiar covenantal pattern, but he also bases his entire argument on this point. J. Cottrell (2000:214) points out, "In each case Israel is enduring the shame of exile, and their Gentile conquerors are pictured as mocking the allegedly great and powerful God whom the Jews bragged about and trusted in, but who could not deliver them from this humiliation." In Romans 2:24, the irony is that those who identify with the covenant become the cause of God's name being dishonoured among the Gentiles (Stott, 2001:92; Moo, 2018:166). Therefore, the verse is emphasising the hypocrisy of religious identification devoid of covenantal living.

In part, Paul writes in Romans 2:25, "For circumcision is of benefit if you obey the law …." (περιτομὴ μὲν γὰρ ὠφελεῖ ἐὰν νόμον πράσσῃς). In this case, γὰρ (for) is a particle/conjunction which connects this verse to the previous accusation; πράσσῃς refers to ongoing practice. The Greek verb ὠφελεῖ is in the present active indicative, third-person singular, of ὠφελέω, meaning 'is of benefit.' Its present tense underscores that circumcision remains desirable; however, it must go hand in hand with faith and obedience (Wright, 2002d:1321). Circumcision, then, is desirable only in a qualified way: it is not guaranteed to be there, but dependent on genuine obedience, and so cannot be a guarantee in and of itself of covenant status.

Romans 2:25 presents a conditional link between circumcision (περιτομή) and the upholding of the law (νόμος). The former was advantageous only if one complied with the latter; otherwise, it was meaningless without inner change. John E. Toews (2004:84) affirms: "Circumcision is defined strictly in terms of obedience to the law…. Thus, the Jews cannot claim circumcision as an advantage without obedience." If the two are disconnected, they are annulled too. The contrastive particle μὲν recognises the possible advantages of legal practice, and the postpositive conjunction δὲ contrasts circumcision with the full observance of the law. The μὲν ... δὲ phrases were used here to set up a conditional contrast**.** As used together in a sentence, the conjunction μὲν and δὲ contrast the theoretical advantage of circumcision and how it has been invalidated by law–breaking. The Greek verb πράσσῃς, the present active subjunctive, second-person singular, of πράσσω, appears in the conditional clause ἐὰν νόμον πράσσῃς (to practice). The subjunctive mood of the statement denotes a hypothetical situation; the present tense indicates habitual obedience, not merely possession of the law (Wright, 2002d:1321).

On this basis, the conditional clause (v. 25), "ἐὰν... πράσσῃς τὸν νόμον" (if you practice the Law), provides a cause–and–effect relationship and suggests a powerful conditional clause. Paul argued that true membership in the covenant was possible only by inner change and true obedience, as represented by the verb πράσσῃς (practice/do). The Greek verb πράσσῃς comes from πράσσω ('to practise' or 'to do') and is a present active subjunctive, second-person singular. In this conditional construction, the present tense is compatible with an ongoing or characteristic pattern of obedience. This supports what Paul had already said: "the doers of the law will be justified" (Rom 2:13; Dunn, 2018:115; Jewett, 2007:214). Paul had weakened the Jewish reasoning that circumcision guaranteed covenantal security, a type of outward religiosity. This demanded a consistent way of life in accordance with God's commands, rather than occasional adherence. N. T. Wright (2013:296) accentuates that Paul redefined Jewish identity not as belonging to an ethnic group but as being ethical and spiritually oriented. Meaning circumcision was rendered incomplete in the absence of moral conviction. The teaching is in line with the prophetic criticism of the OT (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4) that circumcision must embody an inner spiritual fact, and not be the symbol of an outer ritual.

Paul went on to show the other side of the condition by stating, "ἐὰν δὲ παραβάτης νόμου ᾖς" ("but if you are a transgressor of the Law"). By contrast, the negative condition is expressed by ἐὰν δὲ παραβάτης νόμου ᾖς. The Greek verb to be, ᾖς (present active subjunctive, second-person singular of εἰμί) serves as the linking verb, and παραβάτης ("transgressor") functions as the singular masculine predicate nominative. This again suggested habitual identity—one whose actions continually violate the Law (Cranfield, 2004:179). The term transgressor (παραβάτης) refers to one who deliberately violates the law rather than one who merely makes a mistake (Moo, 2018:172).

This negative conditional clause appears in Romans 2:25b: ἐὰν δὲ παραβάτης νόμου ᾖς, ἡ περιτομή σου ἀκροβυστία γέγονεν (if you break the law, your circumcision is no longer valid). This negative conditional provision demonstrates that identity is undermined by consistent non–conformity to the law. It suggests a direct contradiction of the Jewish belief that circumcision was an assurance of salvation. However, the situation is likely to raise a deeper thought: the rebel Jew is still a member of God's chosen generation, but he contradicts the covenant with God, on a spiritual level. So, he is at odds with the covenant mark of circumcision (Rom 9:6–15). Only when accompanied by adherence to the law does circumcision, a crucial aspect of Jewish identity, mean anything. A Jew who violates the law is no longer considered to be a member of the covenant people, and circumcision becomes meaningless. Paul emphasised that a Jew could not be in God's race unless a person sincerely obeyed God in his heart (Toews, 2004:84). J. Stott (2001:93) asserts: "For circumcision is the sign of covenant membership, and covenant membership demands obedience." Thus, Paul argued that breaching the law negated the benefits of circumcision by contrasting it with the preceding phrase. This means that circumcision had lost its theological importance when it was divorced from covenantal obedience. This assertion would have shocked many Jews of the day, who regarded circumcision as a fundamental mark of Jewishness and as members of the covenant (Schreiner, 2018:132).

In verse 25b, the clause "ἡ περιτομή σου ἀκροβυστία γέγονεν" states a striking reversal: the covenant sign loses its value when severed from obedience. Notably, the use of a verb γέγονεν

("has become"), the perfect (tense) active indicative third person singular form of γίνομαι is significant. It underscores the seriousness of the reversal by presenting it as an accomplished state. This is what has been called a total reversal of status (Dunn, 2018:117). As a result, the irreversible change implied here makes the ritual circumcision (περιτομή) become ἀκροβυστία ("uncircumcision"), a shocking reversal that would have deeply offended Jewish sensibilities (Cranfield, 2004:182; Dunn, 2018:115; Wright, 2002e:466). Moreover, the perfect tense denoted a completed action with long–lasting results; hence, the ritual mark is treated as uncircumcision when severed from covenant obedience (Cranfield, 2004:182). Paul here re–established the Jewish identity not only on ritual but also on the status of inner obedience. The reversal was devastating: the distinguishing mark (circumcision) was nullified by disobedience (Wright, 2002e:466).

In reference to Gentiles, the word ἀκροβυστία carries powerful covenantal and social implications, since non–circumcised people were often considered foreign to God's promises (Gen. 17:14; Eph. 2:11–12; Moo, 2018:173; Wright, 2002e:446–448). It was an appalling twist, since the word ἀκροβυστία was used in the Jewish negative sense of contempt and, in many cases, implied impurity or exclusion (Gen. 17:14; Dunn, 2018:115). Paul demolished the notion that circumcision of the flesh served as a surety of being in covenant. According to Paul, any disobedience of the Law made one uncircumcised, which contradicted Jewish ethnocentrism. He claimed that it was more important to do God's will rather than follow external rituals, which did not guarantee that a person would enter the covenant of God of their own accord (Barclay, 2015:185). Conclusively, J. Stott (2001:93) avows: "Circumcision minus obedience equals uncircumcision, while uncircumcision plus obedience equals circumcision." This was an indication of an insoluble relationship between circumcision, covenant, and obedience.

The implication was that Paul criticised circumcision for being used as a sign of righteousness apart from obedience, not circumcision per se. The prophetic call to inner conversion (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:33) fit well in correspondence to Paul's views on circumcision. Paul did not oppose circumcision as such; instead, he gave the concept of circumcision a new interpretation in their context and in the context of the gospel. True obedience and spiritual transformation should be highlighted, as J. G. Dunn (2018:118) argues, rather than racial privilege. Romans 2:25 discloses

that circumcision was entirely conditional on obedience to the Law, and so it was not necessarily salvific.

The first Greek sentence of Romans 2:26 ἐὰν οὖν ἡ ἀκροβυστία τὰ δικαιώματα τοῦ νόμου φυλάσσῃ (Therefore, if the uncircumcised follows the righteous requirements of the law), is theologically important. It introduced a dramatic inversion of God's curse on disobedient Jews to obedient Gentiles. Paul suggests this rhetorically: does not the uncircumcised person, if he obeys the precepts of the law, will he not be regarded as circumcised? This rhetorical question made the boasting of the Jew seem absurd. As a result, the subject of circumcision, unbelievably, has been set forth as something that unites and not divides (Rom 2:24–29). The Greek term ἀκροβυστία had three meanings: the foreskin, the uncircumcised state, and the society of uncircumcised or Gentile people. J. E. Toews (2004:84) argues that the terms "circumcision" and "uncircumcision," or more accurately, "circumcised penis" and "uncircumcised penis," were used disparagingly against individuals in ancient Rome.

The use of αὐτοῦ (Rom 2:26) most likely confirms the text's third sense, indicating that the individual is clearly stated in context. The meaning of εἰς περιτομὴν λογισθήσεται is that God will regard his uncircumcision as circumcision. In other words, he will be considered a member of the Israelites in God's eyes, which lessens ethnocentrism. The verb φυλάσσῃ underscores active obedience, with the sense of keeping or observing the law. Paul asked a question containing a rhetorical inversion and reversal (v. 26): a Gentile who is under the Law can be counted as though circumcised. By the Greek term φυλάσσῃ (present active subjunctive, third-person singular of φυλάσσω), Paul indicated habitual keeping of God's righteous requirements (δικαιώματα) (Moo, 2018:168). The radical inclusion of Gentiles, which Paul envisioned, was, therefore, a threat to Jewish exclusivism. He emphasised covenantal membership, not the physical attributes of ethnicity or rituals, but obedience through faith (Dunn, 2018:118).

Another significant Pauline word, which signifies a legal or forensic reckoning, is λογισθήσεται (will be reckoned/counted), the future passive indicative, third-person singular of λογίζομαι. The passive verb λογισθήσεται can be interpreted as divine, implying an agent (God) in the reckoning,

and the future tense stresses the force of Paul's evaluation. The passive future-tense λογισθήσεται is important; the object (the person who has not been circumcised) is the one being acted upon. One who obeys the moral law, a Gentile, would be regarded as circumcised. The discussion of the value of obedience in preference to ethnicity anticipates the discussion of Romans 4, that Abraham was justified by faith—λογισθῇ εἰς δικαιοσύνην ("counted as righteousness")—before circumcision (Moo, 2018:168; Wright, 2002d:1322). Eventually, God will reckon the submission of the gentile as covenant membership and will destroy Jewish exclusivism (Wright, 2002d:1322). This idea was in agreement with Isaiah 56:3–7, according to which it was a prerequisite that God would most definitely accept obedient Gentiles.

Paul's rhetorical point completely destabilises Jewish exclusivism by enabling obedience to qualify the covenant status. However, this rhetorical play should not be taken as a doctrine of salvation by works (Moo, 2018:169). J. Cottrell (2000:217–218) argues,

> Paul does not make this statement in order to give the Gentiles hope under the law. He says it to the Jews, in order to doubly emphasize the irrelevance of circumcision under the judgement of the law… The whole point is to show the Jew that, as sinners, it is futile to trust their physical Jewishness as their key to salvation. Physical descent from Abraham, membership in the Abrahamic covenant, physical circumcision, possession of the specifically–revealed Mosaic Law–all will be of no avail under law without a perfect record of personal righteousness, which they did not have.

Significant distinctions between the unbelieving Jews and the Christian Gentiles were presented in this text (vv. 25–29), which was basically a role reversal. The contrast between those who were circumcised and those who were not was an intriguing aspect of this passage. According to verses 25 and 27, the circumcised Jew was a "breaker" or a "transgressor" of the Law, whereas the uncircumcised Gentile was regarded as a "law–keeper/doer" or "Torah–observant." This contrast was further illustrated by the fact that the Jew, who trusted in his circumcision and focused on external rites, judged himself better than the Gentile (2:3), will now be assessed by the Gentile who was upholding "the righteous requirements of the law" (v. 26; Daugherty, 2018:139–140). B. Witherington (2004:90–91) affirms: "Paul then in vv. 25–28 critiques a person who bears the outward sign of Jewish faith in the form of circumcision but fails to keep the covenant that circumcision signifies. Inconsistency and hypocrisy are again Paul's target, especially since this person portrays himself as a teacher of the Gentiles." Circumcision is a

recurring topic in the undisputed Pauline letters (Romans, Galatians, Philippians, and 1 Corinthians). But in Romans 2:24–29, it occurs in a highly concentrated fashion: περιτομή and ἀκροβυστία are used as a covenant designator, a reversal category, and an identity marker, all culminating in περιτομὴ καρδίας.

3.2.3.2 Exegetical Contrasts in Romans 2:27–29 and Heart's Circumcision

Some concluding observations are drawn from the foregoing exegetical analysis of Romans 2:24–29. First, Romans 2:26–27 presents a rhetorical reversal. The uncircumcised law-keeper is contrasted with the circumcised law-transgressor. The precise identity of the uncircumcised figure remains a subject of debate. The argument does not require that question to be settled here. Paul's immediate point is that the covenant sign and possession of the written Law cannot secure covenant advantage when contradicted by disobedience. This prepares the inward–outward contrast of Romans 2:28–29. The use of λογισθήσεται ("reckoned" or "regarded") in 2:26, which he foreshadowed, will be used for those justified by faith (Rom 3:28; 4:3–6, 8–11, 22–24; 9:8), further affirming their Christian status (Pate, 2013:109).

The future active indicative, third-person singular, κρινεῖ ("he or she shall judge") is used in Romans 2:27 to drive home the rhetorical twist used in verses 25-26. The law-keeper who was physically uncircumcised is given a new role as the judge of the circumcised law-transgressor. The phrase ἡ ἐκ φύσεως ἀκροβυστία ("the uncircumcision by nature") seems to refer to a Gentile who was physically uncircumcised, particularly in the larger argument of Romans concerning Jew and Gentile. However, the identity of this figure has been disputed, and this question was not necessary to Paul's immediate argument. The exegetical power of the verse is to show the presumptive advantage of the covenant, both in their possession of the written code and in their adherence to the flesh-circumcision, which is lost in the absence of genuine obedience. Conversely, physical circumcision leads us to see the limitations of external tokenism and anticipates the internal–external contrast of Romans 2:28-29 (Dunn, 2018:122-124; Wright, 2002e:465).

Paul's use of ἀκροβυστία then highlights the contrast between outward status and covenantal faithfulness in obeying the law, without the interpreter having to answer all the questions that might arise about who the uncircumcised law-keeper is. If the uncircumcised figure is understood as a Gentile, as many interpreters argue, the rhetorical reversal becomes particularly striking. The one normally regarded as outside the circumcised covenant community is presented as judging the circumcised law-transgressor, thereby reversing the presumed relationship between outward covenant status and covenant advantage. But this is not the necessary basis of Paul's argument. The text itself clearly shows that neither γράμμα nor περιτομή is a solid foundation for covenant confidence when in conflict with transgression. This is a preparation for Paul's more pointed contrast in vv. 28-29 between the inward (ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ) and the outward (ἐν τῷ φανερῷ), and culminates in and gives rise to the term περιτομὴ καρδίας.

The irony of dependence on the written code (γράμματος) and on circumcision (περιτομῆς), while remaining a violator of the Law (παραβάτην νόμου), was theologically revealed in the phrase διὰ γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς παραβάτην νόμου (by letter and circumcision, a violator of the Law). The clause underscores that possession of the written code and circumcision cannot secure covenant advantage when contradicted by disobedience (Dunn, 2018:123). Combined with γράμματος and περιτομῆς, the theology of outside religiosity was largely neutralised. Law and circumcision, without obedience, were synonymous with utter failure. This implies that even in possession of the written code (διὰ γράμματος) and the covenantal mark (καὶ περιτομῆς), a Jew was considered a lawbreaker (παραβάτην νόμου). Thus, it highlights the importance of obedience rather than ritual and heritage in the constitution of covenantal faithfulness and righteousness in the eyes of God. Paul condemned this dependence when it was not accompanied by ethical obedience. It showed that outward signs cannot guarantee faithfulness to the covenant. The opposite, on the other hand, is the failure of ritualism revealed by the Gentile who fulfils the law inwardly (Moo, 2018:175).

Most likely, the term γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς refers to the possession of two distinct items by Jews: circumcision and Scripture or the law. Because περιτομῆς was an external rite, the term γράμμα could have been used to highlight the written, tangible, and concrete nature of Scripture,

but it also could have been used because Paul was aware of the Jews' external custodianship of Scripture (as v. 29 uses γράμματι). Consequently, Romans 2:27 contained the reversal of judgment (Moo, 2018:171). Romans 2:27 presents a rhetorical reversal in which the one who is uncircumcised by nature (ἡ ἐκ φύσεως ἀκροβυστία) and fulfils the law is presented as judging the circumcised law-transgressor. The precise identity of the uncircumcised figure remains debated, but Paul's immediate argument does not require that question to be resolved. The verse establishes that possession of the written Law (γράμματι) and circumcision (περιτομῇ) cannot sustain covenant advantage when contradicted by disobedience. This reversal prepares for the inward–outward contrast of Romans 2:28–29 (Dunn, 2018:124).

Second, Romans 2:27 presents a reversal of expected covenant privilege: the physically uncircumcised law-keeper judges the circumcised law-transgressor. This may be read against Second Temple Jewish expectations that the righteous would participate in eschatological judgment (Wis. 3:8; 1 En. 91.12; 98.12; Apoc. Ab. 29.19–21, cited in Pate, 2013:111). Against this background, Paul's formulation is striking: the physically uncircumcised law-keeper stands in judgment over the circumcised transgressor (Schreiner, 2018:132). The precise identity and judicial role of this figure remain debated. The direct exegetical point is therefore the reversal of presumed covenant privilege rather than a definitive identification of the figure as a Christian Gentile judge (Moo, 2018:171). D. J. Moo (2018:171) observes: "Whether Paul suggests that these righteous Gentiles will be appointed as judges by God or that their obedience to the law itself will stand as accusatory evidence against the disobedient Jew is difficult to say." The climax of his argument appears in Romans 2:28–29, where Paul confronts the conventional outward signs of Jewishness. He also reconstructs what it means to be a Jew as a process of internal change rather than adherence to external practices. These verses contrast an interior, religious, covenantal sense of Judaism with an exterior, ethnic, and ritual approach to Judaism.

Third, the reversal in Romans 2:27–29 has implications for Jew–Gentile relations, but Paul's immediate argument does not depend on the precise identity of the uncircumcised law-keeper. Paul declares that circumcision becomes uncircumcision when contradicted by transgression (2:25, 27), thereby challenging reliance on physical circumcision as sufficient for covenant standing. This reversal gains historical force against Jewish traditions in which circumcision

functioned as an important marker of covenant identity; attempts to conceal or reverse it could signify repudiation of that identity (1 Macc. 1:15; Jub. 15.33–34; Pate, 2013:111). Against this background, outward covenant privilege cannot secure advantage when contradicted by disobedience. The passage culminates not in the rejection of covenant identity, but in its inward reorientation through περιτομὴ καρδίας, ἐν πνεύματι, and divine rather than human approval (2:28–29). This inward, Spirit-enabled conception of covenant identity resonates with prophetic promises of inward covenant renewal (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:26–27).

In Romans 2:28, the inward Jew was contrasted with the outward. Its theological significance lies in Paul's refusal to treat outward Jewish identity as sufficient in itself for defining covenant faithfulness. Paul started His strongly affirmative negation: Οὐ γὰρ ὁ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ Ἰουδαῖός ἐστιν, οὐδὲ ἡ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ ἐν σαρκὶ περιτομή (For one is not a Jew outwardly, nor circumcision outwardly, in the flesh). The negative criticism οὐ γὰρ ("for not") was absolute in denying the extrinsic definition of Jewishness. Paul was rejecting the assumption that Jewishness was defined solely by ethnicity and external circumcision, rather than just putting forth a secondary idea (Moo, 2018:175). The Greek verb ἐστιν is the present active indicative third-person singular of εἰμί. The present tense indicates that an individual is not a Jew at this moment, solely because of external factors.

Categories of identity are redefined at the climax of verse 28: οὐ γὰρ ὁ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ Ἰουδαῖός ἐστιν (a person is not a Jew who is outwardly one), and οὐδὲ ἡ ἐν τῷ φανερῷ ἐν σαρκὶ περιτομή (nor is circumcision outward in the flesh). The repetition of the word φανερῷ (visible) in contrast to κρυπτῷ (hidden) in the following verse is theologically significant. It underlines the Pauline transformation of exterior to internal marks. On the one hand, the verb ἐν τῷ φανερῷ (in what is outward) is used twice to underline the idea of superficiality. Therefore, ἐν σαρκί (in the flesh) emphasises the physical, outward location of circumcision. Paul furthered the prophetic ideas (Jer. 9:25–26), and criticised the religion of appearances (Moo, 2018:169; Jewett, 2007:236).

Putting it a bit differently, Paul emphasised his point by the recurrence of φανερῷ ("outwardly/externally") and ἐν σαρκί ("in the flesh"): ritual observance and outward appearance

were not the main components of Jewish identity (Dunn, 2018:120, 124; Moo, 2018:176; Wright, 2002e:466). Within the Jewish mentality of the Second Temple, circumcision (Gen. 17:10–14) was often regarded as the last covenant marking. Paul therefore challenges reliance on outward ethnic or ritual markers as sufficient grounds for covenant identity when detached from obedience (Wright, 2013:300). To sum up, Paul reconceptualised covenantal identity in Romans 2:28 by relocating it away from ethnic and merely external markers toward inward, Spirit-enabled covenant renewal. He also maintained that true covenant membership was defined by περιτομὴ καρδίας, understood as an inward transformation effected by the Spirit. Thus, neither ethnic descent nor physical circumcision alone was sufficient to establish authentic covenant standing before God. Besides exposing such religious hypocrisy, this verse established the foundation for incorporating Gentiles into God's family through faith rather than ethnic heritage.

Romans 2:29 goes on to discuss the inward Jew whose heart was circumcised. Paul made a very vivid contrast in this verse: ἀλλ᾽ ὁ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαῖος, καὶ περιτομὴ καρδίας ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι, οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ᾽ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ." ("But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men, but from God"). Paul repeatedly uses the word ἔπαινος, for "praise," to highlight the difference between human and divine acknowledgement. Barrett (1991:59) notes that Paul specifically shifts praise from the realm of human recognition to divine approval. Consequently, this strengthens his argument that covenant identity is defined more by inward change than outward religious identity. The contrast in verse 29 takes a concise form, in which the verb [ἐστιν] is not repeated. It serves to emphasise Paul's contrast between circumcision and covenant identity (Porter, 1997:234–235). The Greek word in Romans 2:29, περιτομὴ καρδίας, emphasises that a significant shift in theology was from outward, ritual covenant identification to inward, Spirit–enabled transformation, and it was an attack on formalism in religion.

Paul had already mentioned that God judges people's secrets (τὰ κρυπτὰ) in verse 16. In verse 29, ἀλλ᾽ ὁ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαῖος, he distinguishes between someone who was a Jew on the outside and someone who was a Jew on the inside, writing that the latter was genuinely a Jew, not the former. This verse is the climax of Paul's redrawing of Jewish identity.

The adversative conjunction ἀλλά (“but”) has an adversative meaning and also adds a theological twist in Paul’s theology. It enables a theological reversal of the meaning of Jewishness from being outward ritual to inner authenticity. J. E. Toews (2004:85) argues: “The true Jew is defined in terms of hidden criteria.... If ‘Jewishness’ is defined as a matter of heart, of the Spirit, the Gentiles can be God’s People too.” In agreement, B. Witherington (2004:91) states: “A real Jew is one who has had his heart transformed or circumcised by the spirit, which can operate inwardly in a way that the written code cannot.” It was hinted in verses 25 and 26 that not all Jews in the special sense were also outward Jews, and that not all Jews in the special sense are outward Jews. Erwin R. Gain (2005:51) avows: “As far as God is concerned, the spiritual state of a person’s heart is the important consideration. Outward circumcision was intended to be a ceremonial sign of a heart relationship with God. But if the heart relationship were lacking, outward circumcision as a religious rite was meaningless.”

At the same time, there was a similar difference between circumcision of the heart (περιτομὴ καρδίας) and circumcision of the body (ἐν σαρκὶ). Paul most likely meant to convey that the περιτομὴ καρδίας was a miracle achieved by God’s labour rather than the simple fulfilment of the law. Just like Jews, Gentiles could be considered God’s people (ethnically unifying Jews and Gentiles) if “Jewishness” were understood as a matter of the heart and the Spirit (Toews, 2004:85). To bring Jews and Gentiles together, Paul elevated “Jewishness” (Rom 2:29).

Paul is not denying Jewish identity as such, but covenant identity as merely outward. It is a matter of inward transformation. The most significant point of contrast is the one between ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ (inward) and ἐν τῷ φανερῷ (outward), showing the transition between outward identity and inner transformation (Schreiner, 2018:135; Moo, 2018:174; Toews, 2004:85). The contrast between ἐν τῷ φανερῷ and ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ highlights the movement from outward to inward identity, actualised by the circumcision of the heart as indicated by the dative πνεύματι. This means that, in Paul’s argument, true Jewishness is characterised by inward transformation and a Spirit-renewed heart. True Jewishness was not just about following the γράμμα (letter), but about being inward (ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ) and possessing circumcision of the heart (περιτομὴ καρδίας) in the Spirit

(ἐν πνεύματι). God was the source of true praise. J. A. Ziesler (1997:93) avows: "Circumcision of the heart is thus synonymous with being a Jew inwardly, with having an inner commitment to God and to his will."

Paul's argument is supported by referring to inward, spirit–enabled transformation in playing πνεῦμα ("Spirit") against γράμμα ("letter"). The point is not to abolish the Law, but to expose the fallacy of thinking that the custodianship of "the written code," without inward transformation, alone guarantees covenant faithfulness. While πνεῦμα refers to the work of the Holy Spirit, which makes true obedience and righteousness possible, γράμμα refers to the written Law, which, apart from faith, leads to condemnation (2 Cor. 3:6; Barclay, 2015:192). Paul's "letter–Spirit" dichotomy was a salvation–historical one, according to D. J. Moo (2018:174), with the "letter" signifying the previous era in which God's law through Moses was crucial and the "Spirit" summarising the current era in which God's Spirit is poured out in eschatological fullness and power. It is only the circumcision 'in the Spirit' that ultimately counts."

Fourth, a noteworthy difference between the unbelieving Jews and the Christian Gentiles was again observed at this point. The clause ἐν πνεύματι οὐ γράμματι compares two ways of covenant: Spirit–endowed and written code without the inner renewal of the Spirit. The prepositional phrase ἐν πνεύματι (v. 29) resonates with the language of Ezekiel 36:26–27. It undercuts why Paul changed his theological emphasis to external, law–affirming righteousness. Instead, he asserted that the Holy Spirit was the one who performed real circumcision of the heart (Moo, 2018:174; Schreiner, 2018:150; Hays, 2014:223). Paul made a distinction between the "letter" (γράμμα) and the "Spirit" (πνεῦμα) to contrast Jewish disobedience to the law with Gentile obedience to its intent. Paul contrasts the outer demands of the Torah ("the letter") with the inward work of the Holy Spirit ("the Spirit"), through which covenant membership is redefined in relation to inward renewal (Pate, 2013:111). That is, Paul was not denying the Law itself, but pointing out that it is the Spirit that enables one to be truly obedient, and not legal compliance (Moo, 2018:180).

Fifth, Paul made a stunning conclusion at the end of his exploration of God's approbation over human recognition: "οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος οὐκ ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ" ("whose praise is not from men, but from God"). The last line οὗ ὁ ἔπαινος reflects the etymology of Judah (meaning "praise"). Paul played on this to show that true "Judah–ness" (Jewishness) was affirmed not by people but by God. The present indicative indicated that this divine praise was already permanently in operation and did not depend on ritual or ethnicity (Cranfield, 2004:186). In reference to ἔπαινος ("praise"), this last clause plays on the word Ἰούδας ("Judah"), meaning "praise" (Gen. 29:35). Here again, a significant distinction between the unbelieving Jews and the Christian Gentiles was noted. The unbeliever Jew (2:17, 25), whose name meant "praise" (2:29), had failed to honour God in the Gentiles' eyes (2:24). God had honoured the Gentile Christian, and had been moved to magnify His name (2:29; Moo, 2018:175; Toews, 2004:85). With Christ's eon and the New Covenant, the OT promise of the Gentiles' final conversion was fulfilled (Pate, 2013:111).

Paul sees Romans 2:29 as the culmination of the argument, marking the shift from human approval to divine praise. The final clause moves the mandate of approval from ethnic or ritual acclaim to God's commendation. As a result, true Jewishness is defined not by ethnic or ritual approval, or by circumcision in the flesh, but by περιτομὴ καρδίας and God's commendation. This inner reality echoes Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, and Jeremiah 4:4, and resonates with the promise of spiritual renewal and transformation in Ezekiel 36:26–27 (Hays, 2014:223; Cranfield, 2004:175). Paul, therefore, does not just make a binary distinction between two types of circumcision, but rather he restates the covenant differently, in terms of the inner, spiritual dimension. As Witherington (2004:91), Matera (2010:66) and Wright (2013:297) note, this redefinition rules out pride in outward identity and focuses on the priority of God's approval in covenant identity. Overall, Romans 2:24–29 undermines dependence on the law and circumcision as external signs of covenant identity independent of living it out: the passage progresses from dishonouring of God's name (v. 24), to the conditional value of circumcision (vv. 25–27), to the redefined nature of the covenant (vv. 28–29). Thus, the pivotal phrases περιτομὴ καρδίας, πράσσῃς and λογισθήσεται move from outward to inward covenant identity.

3.2.4 Various Interpretations of περιτομὴ καρδίας in Romans 2:24–29

Romans 2:24–29 evaluates physical circumcision in relation to obedience. The covenant sign has value, but it is not self-validating. Its covenantal significance cannot be separated from faithful obedience. B. Witherington (2004:126) avows: "Circumcision was believed to give access to heaven or the Messianic kingdom (*CD* 16.4–6; *Jubilees* 15:31–332). It was no mere ritual, and in any case, it came to be seen as the sign of both the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants... Paul, however, is attempting to distinguish these covenants and to suggest significance to circumcision that confirms, rather than takes precedence over, Abraham being counted as righteous through faith." Paul reinterpreted the meaning of circumcision through Christ, even though it has long been a distinguishing feature of Jewish identity. He suggested that obedience to God through the Spirit makes one righteous, rather than physical circumcision. In essence, Gentiles who genuinely followed God's instructions were more circumcised than a Jew who did not, which went against Jewish religious and cultural standards (Knight, 2010:71).

In reference to the foregoing section, a key phrase in Romans 2 is περιτομὴ καρδίας, which translates "circumcision of the heart." A fundamental idea in comprehending the New Covenant and the difference between internal and exterior obedience to God's rule, περιτομὴ καρδίας has been interpreted in a variety of ways by theologians as symbolic of spiritual transformation, a marker of New Covenant identity, a critique of Judaizers and a shift from human to divine approval. Scholars have variously understood this phrase, which includes, but is not limited to, denouncing the Judaizers' emphasis on physical circumcision (Dunn, 2018:120–123), denouncing superficiality in Torah observance (Wright, 2002e:471), and signifying spiritual regeneration (Longenecker, 2016:272). C. E. B. Cranfield (2004:137–142) alludes in his treatment of the internal spiritual change to the idea of περιτομὴ καρδίας employed by Paul and criticises the counterfeit dependence on bodily performance.

First, περιτομὴ καρδίας has been interpreted in various ways, in contrast to physical circumcision. It refers to spiritual renewal, inward transformation, or the regenerative work of the Spirit. Consistent with this interpretation, the real circumcision was a spiritual matter, and it could not

be attained without the help of the Spirit of God, not just a symbol. John M. G. Barclay (2015:211) states that Paul employed the term περιτομή in his expression περιτομὴ καρδίας to refer to a form of inner transformation of the heart by the Spirit, rather than a ritual. Paul claimed that this change in the interior was the fulfilment of the law, which could not be achieved by acting individually through exterior observance. The difference between the metamorphosis of the heart and the physical circumcision was revealed (DeSilva, 2018:63). Such an argument connected outward rituals with commitment, which, according to J. Milgrom (2001:231), emphasises that it was both a critique and a plea to turn back to God, in whom Jews and Gentiles were united. This study argues that Paul neither dismisses physical circumcision nor replaces it with private spirituality. The outward sign retains its historical covenant significance. Yet it is not sufficient when detached from obedience. Paul instead locates decisive covenant identity in inward, Spirit-enabled transformation (Rom. 2:28–29).

Second, a popular interpretation of περιτομὴ καρδίας alludes to the characteristics of newfangled identity and inclusion in the New Covenant community. Membership in the Mosaic covenant required physical circumcision. However, the New Covenant involved inward change as a membership. As a result, Paul presented περιτομὴ καρδίας as the spiritual renewal necessary for participation in the New Covenant (Wright 2005:82). He emphasised that this renewal would occur in the heart and that God would be better able to connect with his people. This was compatible with the OT calls for the "circumcision of the heart" (Deut 10:16, 30:6, Jer 4:4). These passages emphasise repentance and the rejection of idolatry, which formed the foundation for Paul's argument.

According to S. Westerholm (2004:147), Paul expanded this tradition by arguing that internal change outweighed rituals and that the activity of the Spirit would fulfil the promises of the OT. N. T. Wright (2013:1011) argues that Paul had a new, spiritual sense of physical circumcision and that they did not abandon it. Under the New Covenant, faith in Christ was the defining characteristic of the inclusivity of those whose hearts had been circumcised by the Spirit. The Greek phrase περιτομὴ καρδίας was therefore important for understanding Paul's theology of the New Covenant, which stressed the change in the heart brought about by the internal Spirit. The alteration emphasises spiritual renewal as the prerequisite of belonging to the covenant. It also

aimed at the eradication of ethnocentric and cultural prejudice. Finally, Paul's teaching united believers by showing that the people of God in the New Covenant are defined by inward transformation, not by ritual performance of ceremonial law.

Third, Paul criticised Judaizers who maintained that physical circumcision was required for salvation (as they did in Acts 15:1–3) by proposing περιτομὴ καρδίας (Dunn, 2018:120–123). He argued that, rather than circumcision being an external ritual, "true circumcision" was an "inner transformation" that the "Holy Spirit" alone produced. According to D. J. Moo (2018:184), Paul stressed that a "true Jew' was one whose heart was circumcised by the Spirit, going beyond simple physical rites, and opposed the idea that justification was based on external circumcision. Paul felt that actual circumcision was internal and not external, and that it changed the heart and brought divine favour and not human acknowledgement, which still comes through.

Fourth, περιτομὴ καρδίας signified a shift from men's approval to seeking praise from God. The value of external spiritual approval of Jewish identity was disputed by Paul when he emphasised that it was the approval of God that determined true spiritual standing in Romans 2:29. Richard B. Hays (1996:112) argued that περιτομὴ καρδίας was a perception of "spiritual purity and authentic faith" where the identity of the true believer was assured by God and not human recognition. In these four interpretations, Paul shifts the focus from external circumcision to internal, Spirit-sanctified transformation. They differ in emphasis: spiritual regeneration, New Covenant identity, polemics against circumcision as a condition of salvation, and divine, not human, approval. Taken together, they demonstrate that in Romans 2:24-29, Paul's main concern is the covenantal identity that is defined by the phrase περιτομὴ καρδίας.

In summation, understanding of Romans 2:24–29, particularly περιτομὴ καρδίας, was regarded as significant in mitigating the blasphemy against God's name. Paul emphasised the internal change more than the outer ritual. Membership in the covenants was grounded in obedience to the Spirit's righteous rule. And it is not based on physical appearance or tribe affiliation. This greatly influenced Paul's thinking on salvation, the process of justification, and the link between Jews and Gentiles. Here, Paul reinterpreted the definition of the Jewish people, condemned

blasphemous customs and emphasised faith and inner conversion instead of race and outer rituals. His emphasis on περιτομὴ καρδίας taught that both Jews and Gentile believers were justified by faith. By it, they meant that, regardless of one's ethnicity, membership in the true covenant was based on spirit-directed inner transformation rather than on observance of the law or physical circumcision. To summarise, the central positions within the major interpretations are that the concept περιτομὴ καρδίας moves the focus of covenant identity from outward ritual status to inward Spirit-enabled transformation. In this study, the significance of Romans 2:24–29 lies in the shift from the public dishonouring of God's name to inward covenant renewal. The exegetical basis for Paul's argument is thus a reading of external religiosity as theologically deficient when religious identity is made visible without being accompanied by obedience, faith, and the work of the Spirit.

3.3 Theological Synthesis of Romans 2:24–29 within Paul's Wider Argument

This section develops the theological implications of Romans 2:24–29 identified in the exegetical analysis above. It then places them within Paul's wider argument in Romans 1–4. It is not a restatement of the general scholarly material as in Chapter One; rather, it highlights the particular logic behind which Paul's reasoning links covenant identity, moral inconsistency, and public dishonour to the inner spirit-enabled transformation of the inner person. It demonstrates how the themes of moral depravity, hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, and ethnocentrism are brought together in Paul's discussion of the public dishonour of God's name and the response to Spirit-sanctified transformation in a covenantal relationship. The argumentative horizon of this synthesis is Romans 1–4; however, the controlling text is Romans 2:24–29.

As a result, the study uses moral depravity, hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, and ethnocentrism as theological-analytical categories. They arise from the wider argument of Romans 1–4. They are not all explicit in Romans 2:24–29, nor do they bear equal weight within the passage. The broader chapters are involved only insofar as they shed light on Paul's discussions on covenant identity, circumcision, boasting in the law, moral responsibility, and renewal. In this context, Paul

challenges people's mistaken focus on outward religious symbols and redefines covenant identity in terms of inward, Spirit-enabled identities.

Paul's argument reveals a false sense of security in religious manifestations, covenant privileges, law-boasting, and circumcision, especially when they are separated from internal righteousness and inner conversion (Kruse, 2012:147–149; Moo, 2018:154–156). In this argument, the importance of physical circumcision is bolstered by its use as a significant covenant marker, but Paul relativises its significance when it is divorced from obedience to the Law, moral integrity, and faithfulness to God (Barclay, 1998:536–556; Nanos, 1996:76–92). When read in this way, περιτομὴ καρδίας is Paul's theological response to the public dishonour caused by external religiosity. It redefines covenant identity in terms of what is done inside rather than what is done on the outside (Kruse, 2012:147-149). Romans 2:24–29 is directly relevant to this study's concern with ritualism, legalism, hypocrisy, moral inconsistency, and ethnocentrism, because these patterns expose the danger of outward religiosity without transformed covenantal life (Boyarin, 1994:13–20, 106–120; Smit, 2017:73–100; Nanos, 1996:76–92). Thus, the synthesis that follows is not to be understood as a purely metaphorical phenomenon, but as Paul's theological remedy for a covenant identity that is confessed but not lived out ethically.

3.3.1 Moral Depravity and Rebellion (Rom 1:18–32)

These patterns of moral inconsistency have contextual implications for Kenyan Christianity, as discussed in Chapter Four. Romans 1:18–32 presents Paul's indictment of Gentile idolatry and moral disorder as the opening stage of his larger argument. In this section, Paul focuses on humanity's failure to recognise and honour God in light of God's knowledge revealed in creation. Therein, he traces the consequences of that failure in terms of idolatry, disordered desire, and moral corruption. The passage, therefore, does not yet present the full universalisation of sin, but functions as the first movement in an argument that later turns toward Jewish reliance on the law and circumcision in Romans 2:17–29 (Jewett, 2007:67–69; Dunn, 2018:93–95). Read in this way, Romans 1:18–32 prepares the ground for Paul's critique of outward religious confidence without collapsing the distinct rhetorical stages of his argument.

Consistently, rather than merely a list of immoral acts, Romans 1:18-32 is Paul's theological description of humanity's disorder in its relationship with God. When God's truth is suppressed, idolatry, distorted desire, and social disorder result (Moo, 2018:98-100; Wright, 2013:375). This sets the context for Romans 2:24, as dishonouring God does not necessarily involve direct aggression against God, but can also manifest in blasphemous actions that oppose the knowledge of God.

N. T. Wright (2002e:432) argues that this passage describes the human predicament resulting from their turning away from the Creator. In addition to idolatry, the refusal of God's truth among the Gentiles led to deterioration in morality and relationships among people, which justified an internal transformation. Paul's argument, in D. J. Moo's (2018:98–100) view, was both theological and anthropological. This was because humanity was compelled to live under a system of depravity that distorted their hearts, minds, and communities once they were detached from God. This deterioration was evidence that God's wrath had already fallen on humanity, a passive judgment in which God allows individuals to seek the terrible results of their own choices. This moral failure anticipates the logic of Romans 2:24, where Paul demonstrates that covenantal behaviour among believers who invoke God's name can bring public shame to God's name in the sight of outsiders as well.

The admonition by Paul (Rom 2:24), when he blamed the Jews for blaspheming the name of God among the Gentiles, should be interpreted in the context of the moral and spiritual deterioration of the Jews. Whereas Romans 1 tackled the Gentiles' revolt, Romans 2 focused on Jewish hypocrisy. Paul, consequently, levelled the playing field and condemned both Jews and Gentiles for their untransformed inward souls as well as their external deeds. Because of this universal situation, περιτομὴ καρδίας was crucial since, according to Romans 2:29, physical circumcision and external religiosity were useless, especially when devoid of the Spirit–enabled transformation.

In the context of Romans 1:18–32, the theological implication of περιτομὴ καρδίας was combating moral depravity. Paul accused the Gentiles of stifling the truth that creation had revealed, which caused idolatry, impurity, and a corrupted mentality. But the failure was spiritual

and stemmed from a damaged heart, an uncircumcised one; it was not only behavioural. Paul claims that περιτομὴ καρδίας is the only way an internal Spirit–enabled renovation can turn someone around by initiating a moral collapse. Without external law, such an internal circumcision cures the heart's insubordination and restores righteousness and spiritual re–creativity (Moo, 2018:96–100; Kruse, 2012:110–112).

3.3.2 Religious Hypocrisy and Judgmentalism (Rom 2:1–3)

In Romans 2:1–3, Paul turns to the person who judges others while practising comparable sins. The identity of this interlocutor is not yet explicit and remains debated. Romans 2:17 then directly addresses the person who bears the name "Jew." That is to say, he revealed a type of religious hypocrisy and judgmentalism in which one commits the same faults on the inside while publicly condemning similar crimes of others. Therein, he chiefly argued that when moral failings and self–righteousness continue, having the Law or taking part in religious rites like circumcision does not exclude one from God's wrath.

Even though the idea of περιτομὴ καρδίας does not appear explicitly in these verses, Romans 2:1–3 serves as a precursor to Paul's radical redefinition of covenant identity in the following verses (28–29). It is important to note that his theological rhetoric in Romans 2 took different shapes and shifted his argument over time. He not only revealed moral failure and hypocrisy but also depicted real righteousness as an internal reality rather than an externally based one. Paul, in verses 1–3, reprimanded those who judged others for participating in the same sin they themselves had committed. He made it clear that it was such religious hypocrisy, as well as the external religious displays of faith, like physical circumcision or Law–possession, that did not save anyone when so lacking in inner modification. Therein, the emphasis is on the justice of God's judgement, which is based on true moral and spiritual transformation rather than status, heritage, tradition, or legacy (Wright, 2002e:453).

Paul's theological critique of individuals who criticised others while ignoring their own moral shortcomings is evident in his remark (Rom 2:1): "You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else." He criticised their false security that was based on their religious

ceremonial conformity, such as physical circumcision and Torah ownership, without internal obedience or transformation (Dunn, 1998:215). He made it clear that only God had the authority to judge, and that His judgment was founded on fairness and truth (Rom 2:2). J. D. G. Dunn (2018:89–91) asserts that Paul greatly cared about morality when he condemned religious hypocrisy. When the divine Law was used to condemn others rather than to lead them to self–development, it resulted in spiritual arrogance and disrespected the nature of God. Paul emphasised that mankind, Jews and Gentiles, were all accountable to God. Moreover, divine judgment was pending for all, without delay, regardless of ethnicity or religious standing. N. T. Wright (2002e:453) links Paul's argument to the prophetic tradition, namely Ezekiel 36:20–23, where the profanation of God's name was caused by Israel's disobedience and hypocrisy among the nations. Paul used this prophecy to show how blasphemy results from external religiosity devoid of internal change, which damages the reputation of the covenant people and disgracefully acknowledges God.

This distinction is significant for the study's argument. Hypocrisy is when someone's stated faith is not matched with their actions, while implied blasphemy is when someone publicly dishonours God's name because of the disparity between their stated faith and their actions (Rom 2:23-24). Hypocrisy, then, is not the same as blasphemy, but is rather the moral state in which God's name is dishonoured to outsiders, as argued in Romans 2:24.

Although περιτομὴ καρδίας is not explicitly mentioned here, Romans 2:1–3 served as the basis for Paul's theological argument, which culminated in Romans 2:28–29. He set off by addressing Jews' false security that was founded upon their physical circumcision and possession of the Law (Dunn 1998:215), predominantly when their external religiosity was devoid of inner moral honesty. This led Paul to expose the pointlessness of outward religious symbols and also to radically reconstruct Christianity, whose great emphasis ought to be inner transformation. According to D. J. Moo (2018:159–160), Paul redefined divine favour by linking it to physical circumcision and connecting it to moral and spiritual renewal. Accordingly, true righteousness is "a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code" (Rom 2:29), and it was termed περιτομὴ καρδίας, an internal transformation meant to be the sole valid basis for divine judgement, in addition to aligning human actions with God's moral principles and code (Dunn,

1998:215; Moo, 2018:159–160). Thus, Romans 2:1–3 contributes to the argument that prepares for the later redefinition of God's people as those whose hearts have been changed by the Spirit. This theologically counters shallow religiosity that brings about implied blasphemy.

Regarding Romans 2:1–3, περιτομὴ καρδίας had theological implications for the Jews' religious hypocrisy and judgmentalism. Notwithstanding Jews' condemnation of immorality among Gentiles, they engaged in it. Paul emphasised that God's judgement was unbiased and evaluated the heart rather than outward religiosity. Even the very strongest religious identity had become a mere facade without περιτομὴ καρδίας. By restoring integrity and bringing one's inner life into line with God's principles, heart circumcision signalled an internal transformation that prevented the blasphemy that arose when religious people misrepresented God to others (Wright, 2002e:463; Kruse, 2012:121–123).

3.3.3 Legalism and Moral Inconsistency (Rom 2:17–24)

There is a serious critique of reliance on the law apart from obedience in Paul's argument (Rom 2:17–24). Paul begins his critique by addressing the Jew who "relies on the law and boasts in God" (Rom. 2:17), showing how confidence in possession of the Torah can become misplaced when it is not matched by obedience. To expose spiritual complacency among Jewish society, he criticises it by insisting that righteousness could not be obtained by legalism or just possessing the Torah (Dunn, 2018:97–99; Moo, 2018:154–155) and by further challenging the idea that religious knowledge alone, devoid of inner genuine obedience, guaranteed heavenly favour and conferred covenantal status. This criticism draws attention to the disconnect between the privilege of the outside religiosity and moral failure on the inside, where external religious privilege masks unresolved moral inconsistency, by arguing that the underlying flaws in the Jews' erroneous feeling of spiritual security were founded on their belief that they were God's chosen people and that they had the Law. Paul challenges this assumption by showing that covenant identity is not validated by mere possession of the law, but by obedience to its ethical demands. The claim to be a guide for the blind or a light to those in darkness (Rom 2:19–20) is rendered hollow when one fails to live up to that calling (Wamue–Ngare, 2012:240–242).

Paul's criticism is not of the Law as God's gift, but of being confident in having and teaching the Law, yet not living it out in the spirit of the Law (God's moral intention). The issue is thus not obedience, but the tension between knowledge and practice of the covenant. This paradox reaches a rhetorical peak in Romans 2:24, where God's name is dishonoured 'by their behaviour in the Law' (Moo, 2018:154-159; Dunn, 2018:97-99).

Additionally, J. G. Dunn (2018:97–99) argues that Paul condemned the legalistic assumption that ownership of the Torah can be equated with covenantal faithfulness without corresponding Torahic obedience and ethical uniformity. The outcome of such legalism was spiritual apathy, in which people were convinced that membership in a religious group or the understanding of religion made them free of any moral obligation. In Romans 2:21–23, he asks rhetorical questions that demonstrate a great hypocrisy: "You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?" In Paul's view, there was a gap between religion and behaviour, faith, and practice, which was perplexing given that those were preaching against stealing while stealing or condemning adultery while committing it. Such moral inconsistency tarnished God's reputation in the eyes of unbelievers. The culmination of Paul's criticism, according to D. J. Moo (2018:154–159), is seen in verse 24, when he cited Isaiah 52:5: "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." In the view of this study, the blaspheming of God's name, which resulted from the disloyalty of those who professed to be God's people, is the ultimate result of religious hypocrisy. As a result, Paul argues that the Law was meant to be utilised to expose sin and bring about inward change rather than to promote religious arrogance (Rom 3:20; Wright, 2013:362–365).

In this study, "legalism" refers to misplaced confidence in covenant privilege when it is detached from obedience. Such confidence may rest on possession of the Law, religious knowledge, or circumcision. Paul's critique does not reject the Law itself. Neither does it characterise Judaism as a whole as legalistic. Subsequently, he challenges a false religion anchored in superficial religiosity, devoid of the internal reality of heart change, as T. R. Schreiner (2018:146–148) accurately points out. He warns that this type of superficial spirituality is detrimental to one's spiritual well–being and futile. This concept is bound to give rise to Romans 2:25–29, in which Paul redefined what it means to be a true Jew. In his view, a genuine Jew has a Spirit–mark in

his heart, περιτομὴ καρδίας ("by the Spirit, not by the written code"), rather than outwardly (Rom 2:29).

The fact that περιτομὴ καρδίας challenges legalism and moral inconsistency was another important theological implication (Rom 2:17–24). Paul's rhetorical interlocutor boasts in the Law while failing to practise what it requires. The problem is therefore not possession of the Torah itself. It is the contradiction between claimed covenant privilege and actual conduct. A life of disobedience could not be made up for by circumcision of the body. The integrity required for a genuine testimony to the nations could only be produced by περιτομὴ καρδίας, the change of the inner being brought about by the Spirit (Kruse, 2012:144–146).

3.3.4 Religious Ritualism (Rom 2:24–29)

In this study, "ritualism" refers to the view that reliance on an outward rite is sufficient in itself. The problem arises when the rite is detached from inward obedience and covenant faithfulness. Romans 2:25–29 therefore does not reject physical circumcision as such. Rather, it subjects the outward sign to the covenant reality it should embody. Even though Genesis 17:10–14 had established circumcision as a significant symbol of God's covenant with Abraham, Paul contends that such practices, devoid of ethical renewal, had lost their spiritual significance and had even turned into blasphemy of God's name among Gentiles (Rom 2:24). Paul denounces the misuse of circumcision that served as a ceremony of superiority, as they used it without moral dedication.

Despite its historical significance, physical circumcision lost its value if the heart was not circumcised or rather, changed. Accordingly, "Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised" (Rom 2:25). The Jewish idea of the covenantal privilege that came with ritual obedience was challenged. Consequently, Paul reinterpreted what it meant to belong to God's family. He argues that a person was neither a Jew who was merely circumcised physically nor one who was a Jew only on the outside. The essence of Jewishness is inward, and the essence of circumcision is spiritual, in the Spirit, and not just in the written rules (Rom 2:28-29). This bold assertion essentially

reoriented covenantal identity towards inner spiritual change rather than ritualistic, ethnocentric, and ceremonial manifestations.

Paul's reasoning does not trivialise the "sacred seriousness" of the flesh in Jewishness. But he argues that the outward mark must not be a covenantal security if it is not connected to genuine obedience. This then shifts the focus of Romans 2:25–29 from the conditional value of physical circumcision to the necessity of περιτομὴ καρδίας—covenant identity in relation to the inward transformation of the heart by the Spirit (Dunn, 2018:105-107; Moo, 2018:165-176).

The precedent for Paul's foregoing reasoning is the Hebrew prophetic tradition, which hinted that the inward change ought to override believers' external conformity to the ritual of physical circumcision. As argued above, Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, and Jeremiah 4:4 have emphasised that the circumcision of the heart was the true mark of faith in the covenant. N. T. Wright (2002e:466) acknowledges that, in the new era that Christ established, Paul took this Hebrew history and redefined Jewish identity in terms of eschatological completeness and the work of the Spirit rather than of human hands. As a result, he redefined περιτομὴ καρδίας as a sign of spiritual genuineness in contrast to the meaningless formality of ritualism.

According to J. G. Dunn (2018:105–107), the disapproval embodied in Paul's critique was not directed against the ritual per se. Instead, it was channelled into a perversion that reduced the ritual to superficial signs of alteration, with no inner transformation or submission. In Dunn's view, Paul criticised "ritualistic reductionism" for reducing covenantal moral obligations to ceremonial observance while ignoring their moral dimension. In this perverted form, rituals such as circumcision excluded the performer from God's covenant since they lacked spiritual and ethical purity, and they simply served to fool the performer into feeling justified. This kind of disjunction between ritual and moral obedience resulted in the kind of religious hypocrisy that Paul criticised as blasphemy of God's name in Romans 2:24. So, instead of being an indication of spiritual blamelessness, this ritualism became a source of Godly disgrace among the nations.

Additionally, a noteworthy theological implication of περιτομὴ καρδίας in relation to Romans 2:25–29 was that Paul distinguished it from physical circumcision, contending that conformity

to the Law was a prerequisite for the value of physical circumcision; otherwise, it became a nullity. This is a radical redefinition of the identity of covenant, and it is a central theme of περιτομὴ καρδίας, a circumcision approved by the Spirit, not by the hand of men. It is the indisputable seal of a true Jew and admission into the family of God. The internal Spirit–enabled transformation is the new norm of the covenant, and this breaks the dependence on the external rituals (Wright, 2002e:466; Moo, 2018:154–156).

Within the constructive theological trajectory of the passage, covenant identity must be accompanied by inward, Spirit-enabled renewal rather than resting on external status or ritual markers alone (Jewett, 2007:221–222). This inner restoration is true Christianity as compared to ceremonial conformity. True covenant identity ought to be characterised by spiritual renewal rather than ritual observance (Schnelle, 1998:109; Cranfield, 2004:12–14), thereby underscoring the need for genuine discipleship that embodies Christ's qualities to revitalise Christian identity rather than the formality of ritualism and/or outward religiosity.

3.3.5 Jew–Gentile Relationship, Ethnocentrism and Religious Superiority

This study argued for a mixed audience of Romans, which was perhaps predominantly Gentile. The main ethnic relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the Christian society, which was shaped by physical circumcision, was the main topic of discussion here. Paul addressed the ethnic tensions between Jews and Gentiles in a theological context by emphasising salvation and the Law's relevance. He also emphasised that the promises that God made to the Jews and the Gentiles were based on unity and inclusion in Christ.

Paul wrote in Romans 1:16 that the gospel was for Jews and Greeks (Gentiles). He made it clear that the gospel was comprehensive. But he was aware of a special, different task of Jews and non–Jews in the redemption account. A major pastoral and theological concern within Romans is the relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers, particularly as Paul addresses questions of Law, covenant privilege, faith, and mutual belonging. He emphasised that all ethnic groups were equally justified by faith in Christ, not by keeping the Law (Rom 3:28). The argument does not reject Jewish covenant privilege itself. It throws out the challenge to rely on having the Law

or observing the Law as a reason to boast or exclude Gentiles from God's salvation. In that place, he stressed the universality of God's redemption – salvation was available to both Jews and Gentiles through faith (Rom 1:16-17; 3:22-24). As in D. J. Moo (2018:209), he reinterpreted the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, focusing on the righteousness that comes from faith, regardless of ethnicity.

In Romans 2:9–10, the author highlighted that both Jews and Gentiles were impartially subjected to God's judgment. He argued that their moral conduct—not ethnicity—was the basis for penalties and rewards. He further maintained that both groups were held equally responsible and accountable for their deeds without favouritism. The belief that everyone, regardless of ethnicity, was eligible for salvation/judgement was reaffirmed. Considerable attention has been paid to the consequences of God's impartial judgment (Longenecker, 2016:149; Moo, 2018:151), particularly Paul's treatment of the ethnic divisions within the Roman house churches and his assertion that everyone was judged by their actions.

Paul's argument starts with the universal human sinfulness, as seen in Romans 3. In Romans 3:9, he writes that "all are under sin," and in Romans 3:23, that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In this context, Romans 3:29–30 introduces God as saviour of both Jews and Gentiles, a God who saves both by faith, not by law or ethnicity. Now, Paul overturns ethnocentric boasting, but not by accusing the Gentiles or even by choosing to side with them; he does so by rendering both Jews and Gentiles guilty of sin and both subject to grace. Justification is based not on religion or ethnicity, but on faith in Christ. Further, faith does not destroy the law; it confirms it (Rom 3:31). This means Paul addresses the danger of ethnocentric divisions between Jews and Gentiles while demonstrating that both are equally guilty apart from Christ and equally righteous by His grace alone. Paul's message is universal, as C. D. Barrett (1991:115), N. T. Wright (2013:1412), Douglas J. Moo (2018:215) and Richard N. Longenecker (2016:174) all emphasise. Both Jews and Gentiles are held to the same standard before God and are judged by a standard of righteousness that is the same in each case.

Romans 3:1–12 raises the question of Jewish advantage, while Romans 3:27–30 introduces the unity of Jews and Gentiles through faith. In this section, Paul's broader argument exposes the

problem of ethnic and ritual superiority by grounding covenant belonging in faith, grace, and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Paul argues for the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's gracious plan of salvation in Romans 9:24-26. In Romans 11:11–24, Paul warns Gentile believers not to be arrogant, because their inclusion does not cancel God's continuing purposes for Israel or displace Israel within God's covenant plan (Wright, 2013:1405). Likewise, in Romans 10:12-13, Paul's message is that Jews and Gentiles are equally accepted before God by faith in Christ. And in Romans 15:7, it is argued that Gentile Christians are to accept Jews in Christ and that Jews are to accept Gentile Christians in Christ. This unity is further applied in Romans 14:1–3, where Paul urges believers to welcome one another despite differences over food practices (Longenecker, 2016:1044–1046; Wright, 2002c:172–174; Moo, 2018:831–834). The specific implications of this reasoning are explored in Chapter Four.

Accordingly, the Epistle to the Romans addresses tensions between Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ by showing that ethnic identity and external religious privilege are insufficient before God. In Romans 1–2, Paul critiques both Gentile sin and Jewish confidence in covenantal markers, and in Romans 3, he declares that all have sinned. Thus, Jews and Gentiles alike stand under sin and are justified on the same basis of faith in Christ. Paul's argument, therefore, moves from the critique of outward religion toward inward transformation, first in terms of περιτομὴ καρδίας (Rom 2:29) and later in terms of the renewing of the mind (Rom 12:2). In this way, Romans promotes a new community in Christ in which ethnic superiority is excluded.

In Romans 3:1–9, particularly in reference to the strong theological element of Jewish ethnicity, Paul attacked ethnic pride based on religious superiority. He also challenged those who thought that their ethnic status and guardianship of the Law were the divine favour and a guarantee of true righteousness. On the one hand, the possession of legal knowledge and the custodianship of the "oracles of God" were beneficial to the Jews (Rom 3:2). Paul rejected the idea that this inheritance offered them spiritual privileges or immunity from God's judgment. He asked a rhetorical question: "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew?" (Rom 3:1). He then stressed the necessity of being accountable rather than superior. Having claimed that Jews and Gentiles are equally "under sin" (Rom 3:9), he evened the spiritual playing field and disarmed any sense of ethnic or theological superiority. As J. M. G. Barclay (2003:70–73) confirms, Paul had a

mission to ensure that no pride in ethnic or spiritual privilege existed, especially the kind that promotes exclusivism and does not glorify God. By so doing, he compromised the Jewish superiority of holding the Law. According to J. G. Dunn (2018:89–91), the criticism of Paul was not aimed at rejecting the role of Jewish heritage but merely at revealing the lack of conformity between privilege and practice. The possession of the Law should not lead to Jewish ethnic boasting or religious arrogance unless accompanied by devout obedience, and it should not swamp spiritual transformation and conversion.

Paul's critique challenges the Jewish presumption that possessing the Torah or belonging to a particular ethnic group could be equated with moral virtue. Yet, in his view, that was biblically baseless. He subsequently emphasised universal human culpability. He contended that everyone was equally condemned by sin: "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). According to N. T. Wright (2013:375), Paul redefined the identity of Jews in terms of the inclusiveness of the righteousness of God, manifested "apart from the Law" but achieved through faith (Rom 3:21–22). To confront various blasphemous practices regarding ethnocentrism, honouring God's name requires faith–based righteousness that is consistent with the idea of spiritual circumcision, an internal transformation as opposed to outward legal compliance.

To address the ethnic tensions between Jews and Gentiles, Paul discussed Abraham as the archetype of faith. Romans chapter 4 presents Abraham as an example of the one who honoured God. This honour was based on faith alone before his physical circumcision (Moo, 2000:84). Imperatively, it is important to note that Abraham had received the status of righteousness before his bodily circumcision (Rom 4:10–11), and this proves that he was conferred as righteous because of his faith and not his custom, ethnicity, or race. In J. G. Dunn's (1998:253) view, Abraham became the father of both Jewish and Gentile believers, and consequently then the honouring God was attainable through the inner faith rather than the adherence to Law or ethnicity (Wright, 2013:410; Moo, 2000:92). To put it differently, Paul's argument here was a clear continuation of his criticism of ethnic and ceremonial pride (Moo, 2000:84). Because of his sincere faith in God, Abraham became the father of all believers, both circumcised and uncircumcised. If such arguments were upheld, then it would dismantle ethnocentrism and barriers between Jews and Gentiles (Dunn, 1998:253) by reframing the covenant people as those

who were partakers of the interior change and spiritual experience of trust. This could be the basis upon which N. T. Wright (2013:410) argues that Paul shifted the focus of religious identity from the Law to God's eschatological operation in the heart by reorienting the entire covenant story around faith and the Spirit.

In Romans 4, this is reinforced by the fact that Abraham is the father of both the circumcised and the uncircumcised believers. Paul's appeal to Abraham illustrates that covenant and righteousness have nothing to do with the physical sign, but rather with the faith he had before his circumcision (Rom 4:9-12; Wright, 2013:410; Moo, 2018:262-266). This aligns with the logic of Romans 2:24-29, where outward covenantal indicators are secondary to inward covenantal faithfulness.

In fact, the concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας meant more than one thing in the context of Romans 3:1-9, which attempts to end the notion of religious superiority and ethnocentrism. But Paul challenged that Jews were naturally and legally spiritually privileged. He instead said that everyone –Jews and non–Jews alike–were sinners and needed to be saved by faith alone. In the broader Pauline synthesis, περιτομὴ καρδίας refutes arguments for covenant superiority due to ethnic and/or ritual differences. Jews and Gentiles are not judged according to their ethnic backgrounds, but according to God's grace. There are no ethnic differences; they have been eliminated. Rather, it ceases to function as a basis for superior covenant standing (Kruse, 2012:150–152; Moo, 2018:160–162).

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Romans 2:24–29 redefines covenant membership in three ways. First, God is dishonoured when covenant privilege is not matched by obedience (2:24). Second, circumcision is beneficial only when it is accompanied by obedience (2:25–27). Third, the circumcision that counts is the circumcision of the heart, enabled by the Spirit rather than by the letter (2:28–29). In Paul's argument, this inwardness is not an appeal to autonomous moral endeavour, but to an inward transformation that depends on God's grace and is effected by the

Spirit. It is supported by Abraham's pre–circumcision righteousness (Romans 4:9–12), anticipates the more developed theology of life in the Spirit (Romans 8), and coheres with Paul's subsequent argument concerning justification by faith and Gentile inclusion in the people of God. Thus, this exegesis clarifies that Paul's critique is directed not against outward covenant signs as such, but against their reliance when detached from obedience; covenant identity is thereby reoriented toward inward, Spirit-enabled renewal.

The chapter interprets περιτομὴ καρδίας as more than just personal inner devoutness. Paul's final answer to this apparent paradox of outward covenant identity and disobedient behaviour. The public effect is in Romans 2:24 – God's name is dishonoured. The theological remedy is offered in Romans 2:29: Spirit-enabled inward transformation and divine acceptance. This provides the exegetical basis for the contextual discussion in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR
EXTERNAL RELIGIOSITY AND DISHONOUR IN SELECTED KENYAN ECCLESIAL CONTEXTS: A PAULINE CRITIQUE IN LIGHT OF ROMANS 2:24–29

4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three exegetically demonstrates that Romans 2:24-29 reveals the dishonouring of God's name due to an inconsistency in the covenant, relativises reliance on outward religious distinctions, and defines covenant identity in terms of the inward working of the Spirit. Selected patterns from the Kenyan ecclesial literature are drawn on in the chapter. These are a sort of "theological analogies" used to "contextualise" Paul's argument. They are not given as a direct parallel to the first-century situation. This analysis is based on four exegetical insights. First of all, Romans 2:24 reveals the public dishonouring of God's name that results from the contradiction between a person's profession of the covenant and their deeds. Second, Romans 2:25 evaluates the covenantal value of circumcision in relation to obedience. Third, Romans 2:26–28 challenges reliance on outward covenant status apart from faithfulness. Fourth, Romans 2:29 locates authentic covenant identity in the inward work of the Spirit and in God's approval. Against this backdrop, this chapter first provides a conceptual and theological definition of blasphemy, then examines moral inconsistency, religious hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, and ethnocentrism in the selected Kenyan ecclesial contexts, before concluding with a reflection on περιτομὴ καρδίας as a call to heart–based ecclesial renewal in Kenya. Thus, this chapter is a theological reflection on ecclesial tendencies in light of Paul's argument rather than a comprehensive empirical study of churches in Kenya.

4.2 A Conceptual and Theological Framework for Understanding Blasphemy

Using the controlled definition of blasphemy outlined in Chapter Three, this chapter understands blasphemy as the dishonouring of God's name through the ethically inconsistent behaviour of those who profess a covenant relationship with God. This should not be confused with a general loss of reputation or a public accusation. Rather, where the conduct of God's people contradicts their religious profession, it may occasion the public dishonouring of God's name in a manner

analogous to the theological pattern of Romans 2:24. Within selected Kenyan ecclesial contexts, this is therefore not merely a sociological question of public reputation but a theological issue of Christian witness, concerning the correspondence between professed faith and conduct.

In this study, the sociological credibility and theological witness are considered as separate issues. Churches may face public criticism or loss of credibility for many reasons. Not all such instances correspond to the theological pattern of covenantal inconsistency in Romans 2:24. If there is a public disagreement between Christian profession and conduct, as is identified by published scholarship, then it can be examined from a theological perspective, as Romans 2:24 does. The analogy is with the conflict between the professed covenant identity and real life. This does not imply a direct historical correspondence with Paul's first-century context. This study is not an empirical evaluation of all churches, church leaders, or all denominations of Christianity in Kenya, but rather presents a theological reading of selected patterns documented in the published literature.

The five churches were selected based on their socio–political influence in Kenyan society, their size, and their history. The characterisations provided here are drawn from published scholarly and ecclesial sources; the present study does not independently test their prevalence through primary empirical research. They are therefore outlined as examples of theological dynamics, or dynamics of theological thinking, from this scholarship, and not as empirical pronouncements on whole denominations. The study does not provide fixed labels for the selected traditions. It focuses only on certain practices reported in the references quoted. The emphasis is on the conflict between external religiosity and internal moral or spiritual transformation. Thus, analytical categories for specific patterns are moral inconsistency, hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, and ethnocentrism. They do not depict whole denominations.

The chapter then examines, theologically, some of the common themes in Kenyan Christianity as revealed in the literature and also in Paul's concern over them in Romans 2:24-29. While Kenyan churches vary in doctrine, governance, liturgy, and rituals, the issue of religious externalism without internal transformation, in one form or another, is documented in the literature. In this context, the chapter explores how περιτομὴ καρδίας might serve as a theological

counterpoint to the implied blasphemy that arises when ecclesial practice contradicts the gospel. As such, they are offered as examples of theological contexts that emerge from this study, not as a set of evaluations and empirical verdicts on entire denominations.

4.3 Moral Inconsistency in Selected Kenyan Ecclesial Contexts

Understood in the context of Romans 2:24, public reputation is not merely a sociological concern but a theological one. Churches do not need to maintain a good reputation for their own sake, but because the conduct of Christians bears upon the public honour of God's name. Some Kenyan ecclesial contexts, as discussed in the published literature, therefore face a Pauline challenge: public credibility is not secured by religious display, institutional power, or apologetic self–definition, but by the visible coherence of confession and practice. Where such coherence is absent, the issue may become not merely a matter of public embarrassment but a problem of covenant witness (Dunn, 2018:112–117; Cranfield, 2004:176–177).

As a result, this chapter employs "blasphemy" in a 'Paulinised' way. It does not mean that every moral failure is direct verbal blasphemy, but when and where the profession of covenant is clearly and visibly at odds with conduct, then God's name is publicly dishonoured among outsiders. In some Kenyan ecclesial contexts, published literature suggests that moral compromise may gradually be normalised under the guise of religious activity, thereby weakening public Christian witness (Njoroge, 2014:57). This does not mean that the same ecclesial response is needed for every kind of moral failing. Instead, it emphasises that the legitimacy of the church's public Christian testimony may be undermined before society at large if it fails to address moral inconsistencies within its own community. Read through the lens of Romans 2:24, this error is not just a moral transgression on a personal level, as is sometimes thought, but also a theological failure and a crisis of witness in the church.

Public Christian identity interacts with other factors, such as corruption, financial malpractice, abuse of authority, and lack of accountability, that put moral credibility to the test in the Kenyan context. The issue of ethical witness has been highlighted in recent Kenyan and African theological debates as a concern for the church's institutional reputation (Muziga, 2021:49-50;

Mumo, 2025:62-63; Bwire, 2022). Theologically, these patterns are important because they reveal a gap between public profession and actual practice, a disparity that Romans 2:24 presents as damaging to the public honour of God's name.

Within the Catholic context in Kenya, safeguarding and accountability issues are recognised through child-protection and diocesan mechanisms, and broader Catholic reporting has identified instances of abuse and reporting in some other contexts (KCCB, 2009; ADN Communications, 2022; Winfield and Muhumuza, 2018; Pinedo, 2026; Defensor del Pueblo, 2023). Ethical issues have also been discussed in the context of the critique of prosperity-oriented Christianity. According to Alwala (2020:13-22), Adamo (2021:6-9) and Williams (2022:1-8), material success, religious commercialisation and leadership charisma can lead to the neglect of accountability and moral transformation. The examples herein are not intended as blanket condemnations of entire denominations, but rather as theological markers of the need for ethical renewal in a denomination's life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Kenyan Catholic context includes formal safeguarding and child-protection mechanisms (KCCB, 2009; ADN Communications, 2022). These acknowledge the importance of institutional responses to abuse and misconduct, and to failures of accountability. This study does not measure the prevalence of abuse, as it exists or not. The question is theological: what happens to churches when there is a threat to the public Christian witness due to moral failure? Whereas the clerical abuse and institutional accountability story is reported in the Catholic Church, as demonstrated by Reisinger (2022) and Winfield & Muhumuza (2018), such reports are not used here to suggest that it is widespread in the Catholic Church in Kenya. Reisinger (2022) observes that "Reproductive abuse is a recurrent pattern within clergy sexual abuse, where the victims' pregnancies become sites of further coercion, silencing, and control by the perpetrators." Within the scope of the current research, the relevance of this evidence lies solely in highlighting the theological significance of protection, transparency, accountability, and responsible institutional response. It does not demonstrate the extent of abuse and institutional inadequacy in Kenyan Catholic contexts.

In the Kenyan Catholic context, issues of safeguarding, accountability, abuse prevention, and public ecclesial witness have also been recognised through official child-protection and safeguarding frameworks established by the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops and some diocesan structures (KCCB, 2009; ADN Communications, 2022). On a broader Catholic level, official reports and public investigations have alleged instances of clerical sexual abuse and institutional accountability actions in some instances (Winfield and Muhumuza, 2018; Pinedo, 2026; Defensor del Pueblo, 2023). Taken together, the cited reports illustrate how allegations of abuse and institutional responses to them may raise questions of accountability and public ecclesial credibility. They are used as context-specific illustrations rather than representative evidence and therefore do not establish the prevalence of abuse or institutional failure within the Catholic Church in Kenya as a whole.

Selected literature surveyed in these contexts shows issues of conflicts over church resources and land, leadership challenges, poor accountability, allegations of financial and pastoral misconduct, and ethnic patronage (Njoroge, 2008:148; Gifford, 2009:44; Spear, 2003:213). These reports are context-specific rather than representative of either denomination as a whole. Their use is limited to the particular ecclesial settings documented in the cited literature. Their relevance to this study lies in the theological questions they raise concerning ecclesial accountability, institutional integrity, and public Christian witness. Selected ACK and PCEA contexts are reported in the published literature to have issues of contestation, alleged financial misconduct among church leaders, and ethnic patronage. These make sense of situations in which institutional practice may run counter to what is claimed to be Christian and may undermine, in the public eye, the credibility of the Church as an institution (Njoroge, 2008:45).

The leadership disputes that began some years ago at the St Andrews Church in Kapenguria (Kakai, 2023) persist due to alleged irregularities and perceived leadership and financial favours (Shanzu, 2025). The reported dispute raises questions of leadership accountability and public ecclesial credibility. Romans 2:24's applicability is analogical, not a straightforward connection with Paul's historical context. When a Christian's profession and recorded behaviour conflict, the scripture becomes pertinent. Such a discrepancy might damage the credibility of public Christian testimony. According to Romans 2:24, this theological reasoning can also lead to the

public dishonouring of God's name. In certain Adventist leadership situations in Kenya, some conflicts have spilled into the public arena and the courts. Descriptions of conflicts for leadership elections and ecclesial authority are recorded in court documents. The cases highlight how internal conflicts can escalate into public and legal issues (Geoffrey Asanyo & another v John Kiragu Ngunyi & 13 others, 2015; Mokua v Central Kenya Conference of the Seventh Day Adventist & another, 2025). Kuria (2014:210) suggests that there may be differences between outward religious practice and moral conduct among some SDA believers. Strict Sabbath observance and adherence to prescribed lifestyle practices may coexist with moral inconsistencies, including dishonesty and difficulties within family relationships.

There are concerns about ethical responsibility, religious commercialisation, leadership accountability, and the exercise of charismatic authority, which have been expressed in published critiques of certain expressions of prosperity gospel in Kenya (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:98; Gathogo, 2011:52; Gathogo, 2022:124). This is a very important issue when there is a sense that such practices undermine Christian witness in the public sphere. These concerns address some forms of prosperity-based preaching that may be so closely linked to material success and failure that they are seen as God's blessing and benediction. These also cover the commercialisation of religious practices, which could lead vulnerable members of the congregation to be exploited or manipulated financially or otherwise. As pointed out by Asamoah-Gyadu (2005:98), there are also ethical considerations to be noted, because on occasions where charismatic authority and religious hopes can be commercialised. In light of the concerns listed below, a conversation with Romans 2:24 is prudent. Public Christian witness is undermined by a lack of harmony between profession and conduct when Christian profession and integrity are challenged by practices which compromise accountability. Within the theological logic of Romans 2:24, such inconsistency may also occasion the public dishonouring of God's name. The question is not whether Pentecostal/Charismatic expression works, but whether it is possible to have a disconnect between outward profession and the inward covenant faithfulness it is supposed to represent.

In certain ecclesial environments in Kenya, however, moral scandals and leadership failures have prompted a renewed debate on governance, accountability, safeguarding, servant leadership, and

public witness. In some Roman Catholic contexts, concerns about abuse and financial mismanagement have increased calls for stronger safeguarding, lay accountability, catechesis, justice, and institutional transparency (Gifford, 2009:60; Oloo K'Ochiel, 2022; Daily Nation, 2023; Tangaza University, 2025). In the same way, the reported leadership issues in some ACK and PCEA context have led to a discussion on governance, humility, forgiveness and servant leadership and the church official documents have laid a procedure for order, discipline, and responsible governance (Njoroge, 2011:76; PCEA, 2012:34; ACK, 2015:28; Kiage, 2025:43). The good news is that these developments indicate that moral failure can be a time to examine the church's health, but that such a reflection is theologically significant only if it results in repentance, accountability, and public proclamation.

Similarly, in the SDA, transparency, financial integrity, and leadership ethics have lapsed, and this has promoted reforms with a focus on holistic discipleship with the integration of doctrine and ethics (Getui, Ichuloi, and Kandagor, 2023:59–76; Nyamongo, Anthony, and Daniel, 2024:191–200; Knight, 2008:145; Daily Nation, 2019). In his article, entitled "*Seventh–day Adventist organizational leadership behavior: An exploration of ethical issues,*" S. Patterson (2010:22) asserts: "Nor should we allow organisational management and leadership behaviors that were designed for and by secular corporate models to be imposed upon the ecclesiastical organisation for which they are not fit. The Church doesn't need a new model, it needs to renew its commitment to the model we have been given" (Patterson, 2010:22)

The prosperity teaching and the commercialisation of miraculous scandals have resulted in internal reform movements, scriptural revivalism and recovery of simplicity and social accountability in Pentecostal and Charismatic contexts (Gathogo, 2011:119; Gifford, 2009:112). These developments are significant because they show that the contextual patterns discussed above are neither universal nor static; the selected Kenyan ecclesial contexts also exhibit processes of repentance, institutional reform, improved accountability, renewed discipleship, and efforts toward more credible Christian witness. In Pauline terms, περιτομὴ καρδίας (Rom 2:29) points to Spirit-directed transformation of the inner person, producing holiness, moral integrity, and accountable witness (Schreiner, 2018:138). Taken together, these trends suggest that moral lapses in the church's life do not remain a private moral shame but undermine the church's public

witness. In the context of Romans 2:24, therefore, this is not only moral failure, but the theological dishonour of God's name due to covenant unfaithfulness. A fuller discussion of περιτομὴ καρδίας in this context is postponed until section 4.8.

4.4 Patterns of Religious Hypocrisy in Selected Kenyan Ecclesial Contexts

Building on the conceptual framework established in Section 4.2 above, this section examines how Paul's critique of religious hypocrisy in Romans 2 is reflected in patterns within Kenyan Christianity. Paul's condemnation of religious hypocrisy in Romans 2 remains a theological issue relevant to Christianity in Kenya. Published Kenyan and African theological literature documents particular tensions between religious profession and moral practice. This study analyses such documented patterns using hypocrisy as a theological-analytical category. Regarding selected Roman Catholic Churches, studies in Kenya suggest that priestly celibacy is a social and pastoral challenge in some sections of the Kenyan Catholic Church (Rop, 2025:22–43; Rop, Kamaara and Koech, 2024:133–149). Kenyan media reports also show that issues of priestly celibacy, marriage and priestly integrity have also been publicly discussed and debated (Obare and Bartoo, 2009; Wambilyanga, 2009).

Hypocrisy is evident when members of the church condemn public corruption, immorality, or injustice in Kenyan church life, yet their actual behaviour conflicts with these values. Studies of Kenyan Christianity and African Pentecostalism show that these tensions emerge in relation to financial accountability, clerical authority, performative righteousness, and the public moral witness of churches (Ochieng, 2019:71-73; Mwaura, 2018:105-118; Gifford, 2009:123-126; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005:110-112). In Paul's view, it is not "inconsistency" that is the issue at all, but "inconsistency" that brings dishonour on God's name before the world.

More generally, Aylward Shorter (1998) demonstrates that celibacy has traditionally been in tension with African cultural views, while Doris Reisinger (2022) notes the broader ecclesial and ethical consequences of reproductive abuse in the Catholic Church. Further, on the international stage, Winfield and Muhumuza (2018) demonstrate that such tensions have also been aired in relation to Africa. Kazziha and Winfield (2019) describe a case in which two Kenyan men

claimed that an Italian missionary priest was their father. Vatican instructions also emphasise that if a priest has children, the principle of the good of the child should be observed, and this can even include exemption from clerical duties, leading to further discussion of the concept of "secrecy" and "institutional accountability" with respect to a priest's children (Tornielli, 2019; Thomas, 2019). These reported cases do not describe the Catholic Church as a whole. They illustrate a broader theological question raised by Romans 2: Does public religious profession correspond with ethical conduct? Paul's argument is not directed at Catholicism. Rather, it provides a theological norm for examining the relationship between profession and practice in any Christian tradition.

Niringiye (2016:102) and Njoroge (2008:153) raise concerns about political entanglement and prophetic witness in East African and Kenyan Christianity. For this study, the relevant issue is not political engagement itself. It is a documented contradiction between a church's public ethical witness and its institutional or leadership practice. Attendance at a political event alone is therefore not treated as evidence of hypocrisy. This is Paul's criticism of religious leaders who are considered to be dishonouring God by doing something contrary to what they teach and/or by failing to condemn their own behaviour. The PCEA also has been accused of nepotism and tribalism in the allocation of resources and appointments of leaders, even though it is theoretically based on Reformed theology. The practices are in conflict with the organisation's public proclamation of justice and unity in Christ (Spear, 2003:215). It's an appropriate context for Paul's rhetorical question, "You then, who teach others, do not teach yourself? (Rom 2:21).

The SDA Church places strong emphasis on temperance, Sabbath observance, and ethical living. In selected contexts, however, these outward commitments may coexist with internal conflicts and inconsistencies between professed values and practice. When leaders indulge in financial activities that are ethically questionable, or even in personal activities that are condemned by the Church, such as drinking alcohol, Paul's concept of an uncircumcised heart that is hidden behind outward practices of the law is demonstrated (Rom 2:25-29; Getui, Ichuloi, and Kandagor, 2023; Knight, 2000:141). There is a special tension in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements between holiness and extravagant lifestyles. It can be misinterpreted as exploitation and inconsistent when church leaders promote a prosperity gospel and emphasise sacrificial giving,

but then flaunt their own wealth. This contrasts with the idea of servant leadership, as it can lead to the impression of exploitation (Kalu, 2008:201; Anderson, 2004:78). The absence of moral responsibility, despite the outward appearance of religion, is characteristic of it. Consequently, it reflects the inconsistency Paul associates with moral conduct; it dishonours God's name.

Some Kenyan theological literature identifies denominational pride, moral policing, and outward religious performance within particular ecclesial settings. These become problematic when outward religious identity is detached from inward transformation (Gathogo, 2008a:260–262; Njoroge, 2019:45–47). Some Kenyan Christian leaders criticise others based on their understanding of the Bible, their observance of rituals like baptism, tithing, and frequent attendance, yet they engage in social injustice, political compromise, and tribalism in private. Their focus is on the overemphasis on outward religiosity, such as attending church, tithing, or displaying piety, without attention to inner change or to ethical living (Gitari, 1989:133–135; Wamue–Ngare, 2012:240–242). This, then, is a reflection of religious hypocrisy that Paul criticised in Romans 2 or duplicity (Wright, 2013:362–365).

While hypocrisy undermines the credibility of the Christian faith, there has been a renewed focus on accountability, integrity, reconciliation and servant leadership in some churches and theological writings in Kenya. The significance of Romans 2:24 is not that scandals are good, but that when there is a public contradiction between confession and conduct, there is a need for an internal transformation and public witness. Clerical hypocrisy and abuse-related scandals in the Roman Catholic context have intensified discussion on seminary formation, lay responsibility, safeguarding and lay empowerment, in line with Vatican II's theology of the People of God (Vatican II, 1964:7, 10, 30; Gifford, 2009:60). Leadership failures in some ACK and PCEA contexts, concerns about governance, tribalism and justice have raised questions about institutional credibility, while also renewing attention to reconciliation and servant leadership (Njoroge, 2011:76; Ndeti, 2019:164; Kiage, 2025:71).

In the Kenyan SDA setting, some literature points to a tension between a strong emphasis on holiness and ethical inconsistency (Nyaoko, Anthony and Ojwang, 2025:160–173). Public media reports also indicate that leadership disputes and internal disunity have at times undermined the

unity and public witness of the Kenyan SDA Church (Mosoku, 2019; Githae, 2020). Such tensions may be read in light of Paul's warning against outward religious practice without corresponding inner transformation (Knight, 2008:145). In Pentecostal–Charismatic churches, hypocrisy weakens public credibility, especially where prosperity-oriented claims are contradicted by unethical leadership or weak accountability. This has generated renewed calls for Scripture-centred ministry, simplicity, and responsible leadership (Gifford, 2009:112; Gathogo, 2011:119).

Such forms of examination have promoted transparency, moral practice and greater integration of theology and Christian practice, so that the failures become a source of spiritual and institutional renewal. In selected Roman Catholic, ACK, PCEA, SDA, and Pentecostal/ Charismatic contexts, the literature reviewed identifies responses to particular forms of ecclesial inconsistency through renewed attention to discipleship, accountability, and institutional reform. These responses are not themselves equivalent to περιτομὴ καρδίας. They may, however, be brought into constructive dialogue with its theological logic in Romans 2:29, where authentic covenant identity is located in inward, Spirit-enabled renewal. Such renewal calls for correspondence between professed Christian identity and ethical practice (Schreiner, 2018:138; Dunn, 2018:122).

Drawing on the exegetical arguments in Chapter Three, this section does not seek to redefine περιτομὴ καρδίας but rather to examine how it plays out ethically in selected Kenyan ecclesial contexts. The covenant life in Romans 2:29 is an inside-out, Spirit–enabled life with a God-centered perspective instead of a human-centered. From a theological perspective, this is an acknowledgment that the renewal of the church cannot happen if external reform, compliance, or symbolic membership is the only means available. The theological power of περιτομὴ καρδίας is that it highlights that authentic covenant life is characterised by inward renewal by the Spirit (Hays, 2014:223; Cranfield, 2004:175).

This must be understood within Paul's broader theological framework. It does not refer to individual piety and moral autonomy, but to God's gracious action on the inner life. For this reason, the Kenyan church does not find its remedy in tougher enforcement, intensified

condemnation, or higher levels of religiosity. The more Pauline horizon is that of Romans 12:1–2, where the transformation is "by the mercies of God" and by the renewing of the mind. So, περιτομὴ καρδίας and renewed–minded discipleship go hand in hand: both refer to a grace–based, Spirit–driven reconfiguration of Christian identity and life (Wright, 2013:252; Dunn, 1998:253).

4.5 Legalistic Tendencies in the Selected Kenyan Ecclesial Contexts

Herein, 'law' does not mean the law of the land but, in Paul's argument, it means Torah and, later, by analogy, codes of law from the modern ecclesial world, in which outward conformity is equated with inner fidelity. For the present study, legalism is defined as a dependence on rules, denominational standards, and doctrinal purity as the basis for determining spiritual authenticity rather than on grace-inspired obedience and moral purity. In Romans 2, Paul critiques religious confidence grounded in the possession of the law and circumcision, especially when such confidence is contradicted by moral disobedience. Paul argued that something external to the Law cannot be a substitute for genuine obedience in the heart (Rom 2:17–29; Dunn 2018:118; Moo 2018:164). Legalism, thus, does not constitute obedience but rather the replacement of human effort and delights with observance and rites, rituals, or markers of identity, all with divine grace (Cranfield, 2004:172; Schreiner, 2018:151). The significance of external compliance with the religious law without internal transformation is the key theme in Romans 2:17–29. Paul's critique of legalism redefines covenant identity not as outward circumcision but as περιτομὴ καρδίας (Dunn, 2018:123).

Legalistic tendencies manifest themselves in various ways within Kenyan Christianity. In some mainline settings, it can manifest as doctrinal rigidity, proceduralism, institutional conventions and inherited traditions that lose their connection with inward renewal and ethical life. It may be used in some SDA settings, in connection with Sabbath observance, dietary discipline, or doctrinal correctness, as evidence of covenant faithfulness in the absence of being transformed by the Holy Spirit. In certain Pentecostal/ Charismatic contexts, legalism can manifest in either a moralistic or a prosperity-based form. In both cases, the measure of legalism is whether the behaviour or the spiritual or financial expectations are evident (Knight, 2000:56; Gatu, 2022:39–45; Omenyo, 2021:5–8; Wamue, 2021:80). These self-selected examples together imply that

there is a possibility that visible religious conformity can at times be a substitute for covenant faithfulness through the Holy Spirit, and for an ethical transformation in the individual.

In this study, legalism refers to the habit of relying on rules, doctrinal correctness, institutional norms, or external conformity as a measure of spiritual authenticity, while neglecting inward renewal, grace-enabled obedience, and ethical integrity. Paul's criticism in Romans 2:17-24 is not of obedience itself but of confidence in religious possession or covenant privilege in the face of a lack of moral consistency (Dunn, 2018:97-99). Hence, legalism is not the fault of rules or doctrines, discipline, but of their use as substitutes for the transformation of the person, which is necessary for faithful public witness.

The example in Romans 2:25–27 reveals selective adherence to the Law. As a result, the privilege of guardianship of the covenant is celebrated and cherished, but its obligations are broken. Paul makes it clear that anyone who breaks the law is uncircumcised. In this context, *νόμος* ("law") refers specifically to the Torah, not to an abstract notion of law or to morality in general. Within Paul's argument, the Torah functions as the covenantal standard against which claims of covenant privilege and actual conduct are tested. This argument is particularly applicable to Christianity in Kenya, where legalism and moral selectivity are evident: strict observance of certain rules, customs, or denominational standards is combined with lax observance of the broader ethical requirements of the gospel. The theological concern is not obedience or zeal for holiness, but the separation of outward religious practice from inward obedience. The problem arises when visible practices are treated as sufficient signs of faithfulness without the inward, Spirit-enabled transformation they are intended to express.

Legalism is not simply "hard;" it is the perversion of righteousness, without the mediation of obedience, which is effected by grace. That *περιτομὴ καρδίας* is relevant here because it prevents obedience from becoming self–serving. The difficulty in Romans 2:25–27 is not that one abandons moral integrity, but that one recovers a single–minded and integrated obedience that is not detached from humility before God.

Romans 2:17–24 offers a scathing critique of religious legalism and the resulting moral inconsistency that dogged the Jewish community in Paul's day, with analogous patterns evident in certain aspects of modern Kenyan Christianity (Gathogo, 2008:260–262; Njoroge, 2019:45–47). In Kenya, legalism manifests in a manner parallel to Paul's in Romans 2. First, there is ritualism without transformation. Just as Jews relied on physical circumcision, many Kenyan Christians turn to external evidence of salvation: baptism, Holy Communion, prayer in the church or donating money, and ignore the issues of justice, mercy, and personal sanctity (Gathogo, 2013:45; Kuria, 2014:210). Second, denominational and ethnic pride reflects the ethnocentrism that Paul criticised, as some Christians see their denomination or tribal group as spiritually superior, creating divisions in the body of Christ (Njoroge, 2008:87; Kinyanjui, 2017:118).

Third, there is also the emergence of the so–called leadership legalism when church leaders prefer to view the church as a performance–driven organisation that equates material success or strict religiosity with divine approval, the appearance of traditions, dress code, or liturgy over discipleship, compassion, and moral purity; they effectively diminish the relevance of inner transformation (Gifford, 2009:68; Asamoah–Gyadu, 2013:77). Fourth is a type of legalism, which may be referred to as prosperity and performance mentality. In Kenya, there are churches that equate material blessings or strict religious performance with God's approval, rather than emphasising faith, grace, and Spirit–led change. Prosperity teaching leads to a performance culture in which material prosperity or religiosity is equated with, and/or substitutes for, God, thereby often misplacing the concepts of grace, faith, and being led by the Spirit (Ndeti, 2019:155).

Across Christian traditions, legitimate practices may become externalised markers of spiritual authenticity. In sacramental traditions, this may involve excessive reliance on formal participation (Gifford, 2009:68; Ndeti, 2019:164). In strongly regulated traditions, doctrinal or lifestyle conformity may become an external measure of spirituality (Kuria, 2014:210; Knight, 2000:127). In some Pentecostal and Charismatic settings, visible spiritual performances may assume similar significance (Gifford, 2009:112; Gathogo, 2011:127; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013:80; Anderson, 2004:112). None of these practices is inherently problematic. The problem arises

when the outward practice is detached from grace, inward renewal, ethical obedience, and Spirit-enabled covenant faithfulness. In Romans 2, Paul challenges this kind of confusion by warning against reliance on outward religiosity. This dependence substitutes the gospel with a corrupting message of grace and hinders internal change.

When interpreted as conformity to constitutions and liturgical rules, legalism has the capacity to promote purity of doctrines, stability, and strengthen the identity of the denominations. Despite the negative effects of legalism, strict adherence to canon law and sacramental discipline has promoted order, continuity, and moral responsibility in parish life and in the Roman Catholic context (Shorter, 1998:54; Valdrini, 2024; Gifford, 2009:60). In the ACK, there is order, pastoral responsibility and the worship practices which are supported by a governance structure and compliance to liturgical rubrics thereby strengthening a reformed identity (Njoroge, 2011:76). In the case of the PCEA, it is the constitutional oversight and session courts that maintain ethical leadership, theological orthodoxy, and order in the congregation (PCEA, 2012:14–18; Ndeti, 2019:164).

In the SDA church, the Sabbath–keeping, tithing, and dietary laws also help foster discipline, solidarity, and health consciousness among its members, thereby offering them a unique counter–culture witness (Knight, 2010:145). As a matter of fact, the church manual and 28 Fundamental Beliefs are well–structured guidelines that ensure theological clarity, ethical discipline, and mission–oriented identity (Seventh–day Adventist Church, 2018:45–48). Equally, the following in the Pentecostal/ Charismatic environments, where followers are defined by the official constitutions and practices like orderliness during worship and accountability in prophetic ministry, ensure the consistency of doctrine and collective identity (Anderson, 2004:78). Protective moral boundaries, particularly among the youth and the vulnerable groups, are provided by codes on modesty, prayer, and lifestyle even in the settings of the Pentecostal/ Charismatic Churches where spontaneity is the order of the day (Gathogo, 2011:119; Gifford, 2009:112).

Ecclesial discipline, the clarity of doctrine, orderly worship, and high moral standards do not make the church legalistic. They can help to build theological unity, moral development, and

collective identity. Where they are detached from grace and the renewal of the inner man, there is a problem. Paul does not dispense with obedience or religious discipline. He raises an objection to an outward regulation as the foundation of covenant identity, rather than to inner, Spirit-enabled faithfulness (Rom. 2:29; Schreiner, 2018:138; Dunn, 2018:122).

Romans 2 exposes the futility of legalism, especially where physical circumcision and conformity to the law are mistaken for true covenantal righteousness (Rom 2:17–29; Dunn, 2018:118; Moo, 2018:164; Cranfield, 2004:172; Schreiner, 2018:138). The nature of sacramental and ritual externalism is addressed extensively as Ritualism in the selected Kenyan Ecclesial contexts (as set out in Section 4.6). For the purposes of this study, sacramentalism denotes reliance on legitimate sacramental, liturgical, or symbolic practices as though participation in them were sufficient for salvation or divine favour apart from inward, Spirit-enabled transformation and covenant faithfulness. It reduces faith to ritual compliance and creates the impression that visible religiosity is salvific in itself (Adventist Biblical Research, 2005:4–5; Muindi, 2012:515; Church Society, 2020:3). Scholars also note that sacramentalism occurs where believers depend on ritual performance, such as the Eucharist, baptismal identity, liturgical accuracy, or charismatic manifestations, as substitutes for Spirit–empowered renewal (Delgado, 2022; Denis, 2019:102–103). Therefore, it distorts biblical spirituality by directing attention to outward appearances rather than inward faith and obedience.

These trends are also visible in selected expressions of Kenyan Christianity. Catholic sacramentalism may reduce liturgy to ritual conformity (Gifford, 2009:68), Anglican sacramentalism may emphasise form more than transformation (Ndeti, 2019:164), and the SDA's Sabbath observance and lifestyle practices may become external identity markers rather than expressions of inward renewal (Kuria, 2014:210; Knight, 2000:127). In Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, spectacular displays of anointing services, speaking in tongues, fasting or prosperity teaching may sometimes be promoted at the expense of grace and inner renewal (Gifford, 2009:112; Gathogo, 2011:127; Asamoah–Gyadu, 2013:80; Anderson, 2004:112). In each case, the visible religion risks displacing Spirit–enabled discipleship.

Paul's corrective phrase, περιτομὴ καρδίας, therefore gives covenant identity a renewed meaning as inward transformation through the Holy Spirit. This renewal produces genuine holiness and discipleship rather than ritualism (Rom 2:29; Dunn, 2018:124; Cranfield, 2004:175; Wright, 2013:412). Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας calls Christians across ecclesial traditions to prioritise inward transformation by the Spirit over merely external performance.

4.6 Ritualism in the Selected Kenyan Ecclesial Contexts

Ritual, as the symbolic and communal practice of repeated forms, is endemic to religious practice and is not the issue per se for this section. The problem is not ritual itself, but ritual when it is absolutised or separated from inward renewal, ethical obedience, and Spirit-enabled transformation. Morrill (2024) argues that Christian worship as symbol and ritual is always a matter of embodied practice. Equally, McNamara (2024) demonstrates that ritual is also a key social endeavour which creates cohesion and trust. What is at stake here, then, is not ritual as such but its abuse in external religiosity, which conceals inner emptiness and excludes faith. The emphasis of this section must be read in light of the theological logic of Romans 2:25. The covenantal rite is not rejected, but its value is inseparable from obedience. The problem arises when the outward sign is treated as sufficient in itself, or as a substitute for the inward, Spirit-enabled covenant renewal it is intended to embody. In this sense, Paul's argument is not an abandonment of visible expressions of worship, but rather a claim that they cannot maintain covenant faithfulness without being accompanied by the life of obedience in the power of the Spirit. Theology is distorted when the ritual form is maintained, but what it symbolises is disregarded.

Ritual externalism can manifest itself in various ways, depending on the ecclesial tradition in Kenyan Christianity. In some sacramental and liturgical traditions, the celebration of the Eucharist, Baptism, Confirmation, and other sacraments can become routine rather than a context for spiritual formation, ethical renewal, and inward devotion. Research on Eucharistic practice in the Anglican Church of Kenya, particularly in the Diocese of Thika, reveals that deep preparation, reverence, and theological formation are necessary for participation in the Eucharist (Kiariem and Joshua, 2016:295-320; Kiarie, 2017:439-456).

Published theological critiques identify a possible tension between routine sacramental participation and spiritual or ethical formation (Magesa, 1997:123). The concern is not the Eucharist itself. Nor is sacramental practice inherently problematic. The theological issue arises when ritual participation is detached from inward renewal and faithful conduct. Ritualism also occurs outwardly in charismatic and related African Initiated contexts through reliance on symbols, sacred objects, water rituals, sacred garments, anointing and prophetic utterances or visible spiritual manifestations if these take precedence over the process of inward transformation (Gifford, 2009:72-74; Katongole, 2017:99-101). The examples do not diminish the theological importance of ritual, but they point to the problem of ritual that occurs without renewal by the Spirit. In this way, the externalism of ritual is indicative of what Nthamburi calls a more serious problem of theological "shallowness" and ethical laxity in African Christianity (Nthamburi, 1991:45–46).

Ritualism, as such, is not a central concern in wa Gatumu's writings, but his discussion of primal religious resources and the interaction between gospel and culture helps to understand external religious performance without corresponding ethical or spiritual transformation (wa Gatumu, 2009; 2014:232–240). It helps explain why religious practices should be evaluated not only in terms of their cultural or ecclesial role, but also in terms of whether they foster inward renewal and credible Christian witness. In this study, this literature is used to support a Pauline critique (Romans 2:25-29): outward signs and religious practices become theologically distorted when they are not linked to obedience, inward renewal, and περιτομὴ καρδίας.

In the Kenyan context, this Pauline distinction allows Christians to avoid both ritualism and anti–ritualism. Liturgical form, the sacraments, and denominational devotional practices can all have their place in theology and ecclesiology. The issue is that they become absolute when treated as ends in themselves, especially when they are expected to serve as the basis for covenant assurances without ethical transformation. In Kenyan churches, this risk takes the form of treating baptism, Holy Communion, tithing, Sabbath or Sunday worship, or denominational practice as if they could be used to ensure spiritual authenticity without obedience, integrity, justice, and community love (Stott, 2001:112; Njuguna, 2016:101). At such points, Paul argues

that circumcision has value only when joined to obedience to the law (Rom. 2:25), while his teaching on περιτομὴ καρδίας (Rom. 2:29) provides a lens for analysing the misuse of Christian symbols today.

Although ritual externalism may appear different across Kenyan denominations, the danger of ritual theology remains the same. Studies of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Kenya further demonstrate the place of spiritual renewal within Catholic ecclesial life (Kibue, 2002:145–147). Shorter (1998:114), Gifford (2009:72, 74), Spear (2003:217), Nthamburi (1991:45-46) and Njoroge (2008:158) all point out that in some Roman Catholic, ACK and PCEA contexts, sacramental, liturgical and formal worship practices can become routine when they are averse to discipleship, inward renewal and moral transformation.

Sabbath observance, health discipline, and doctrinal identity may go beyond biblical, sacred boundaries and become externalised because they are not linked to Grace-Enabled Obedience and renewal (Knight, 2000:146; Gathogo, 2011:130). Within particular SDA settings, scholars have examined tensions between inherited cultural practices and Christian worship, including the implications of Luo ancestral-spirit veneration for Christian belief and practice (Otieno, Ayako & Kandago, 2021:35). In particular SDA congregations, intergenerational differences over traditional and contemporary forms of worship have raised questions about reverence and appropriate worship practice (Masimba, 2011:21).

In some Pentecostal and Charismatic contexts, repeated deliverance rituals, seed-giving practices, anointing with oil and ecstatic manifestations may become ritualistic when they substitute for inward transformation, moral formation, and ethical accountability (Anderson, 2004:81; Kalu, 2008:201; Gathogo, 2011:129; Parsitau, 2014:161–164). These examples show that ritualism is not confined to liturgical churches; it can appear wherever ceremonial religious behaviour is treated as a substitute for inner transformation. So, the problem is not whether a tradition is liturgical, but whether its visible acts still have the direction of Spirit-empowered obedience, moral integrity, and περιτομὴ καρδίας.

Ritual practice, however, can contribute positively to the Church's life and public witness when accompanied by personal transformation and the formation of an ethical conscience. Sacramental practice within the Roman Catholic context has led to solid communal identity, catechesis and reconciliation and provides embodiment of means of grace and continuity with the historic Christianity (Shorter, 1998:114; Gifford, 2009:61). The Book of Common Prayer and the ordered liturgy found in the ACK offer theological richness and training, which allow continuity of coherent faith over the generations (Njoroge, 2008:153). In some PCEA setups, ordered worship and ecclesial discipline can contribute to doctrinal clarity, pastoral responsibility and pastoral moral accountability in session courts and teaching elders (PCEA, 1998: *Articles* 2.2, 4.1 and 4.2; Njoroge, 2008:153; PCEA, 2012:6).

The observance of the Sabbath, health education, and structured worship within the SDA Church may positively contribute to whole-person discipleship, religious identity, mission consciousness, and a sustained service ethos (Knight, 2000:127; Nyabwari, 2016:112–114; Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2018:287–290; Ministerial Association, 2022:16–17). Religious identity, mission consciousness, a sustained service ethos, health education and structured worship within the Seventh-day Adventist Church can contribute positively to whole-person discipleship (Knight, 2000:127; Nyabwari, 2016:112–114; Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2018:287–290; Ministerial Association, 2022:16–17). They are not only denominational identifiers but practices that form and define time, body, worship, and mission around obedience to God at their best. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church (East Africa) Ltd *vs* Minister for Education & 3 others (2017) case, the Court of Appeal acknowledged the importance of Sabbath observance in the life of the SDA community and in the process of religious education. This is a good example of how visible practices can truly be in the service of faith formation when they go hand in hand with inner growth, rather than in place of it.

The Pentecostal and Charismatic practices of prayer vigils, prophetic ministry and anointing in Kenya provide empowerment to the believers, particularly the marginalised, by creating a space of spiritual release, mutual support, and social capital through networks of care; the practices mobilise commitment to spiritual things and at the same time enhance resilience and development of a community of faith (Anderson, 2004:78; Kalu, 2008:201; Gathogo, 2011:140;

Gathogo, 2022:10–12; Asamoah–Gyadu, 2013:126–127, 172). In sum, these are cross-cutting benefits of the sacraments, liturgies, denominational disciplines, and charismatic practices that point to a capacity to evoke collective memory, shape a moral life, and encourage social engagement. It shows that ritual, in concert with a transformation empowered by the Spirit, can be more than just religious ritual: it can be a means of discipleship and social stability.

To sum up, rituals as a whole in the Christian faith in Kenya are not the issue. Worship, identity, morality, and community can be served through sacraments, liturgies, observance of the Sabbath, denominational discipline, prayer, and charismatic expression. Theological risks arise when practices are used to generate a sense of spiritual authenticity or Christian maturity outside the context of obedience, justice, humility, love, and Spirit-enabled transformation (Jewett, 2007:220–223). Within the theological logic of Romans 2:24–29, ritualism is a form of external religiosity in which legitimate outward rites or practices are treated as sufficient markers of covenant faithfulness apart from the inward, Spirit-enabled renewal they are intended to express. Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας, therefore, challenges Kenyan Christianity to continue to maintain meaningful ritual practice while restricting all outward forms to the context of interior transformation, true discipleship, moral integrity, and faithful witness (Wright, 2002b:220; Schreiner, 2018:138; Dunn, 2018:122).

4.7 Ethnocentrism in the Selected Kenyan Ecclesial Contexts

The superficial idea of covenant identity is countered in Romans 2:28. Chapter Four uses this insight as the hermeneutical lens for viewing ethnicity as an analogue to external Jewish symbols. It is not ethnicity per se, nor the rejection of cultural identity, but the theological subversion that results from using ethnicity as a special identifier of faith, legitimacy, or church membership. In this sense, Paul's rejection of outer religiosity (Jewett, 2007:236; Wright, 2013:297–300) provides a lens for reading some forms of ethnicised Christian identity in Kenya. For this reason, this analysis does not rely on sociological stereotypes as legitimate characterisations of communities. Instead, it notes that ethnic narratives, loyalties, and exclusions can enter the life of the church and pervert covenant identity when they are allowed to become a pragmatic

measure of leadership, trust, or inclusion. In light of Romans 2:28, the theological point is that external religiosity, such as ethnic ones, cannot function to define Christians at all. Covenant identity is more than mere visible identity (Moo, 2018:175–176).

In the Kenyan context, ethnic identity may at times shape patterns of leadership, access to ecclesial resources, and church membership in ways that can be problematic for the church's mission. The theological problem is the substitution that occurs when ethnic identity is virtually understood to be a proxy for legitimacy and covenant identity, as reflected in Romans 2:28. In this respect, ethnocentrism is a distortion of Christian identity when visible communal identity begins to trump the final criterion of fidelity to God and unity of Christians (Mugambi, 2002:109; Nkonge, 2013:74–75).

Romans 2:28 challenges reducing covenant identity to the outward. This challenges any attempt to define covenant identity primarily through external markers. In the Kenyan context, this offers a theological approach to understanding ethnocentrism, not because ethnicity is inherently bad, but because ethnic identity might serve to become a privileged criterion of trustworthiness, leadership, legitimacy, and church membership. Recent Kenyan research confirms this fear. Gathogo's research on cross–cultural inclusivity at St Andrew's Kabare focuses on the need to appreciate the "other" in the church and theological education. Tarus's work on ethnic political conflict and the church's response in Kenya reveals how ethnic loyalties can skew Christian witness and community. Thus, the theological question is not about "cultural belonging" but about the displacement that occurs when the visible communal identity becomes more significant than the more substantial measure of union to God's body (Mugambi, 2002:109; Nkonge, 2013:74–75; Tarus, 2021; Gathogo, 2024).

While the available literature indicates that there is still an implication of ethnicisation in certain Kenyan ecclesial settings, one should not generalise the prevalence of ethnicisation in all denominations or congregations. Ethnic identity may affect leadership styles, institutional trust, and resource relations in some major Christian traditions in Kenya. This includes Roman Catholic, ACK, PCEA, SDA and Pentecostal/Charismatic contexts. Such dynamics are best understood in light of historical factors such as pre-colonial ethnic relations, uneven colonial

mission geography, unequal access to education, and post-independence political developments. While there have been several initiatives in Kenya to promote unity and reconciliation among churches, ethnicised patterns of belonging and leadership still persist in some churches. This section, therefore, examines ethnocentrism as a theological pattern rather than as an empirical assessment across all churches within the selected denominations in Kenya. The aforementioned areas are the focus of this section, with the ultimate aim of exploring how περιτομὴ καρδίας can be utilised as a remedy for ethnocentrism and for fostering stable ethnic relations among Christians in Kenya.

4.7.1 Historical Roots of the Ethnicisation of the Kenyan Church

Ethnicisation within church leadership in Kenya must be approached from a historical perspective. It is more appropriate to talk of the complex of factors that contributed to the mission location patterns and postcolonial institutional legacies, together with unequal access to education and regional political dynamics, which have created enduring patterns of inclusion and exclusion in ecclesial life (Mbugua, 2008:3–4). In this context, ethnic stereotypes that existed in Kenyan society have at times influenced ecclesial perceptions, leadership expectations, and trust among communities (Ndonye, Yieke and Onyango, 2016:45–47). This study does not accept such stereotypes as accurate representations of communities, but only notes them as social narratives that have seeped into church life, deformed Christian identity, and shaped attitudes towards and representation of communities in church leadership and community relations.

The ethnicisation of Christianity in Kenya is historical and is inextricably linked to missionary geography, colonial administrative geography, and regionally based church formation. These led to some overlap among denominational, congregational, ethnic, and/or regional identities. While not all churches in Kenya are ethnocentric, the historical context sheds light on the possibility of an ecclesial (church) identity with an ethnic overtone at times, which can compete with the gospel's inclusive mandate.

In Kenya, ethnocentrism is a long-standing practice shaped by socio–political systems that emerged before, during, and after colonisation. Ethnocentrism, which is the idea that one's ethnic group is superior to others, has had a strong hold on the Kenyan social, political, economic, and religious systems. Despite the occasional clashes on resources and land, before the colonial rule, Kenya had ethnic groups that existed together due to the trade, intermarriage, and cultural interactions (Ochieng, 1985:42). But through the British colonial administrative and economic burdens on select communities over others at the expense of others, the British colonialists began the policy of divide and rule, which increased ethnic tension (Mamdani, 1996:75). The ethnic lines have since then impacted the administration, allocation of resources, career, and even religious affiliations ever since the independence of the country in 1963 (Ghai and Cottrell, 2010:211). The colonial government also played a great role in the cause of the establishment of these divisions and the establishment of tribal politics in the post–independent world through its divide–and–rule policy that favoured some communities against others (Mamdani, 1996:75). To further entrench ethnic consciousness and ethnic rivalry, the colonial masters also structured political representation and land ownership on ethnic lines (Ogot, 1995:198).

After Kenya gained its independence in 1963, ethnocentrism continued to dominate the nation's politics, the education system, and the economy. The original government after independence was partial to the Kikuyu, the ethnic group of Jomo Kenyatta, in terms of government positions and land (Throup and Hornsby, 1998:134). Successive governments continued this pattern. Political parties were often organised along ethnic lines, thereby reinforcing discriminatory rule and ethnic-based voting behaviour (Branch, 2011:189). Ethnocentrism has therefore also contributed significantly to electoral violence in Kenya, where political leaders mobilised their people in tribal groups, resulting in numerous conflicts and migrations (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009:260). Ethnic alliances continue to determine political outcomes, and political parties are often perceived as serving ethnic interests rather than the country's advancement (Muigai, 2004:97).

Christian missionaries, both in the pre- and post–colonisation periods, inadvertently strengthened ethnic divisions in Kenya by establishing churches and schools along ethnic lines, linking denomination and ethnicity (Gifford, 2009:211). This has hampered the development of national

identity, favouring ethnic loyalty, a problem that persists in Kenya's religious, social, and political systems. Ethnicity is therefore still a driving force of identity in politics (ethnically affiliated parties and election violence), spirituality, economics, and social mobility (Kagwanja and Southall, 2009:260). Even in Christian institutions, leadership and congregations tended to be ethnically affiliated rather than ethnocentric, unified by national affiliation (Gifford, 2009:211).

Although ethnic diversity has affected Kenyan cultural practices, cultural practices such as languages and economic specialisation, Kenyan culture and the church are highly affected by ethnocentrism. To begin with, it has led to electoral violence and political instability. Since ethnicity has been highly influential in Kenyan democracy, elections are highly competitive and often violent. There were ethnic clashes after the 1992, 1997 and 2007 elections, leading to deaths and displacement (Odhiambo, 2012:87). Second, ethnocentrism has also led to marginalisation and economic differences. Ethnic affiliation may influence business opportunities, employment, and resource distribution, contributing to economic imbalances where some groups become associated with particular sectors (Kagwanja and Southall, 2009:260), as evidenced herein. What has followed is a lopsided allocation of resources, with some regions benefiting more because of government efforts and others remaining underdeveloped. J. Nyamweya (2013:38–39) affirms that such an economic discrepancy increases the level of ethnic antagonism and hostility. Third, ethnocentrism has destroyed social cohesion and national identity. For many Kenyans, their ethnic communities have proved more important than the country. This has caused social cohesion to become divisive and has undermined efforts to foster national unity (Mbugua, 2008:29). Fourth, conflicts or tensions inside the church and other religious institutions have been a direct result of ethnocentrism. Ethnic differences have also affected worship and leadership in the church, which is supposed to be a sanctuary of togetherness. Since most Kenyan denominations are associated with specific ethnic groupings, churches find it difficult to promote national reconciliation (Githiga, 2001:118).

At its worst, ethnocentrism in some Kenyan churches is associated with the colonial policy, missionary work, and socio–political dynamics. British colonial rule reinforced ethnic

differences by privileging some groups in matters of economic development, education, and administrative participation (Ochieng, 1985:212). The establishment of mission schools and mission stations that were built along ethnic lines by missionaries who sought to spread Christianity inadvertently created tribal divisions. This association led to the ethnicisation of the Christian faith, and a few of the denominations became more closely identified with one ethnic group or the other (Nandi, 2002:87).

Ethnocentrism in Kenya has enormously affected the formation of socio–political and religious organisations, including the Christian Church. Ethnocentric politics has been involved in conflict, rivalry, and marginalisation of different ethnic groups in the country, with the colonial and post–independence history of the country, without sparing the Church. These ethnocentric distinctions are evident in the composition of congregations, institutional decision–making, and church leadership structures. Accordingly, ethnocentrism in Kenyan churches may reflect wider social and political tensions, especially where ethnicity is used as a tool in power struggles (Kibicho, 2015:112). In agreement, P. Kinyanjui (2017:118) argue that religious organisations frequently reflect the nation's ethnocentric divisions rather than promoting inclusivity; instead, ethnocentrism, rivalry and partiality are promoted. Therefore, historical animosity and ethnic pride shape religious identity and interactions in the church. Concerning Kenya's historical context of ethnocentrism, the church's ethnocentrism was advanced by the colonial legacy and ethnic stratification.

The divide–and–rule policy of the British colonial government (1895–1963) laid the basis for ethnocentric stratification in the church, reflecting disparities in the political and economic advancement of different ethnic groups (Ogot, 1995:215). Even after independence, this system continued to deepen the ethnocentric divide and awareness. Mission stations were founded along ethnocentric lines by Christian missionaries, which strengthened tribe identity in the ethnocentric religious affiliation (Karanja, 2016:78). In the early 1900s, for example, the Adventist message reached Kenya, mostly among the Kisiis, Luos, and Kikuyus at Karura, which led to the Church's initial ethnic division (P. Sang, 2019: 41). Missionary activity in Kenya often developed along regional and ethnic lines, contributing over time to strong associations between particular churches and particular communities. For example, Adventism became especially prominent

among the Kisii, while Presbyterian and Anglican influence became strong among the *Agĩkũyũ* (Makori, 2013:93).

In Kenya, the Church is struggling with ethnic disintegration despite its quick growth and devotion to biblical teachings. Ethnocentric ties are frequently reflected in institutional representations and leadership appointments, as well as disputes over favouritism (Oluoch, 2015a:136). Some of the churches consist mainly of one ethnic group, which adds to the tensions and ethnocentrism instead of fostering unity (Mbugua, 2008:5). Worship customs, leadership styles and community ties are all significantly impacted by the pervasiveness of ethnocentrism, which is the tendency for people to place a higher value on their ethnic affiliations than on others. This has put the church's core Christian principles in jeopardy and has presented a serious obstacle to its aim of fostering inclusivity, love, and togetherness.

4.7.2 Ethnocentrism in the Selected Kenyan Ecclesial Contexts

Biblically, ethnocentrism may be defined as the glorification of ethnic or cultural identity as the foundation of spiritual or covenant authority. In Romans 2, Paul criticised Jews who used the custodianship of the Law and circumcision as evidence of superiority, and claimed that God could not favour anyone. However, the only true covenant identity was that of the circumcision of the heart through the Spirit, not the written code (Rom 2:11, 29; Dunn, 2018:118; Cranfield, 2004:172; Wright, 2002e:465). From a social–scientific perspective, ethnocentrism refers to the tendency to regard one's ethnic group as central and to evaluate others from that standpoint (Sumner, 1906:13). The in–group favouritism enhances unity but creates prejudice (Hofstede, 2001:45) whereas cultural tendencies to evaluate other people using personal criteria tend to result in marginalisation or incomprehension (Triandis, 1995:34). All these views collectively emphasise that theological and sociological approaches are aware of the risks of group identity overvaluation, be they in terms of covenantal or social legitimacy and that transformation facilitated by the Spirit and objectivity are necessary.

Negative ethnicity can manifest in church membership, leadership, resource distribution, and institutional appointments (wa Gatumu, 2019:194–195). Similar patterns have also been noted

across various church contexts, including Protestant, Catholic, African-instituted, and Pentecostal/Charismatic traditions (Gathogo, 2022:1–2; Makhanu and Kithinji, 2024:82–95). These examples should be understood as theological patterns found in literature, and not as exhaustive empirical statements about all congregations of every denomination. Ethnocentrism is a recurring theme in the theological writings from Africa (Kenya) that threatens the ecclesial identity, leadership, belonging, and Christian unity. These studies have revealed that ethnicity can have a negative impact on leadership identification, resource allocation, church participation and relationships of power in some African and Kenyan church settings (Nthamburi, 1991:44 – 46; Shorter, 1999:28 – 29; Kamara, 2010:135; wa Gatumu, 2019:194 – 195; Makhanu and Kithinji, 2024:82 – 95). Theologically, this concern is important because ethnic identity will supersede the inclusive covenant identity created by the gospel. Given Romans 2:24-29, these patterns are similar to the danger of external identity markers displacing covenant faithfulness, and the reversal of the understanding of covenant identity—from outward to inward—is a theme found in the περιτομὴ καρδίας, which is covenant identity oriented toward inward transformation by the Spirit and Spirit-formed unity.

Shorter (1999:28–29) observes: "the church has become a victim and an accomplice of ethnocentrism." This observation is useful as a comparative lens to view the ecclesial realities in Kenya. The church has been critiqued strongly as the 'birthplace of negative ethnicity' in Kenya; as 'ethnically polarized;' in some contexts as 'unable to transcend their ethnic identities' (Nyaundi, 2015:57; Kamara, 2010:135). The descriptions do not reflect an opinion about every congregation or denomination. Instead, they are theological and contextual critiques of the risk that ethnic identity can supplant covenant identity. In particular, this problem is manifested in church life in Kenya as wa Gatumu (2019:194) observes:

> Unfortunately, negative ethnicity is also rife in Kenyan churches… In fact, the tendency to manipulate ethnic identities prevails in all Christian churches like in political circles. A person not belonging to an ethnic group in a region where the Church is confined does not qualify for leadership. The loyalty of church leaders usually stops within their ethnic groups rather than the Christian faith.

wa Gatumu's observation, along with the other studies cited herein, is important for the present study. This is because it shows how ethnic loyalty can displace covenant identity and produce

the kind of outward confidence in identity that Paul contests through περιτομὴ καρδίας in Romans 2:28–29. Makhanu and Kithinji's reading of Luke 3:23–38 through Social Identity Theory also supports this point by showing how Christ-centred identity challenges ethnic exclusivism and offers a biblical alternative to identity based on ethnic superiority (Makhanu and Kithinji, 2024:82–95). Thus, ethnocentrism within Kenyan Christianity is not only a sociological issue but also a theological concern, since ethnic identity may compete with the inclusive covenant identity formed by the gospel. In light of Romans 2:24–29, such patterns mirror the danger of external identity markers replacing covenant faithfulness in Christ. Through περιτομὴ καρδίας, Paul offers a way to rethink ecclesial identity beyond ethnic superiority toward Spirit-formed unity, where covenant identity is reoriented from outward markers of belonging to inward, Spirit-enabled transformation of the heart. The following denominational examples are therefore framed by this literature, which situates ethnocentrism within the wider problem of identity formation in the church.

The ethnocentric concerns are important because ethnocentrism in Kenyan Christianity is more than just a political or social issue that occurs away from the church. Published sources indicate it could be a factor in the appointment of leaders in the church, the makeup of congregations, denominational affiliation, and interdenominational relationships, resource allocation, and also governance structures (Oluoch, 2015a:136; Lee, 2000:14; Kamara, 2010:135, 140; Wosyanju, 2015:55–64; Wandera, 2016:783–793; Gitau, 2018:92). Although Galatians 3:28 affirms unity in Christ, some Kenyan ecclesial contexts seem to reflect wider socio-political ethnic divisions within church life. The theological question in this study is not one of ethnicity per se but of the prioritisation of ethnic identity over covenant identity, which Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας in Romans 2:24-29 critiques.

For example, although the Roman Catholic Church, one of the oldest Christian organisations in Kenya, has a fairly diverse ethnic membership, historical missionary activity has shaped ethnocentric affiliations within the church. Some missionary groups concentrated on particular ethnic communities, thereby resulting in a regional concentration of Catholic followers (Oluoch, 2015a:134). For example, there are many Catholics in the Luhya and Kisii communities in Western and Nyanza, Kenya, respectively. Central Kenya, which is dominated by the Kikuyu

community, is characterised by a more balanced number of Catholics and Protestants. In the Catholic Church, local governance and leadership selection are hierarchically structured. In some contexts, this structure may still be affected by ethnocentric influences in internal processes and representation, despite efforts to overcome ethnic divisions (Gifford, 2009:78–79, 211). For instance, there is evidence that ethnic preference impacts some aspects of ecclesial leadership and appointment processes. Gifford (2009:114) reports ethnic preferences regarding certain episcopal or clerical appointments in particular Kenyan dioceses. The observation is historically situated and context-specific. It does not imply that Catholic appointments in Kenya generally follow ethnic criteria. This can weaken the local authority of non-local priests and create silent hostility and opposition, which is antithetical to what Paul envisions: a spirit–shaped identity (Rom 2:29).

Second, regarding Protestant churches, Kenyan Pentecostal, and Charismatic Churches, such as the Redeemed Gospel Church, Deliverance Church, and the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya, have experienced tremendous expansion and growth, particularly among the country's urban populace of diverse ethnicities. Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are decentralised and heterogeneous; nonetheless, ethnic aggregation is observed in many of them. These churches are not immune to ethnocentrism, though. Their congregations frequently exhibit ethnocentric lines, and many of them are created and run by people from certain ethnic origins. More frequently, pastors establish their churches where members of their ethnic group prevail, and the language, music and social networks support these boundaries (Anderson, 2004:173). It is unfortunate that the Kamba–led churches in Nairobi, Luo–led ministries, and Kikuyu–dominated fellowships can be found living in the same neighbourhood, yet barely interact with one another in joint worship or assembly-leader forums (Gitau, 2018:117).

Some churches, for instance, have services in their mother tongues or preach in culturally relevant ways, and they primarily draw members from the ethnic populations. Since many founders and senior pastors train leaders from their own ethnic backgrounds, these churches' leadership structures frequently perpetuate ethnocentric representation, which hinders cross–ethnic integration (Gifford, 2009:81), thus promoting ethnocentrism. The charismatic churches tend to be ethnically affiliated with their founders and can seldom expand outside of ethnic lines

(Anderson, 2004:173). In asserting Spirit's power, such churches are tempted to provide implicit ethnic separationism, without which they need an inner transformation Paul speaks of in Romans 2:29.

Third, one of the largest native Protestant groups in Kenya, the AIC, is well–known for its extensive impact and presence. The roots of the church can be seen in the early evangelisation efforts, which were particularly successful among the Kalenjin and Maasai populations (Mbugua, 2008:6). These ethnic groups became the core of the church's membership and leadership, thereby gradually shaping the church's identity. With Kalenjin and Maasai leaders occupying important positions, the AIC's leadership structure has remained consistent with its initial ethnic makeup despite its growth throughout Kenya. Since non–Kalenjin and non–Maasai members frequently have difficulty integrating into leadership roles, this has given rise to suspicions of ethnic favouritism. These views have occasionally led to conflict, especially when it comes to church leadership changes, resource distribution, and decision–making (Ndonye, Yieke and Onyango, 2015:49). However, the AIC continues to be an important religious organisation that actively promotes community development, education, and spiritual advancement among many Kenyan communities.

Fourth, despite its national reach, ethnocentrism in the ACK manifests in leadership wrangles, congregational preferences, and structural imbalances based on missionary (CMS) concentration in Central Kenya where communities like the Meru, Embu, and Kikuyu acquired privilege access to evangelistic and educational activities, mission schools, seminaries, and clerical appointments which provided them with ethnic advantage in church leadership in the long–term (Githiga, 2001:13; Mbugua, 2008:4; Nkonge, 2013:74–75; Kagema, 2016:172–174). As a result, the church has also been perceived as primarily Kikuyu, with Kikuyu bishops and archbishops holding important positions for long periods (Ndonye, Yieke and Onyango, 2015:45–47; Githiga, 2001:118). This perceived ethnocentric superiority has sometimes led to tensions, particularly when it concerns change in leadership as well as the allocation of resources among the dioceses. David Mukuba Gitari (2005:88) notes many occasions when ethnic lobbies often override theological competence in the process of selecting bishops.

Senior ACK leaders have also condemned tribalism in both national and ecclesial life. Archbishop Jackson Ole Sapit, for example, described tribalism as a curse (The Star, 2023), while Bishop David Gitari repeatedly warned against the entry of tribalism into the church (Gitari, 1989:15, 40; Gifford, 2009:120–123). Notwithstanding this, the church is struggling with the extent to which ethnocentrism has permeated its systems. Consequently, the elections of the bishops have become more ethnic, and synods are likely to take place on tribal lines (Gitari, 2005:61). How much ethnic politics has invaded church institutions remains a problem, with ethnocentrism appearing as an 'ugly head' in episcopal contests (like the 1996 archbishop election) and within dioceses like Mombasa (Osanjo, 2017; Osanjo, 2018; Ndarwa, 2022:77).

This tendency of exclusivity of others that ends up in court battles, besides the media's blasphemous title: "Why wrangles are ugly part of ACK's bishops elections" (Osanjo, 2018), is what the principle of περιτομὴ καρδίας directly opposes. Paul's theological views in Romans 2:24–29 are a critique of superficial religion. This is because he believed that true covenantal faithfulness was not the superficiality of valuing outward signs or ethnic identity. The fact that he places so much emphasis on περιτομὴ καρδίας demonstrates that true covenant identity is attained through an inner change of character. So, it necessitates the ACK to undergo a series of structural and spiritual reforms to be impartial, transparent, and even truly universal.

Fifth, similarly, the PCEA, which emerged from Scottish Presbyterian missionaries who evangelised mostly in Central Kenya, has a close ethnic bond with the Kikuyu people. Such ethnic concentration has also affected the church's membership, leadership, and even its worship. In most churches, services are often conducted in Kikuyu (Gitari, 2011:112). Though with mission and educational influence, PCEA has been viewed as a Kikuyu church because of the historical and demographic influence of the Kikuyu population among church members (Githieya, 1997:213).

This reputation, however, disputed within the country, has not allowed it to attract the country at large and other ethnic nationals. This attribution of PCEA to the Kikuyu has contributed to minimal cross-ethnic interaction in leadership, mission activities, and priorities. In certain synods, it is found that elders and pastors face marginalisation or underrepresentation as they

belong to minority tribes. This is contrary to the non–discriminatory aspect of the gospel, and it will alienate non–Kikuyu Christians in the church (Githieya, 1997:213). Due to ethnocentric attitudes and tendencies within the PCEA, the non–Kikuyu members feel excluded because, despite the church's expansion into new areas, Kikuyus still hold a huge majority of its leadership positions (Gifford, 2009:79).

Sixth, ethnocentrism and its manifestations in the Kenyan SDA Church are also evident. The mobilisation of support along tribal lines by political leaders in Kenya, which followed the independence of the country in 1963, led to a highly ethnicised political environment in Kenya (Ajulu, 2002:33). The same situation was true of religious organisations, where institutional growth, distribution of resources, and election of church leadership were influenced by ethnicity. National ethnic politics were often reflected in the appointment of church leaders depending on the tribal affiliation (Oluoch, 2015a:136). In the 1970s and 1980s, SDA leadership elections at the local, regional, and national levels were marred by allegations of ethnic favouritism, leading to conflicts and factionalism within the church (Mbugua, 2008:112). The SDA institutions, including schools, administrative centres and hospitals, may have reinforced regional and ethnic patterns of affiliation, sometimes contributing to the visibility of particular ethnic groups within church structures (Nyaundi, 1993:73).

Although SDA membership is unevenly distributed among ethnic groups, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is among the growing Christian traditions in Kenya. However, some groups are more represented in the church than others, such as the Luo and Kisii (Nyaundi, 1993:58). Some SDA administrative territories overlap with regions where particular ethnic communities are numerically prominent. This has prompted questions about representation, leadership, and institutional trust (Owino, 2020:89). Such regional concentration does not, by itself, demonstrate ethnocentrism. Despite being more diverse, urban churches still tend to draw members based on their comfort and familiarity with other ethnic groups, thereby perpetuating ethnically based worship practices (Mwaura, 2005:189). This could promote ethnocentrism.

In obedience to the Great Commission given by Christ to spread the gospel throughout the world (Matt. 28:18–20) and to prepare believers for His glorious return (Eph. 5:27; 1 Thess. 5:23), the

SDA Church has committed itself to proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to "every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (Rev. 14:6; Ministerial Association, 2022:173). Such a mission should challenge ethnocentrism within the church itself. Notice (2024:59) observes that, although the Adventist Church is "one of the most ethnically diverse churches within North America," many congregations remain segregated along racial and ethnic lines. This is a North American reflection only as a comparative illustration, reflecting the possibility of diversity living harmoniously with segregation in a global church. However, the current argument must be based on the specific sources in the Kenyan SDA context where it has been revealed that ethnicity or region at times played a role in shaping debates on leadership, deployment, institutional trust and representation in some of the SDA structures (Mwaura, 2005:189; Nyaundi, 1993:73; G. K. Sang, 2019; Mbugua, 2008:112; Owino, 2020:89).

Kenya's main newspapers have persistently published blasphemous articles about the SDA church. For example, the Sunday Standard published an article headed "Massive corruption alleged in church" on April 10, 1988. The anonymous author claimed that the Kenyan SDA Church was "threatened by corruption, tribalism and nepotism…" (1988:2). The situation in the church has persisted for many years. This state of affairs has locked the church in persistent wrangles to date, as demonstrated by Nyaboga Kiage's (Sunday Nation, September 14, 2025) article entitled *SDA Church Members file Fresh Case*: "The church has had wrangles for many years, with boardroom wars spilling on the altar where members have exchanged blows on some occasions."

The Kenyan Adventist Church's alleged inclination toward ethnocentrism has been linked in the literature to employment, deployment, scholarship allocation, and leadership representation. Disgruntled with ethnocentrism in the SDA mainstream church, dissenters organised a splinter group and registered it as the Nairobi Cosmopolitan Conference (NCC), according to an article published in *The Standard* newspaper on 15 April 2019. G. K. Sang (2019) provides employment data from SDA entities CKC, CRVC, SEKF, and SKC to support the SDA church's position that the Kisii community has not been marginalised as the NCC alleged. According to G. K. Sang (2019), there was no marginalisation of Kisii people regarding deployment to Nairobi and Kajiado stations, as 29 (36%) of the 80 pastors engaged by CKC in 2019 were Kikuyu and 22

(28%) were Kisii. In the same year, CKC had 33 elected and appointed office holders: ten Kikuyu (30%), six Kisii (18%), six Kamba (18%), five Meru, four Luo, one Giriama and one Luhya. G. K. Sang (2019) also provides employment statistics for some SDA entities, indicating that staffing patterns in CKC, CRVC, and SEKF were concentrated among a few ethnic categories.

The above-mentioned data do not in themselves constitute evidence of ethnocentrism. They may reflect population characteristics, location, institutional history, the availability of workers, or other administrative factors. For this reason, they do not form the basis for a firm conclusion here. They are important because they demonstrate how ethnic representation can enter internal church negotiations about fairness, deployment, leadership, and institutional trust. Romans 2:28–29 does not treat ethnicity itself as the problem; the issue is the possibility that ethnicity may become a badge of membership, confidence or access that displaces spiritual identity grounded in covenant renewal.

Concerning leadership of the SDA church, to refute NCC's claims of marginalisation against Kisii people, G. K. Sang (2019) turns to the three Kisii conferences and argues that main leaders have nearly always been selected from the Kisii community: the South Kenya Conference (SKC), which was founded in 1953; the Nyamira Conference (NC), which was formed from the SKC in 1995; and the South East Kenya Field (SEKF). Maasai, Kipsigis, and Kuria communities live in the areas of Trans Mara and Narok, which are comprised in the territorial area of the South Kenya Conference. But both as field pastors and leaders in the office, these populations are hardly represented in the conference leadership. All 30 of SKC's pastors, along with the 10 Bible educators and the other 10 contract employees, were from the Kisii community at that time. There were nine Kisii persons and one Maasai in the conference leadership. In fact, since 1969, the SKC has had only one non–Kisii as the head, a Maasai named Pr. Joseph Parmanyari, and for only one year (2015). While it can be argued that G. K. Sang's data contradict NCC's allegation of the marginalisation of the Kisii people, it may also raise questions about ethnic concentration, diversity, inclusion, and representation within some SDA structures. The point here is not to demonstrate ethnocentrism from these statistics, but rather to illustrate that ethnic issues were an important part of internal SDA discourse.

Published studies and internal debates raise concerns about the possible influence of ethnicity on leadership, deployment, resource allocation, and representation within some SDA structures in Kenya (Oluoch, 2015a:136; Wambugu, 2021:33; Owino, 2020:89; P. Sang, 2019:74). Related studies discuss leadership concentration, minority inclusion, and the role of ethnic connections in perceptions of representation (Kibicho, 2015:122–123; Nyaga, 2011:55–56; Mutiga, 2013:145). These observations are context-specific and should not be generalised to SDA leadership in Kenya as a whole. The theological issue is whether affiliation with an ethnic group can be a source of privilege or exclusion, thereby challenging the church's avowed position of unity and equality.

In summation, the Kenyan examples above indicate that ethnocentrism poses a theological problem when ethnic identity is seen as more important than covenant identity. Ethnicity is not the problem in itself because it is a social construct of human existence, but the absolutising of ethnicity as a superior marker of trust, leadership, belonging, or access. That is how tribal loyalty and ethnocentrism become dangerous: when it triggers the "exaltation of that tribe above other peoples" (Musvosvi, 2010:45) and gives people the freedom to treat outsiders as inferiors (Nothwehr, 2008:5; Onyancha, 2022:97). In this case, ecclesial identity is skewed, and the unity of the church in Christ is undermined. Such ethnocentrism is similar to what is seen in Romans 2:24-29, where the danger is that outward signs of identity replace covenant fidelity. Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας, then, offers a theological framework for envisioning Kenyan ecclesial identity as Spirit-created, covenantal, and inclusive, rather than ethnically maintained.

4.7.3 Effects of Ethnocentrism on the Selected Kenyan Ecclesial Contexts

Ethnocentrism significantly affects the African Church, especially in Kenya, by creating divisions that weaken Christian unity and hinder mission across congregational composition, leadership structures, theological interpretation, worship practices, and interdenominational relations. Most of the time, the ruling ethnic groups take over leadership roles at the expense of minority groups; therefore, majorities split as ethnic identity prevails over doctrines and denominational allegiance, which the Bible discourages through unity in Christ (Gal. 3:28; Rom. 2:28–29). The Church's capacity to establish new united communities in Kenya is undermined

by ethnocentrism. D. Waruta (1992:6) affirms: “most religious groups and denominations, closely scrutinised, are very ethnic in their composition and leadership. Those that happen to be multi–ethnic with a national outlook are plagued with internal [interethnic] conflicts.”

Accordingly, ethnocentrism is a problem that affects and causes conflict in both the political and church spheres. Ethnic tensions in politics often find their way into ecclesial conflicts. When church officials are chosen or appointed along such lines, the process may reflect political loyalties more than ecclesial discernment, leading to spiritual stagnation and weakening the church’s integrity and witness. The answer to these dilemmas is that religious institutions should actively work to encourage inclusivity, intercultural dialogue, and theological doctrines which value unity in Christ more than tribal affections, and that the African church has a significant role to play in eradicating ethnic bigotry by building diverse leadership, encouraging intercultural communication and designing institutions to cross ethnic borders to achieve true Christian fellowship based on biblical values and not ethnic devotion.

The ethnocentrism experienced in the Kenyan Catholic context has been the cause of resistance to non–local clergy, especially where the local ethnicities are the majority in dioceses. For example, clergy from outside the Kisii community have reportedly faced rejection and alienation within the Kisii Diocese, undermining their pastoral work and weakening trust between clergy and laity (Gifford, 2009:114). Priests belonging to other ethnic groups are not welcome in some dioceses, and some are even very gently evicted, an act that discourages clerical solidarity (Gifford, 2009:114). This has caused ethnological pockets in a church that has been supposed to be an example of multi–ethnicity (catholicity), eroding the capacity of a church to exemplify ethical proselytism.

In some ACK contexts, ethnocentrism has been reflected in the politicisation of episcopal elections, in which ethnic loyalty may overshadow spiritual qualifications and ecclesial discernment. This may be seen in some diocesan contexts, such as Kirinyaga and Embu, where synod processes have reportedly been marked by ethnic fragmentation, post-election disputes, and factionalism (Gitari, 1989:59–61). Bishopric positions have been contested on ethnic grounds and hence even among the clergy and lay leaders there exists division on ethnic lines

(Gitari, 1989:61). These divisions will not only cause a lack of trust in the processes of the church, but also negatively affect governance and discipleship of the church as leaders are reduced to serving the interests of their ethnic group as opposed to seeing them through the lens of biblical vision.

The close ties that PCEA has with the Kikuyu have been abhorrent to other non–Kikuyu believers, especially in western Kenya and coastal regions. In congregations that exist, the non–Kikuyus perceive themselves as marginalised in decision–making and leadership positions. The church has not been attractive and has not spread in the non–Kikuyu–dominated regions due to ethnic dominance (Githieya, 1997:214). This not only aborts the growth of the churches across the ethnic boundary but also nurtures the notion that Christianity is a tribal project, rendering its gospel witness weak.

Quite a few Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are established along tribal lines, though not necessarily deliberately, and they support ethnic groupings. For example, a pastor who is Luo can have most of his congregants be Luos and conduct the service in Dholuo, or a pastor who is Kikuyu can have most of his congregants be Kikuyus and conduct the service in Gĩgĩkũyũ. This has also created similar ethnic congregations in the same urban lands, where there are inter–ethnic interactions (Anderson, 2004:173; Gitau, 2018:117). Language and ethnic identity may become bases for membership, resulting in segmented Christian fellowships that do not reflect the Church's universal nature (Gitau, 2018:117). Such segregation damages reconciliation among ethnic communities and compromises the Church's witness as a national agent of unity.

Ethnic lobbying has resulted in the development of ethnically homogenous units in the SDA Church. In August 1998 was the time when current large territories were divided into ethnically based conferences like CKC in the Kikuyu land and SKC in the Gusii territory (Owino, 2020:90). Ethnicity in the organization of the administrative unit brings segregation and denominational tribalism (Owino, 2020:90). This has resulted in competition for resources, political campaigns at church elections and spiritual laxity among the members, where emphasis is laid on ethnic representation rather than on the mission.

Consequently, the most evident consequences of ethnocentrism are the conflict and division among the members of the SDA Church. Ethnocentric groupings may become more devoted to their own group than to the spiritual unity the church demands, as they compete for power, leadership, and cultural representation. The social fabric and sense of unity in the body of Christ are weakened by widening ethnic division in church communities (Mutiga, 2013:153). Ethnocentrism, for example, fuelled political polarisation both within and outside the church. Rather than acting as impartial arbiters, church leaders opted to adopt politically driven, ethnocentric positions.

During the post–election violence in 2007–2008, several Christian leaders were accused of supporting their ethnic communities rather than calling for peace (Gifford, 2009:204; Oluoch, 2015b:45). After linking Christianity to the 2007–2008 post–election violence in Kenya, A. L. Ekitala and M. G. Wosyanju (2015:55) assert: "…The entire nation experienced the twin evils of ethnicity and impunity, which breed all manner of evils and corruption that characterise our society today. Yet, amid all these, the big question was 'where was the church?' – 'Why didn't the church act swiftly to curb the negative ethnicities early enough?'" The moral authority of the church is seriously compromised since it is a binding institution.

Similarly, ethnocentrism has had an impact on the cultural diversity of worship rituals in the SDA Church. Language and cultural practices play a huge role in worship practices. Linguistic minorities are sometimes left out in the use of ethnic language in services (Kinyanjui, 2017:120). Even though the church uses elements of culture to attract many groups, it can also be used to further create tension in terms of ethnocentrism. Exclusion is often caused by the dominance of the customs of one culture over another. Other members who do not speak the main language, such as Dholuo, can feel alienated when ethnic languages are used in worship services. Kinyanjui also states that the use of major ethnic languages in worship makes ethnocentric divisions even tighter as non–speaking people become alienated. This exclusion hinders the ability of ethnocentric members of the church to engage in worship due to the resulting lack of prospective fellowship (Kinyanjui, 2017:120, 122).

In addition, ethnocentrism also affects the representation of different ethnocentric groups in church leadership. A hierarchical structure is produced by the concentration of power in the hands of a small number of ethnic groups, where leadership is seen as determined more by ethnicity than by ability or spiritual background (Nyaga, 2011:60). In Kenya, which is a diverse context, it defines the leadership, membership, and worship patterns (Kinyanjui, 2017:118). People from underrepresented groups feel marginalised and underappreciated as a result of cycles of exclusion that are sustained by this lack of inclusive leadership. Besides, ethnocentrism has impacted the church's organisational structures. Even while the SDA Church emphasises oneness in Christ in accordance with Galatians 3:28, church governance, just as worship and language use, is shaped by ethnocentric identities (Onyango, 2010:92). Ethnocentrism, the belief in one's own group's superiority, affects church governance, decision–making, and worship (Mutiga, 2013:145). While certain ethnic groups place more value on personal religious displays and Christ–like character, others place more emphasis on communal customs that influence church governance and decision–making (Makokha, 2018:211).

In addition to the foregoing, views on church governance, church discipline, fellowship, and worship styles are influenced by ethnocentric identification, which frequently results in doctrinal disputes among congregations (Nyaga, 2011:64). The entrenchment of ethnic identity within the church set–up threatens the doctrinal interpretations of foundational Christian values of unity, love, and inclusion. As argued so far, the SDA Church promotes the idea that believers are one body in Christ, transcending ethnic and cultural boundaries (Galatians 3:28). Ethnocentrism challenges the church's status as a moral and spiritual authority. It also contradicts the biblical teachings on equality, love, and unity (John 13:34–35, Romans 12:4–5). This implies that, in some SDA contexts in Kenya, ethnocentric allegiance may weaken the biblical ideals of unity and inclusivity (Kamara, 2010a:127). Consequently, ethnic groups have shaped biblical interpretations, leadership, and congregational relations as well as the missionary spread, as the church cannot fully realise its missionary mandate to reach everyone regardless of ethnicity (Nyaga, 2011:60).

Furthermore, ethnocentrism greatly affects the SDA Church's evangelistic efforts. Ministerial Association (2022: 26) insists: "Our mission remains unchanged wherever we find ourselves in

the world. The Seventh–day Adventist Church has been organized for the purpose of mission." The Church's primary mission is to spread the gospel in the context of Revelation 14:6 and make disciples of all nations, as greatly commissioned by Jesus in Matthew (28:19–20). The SDA church's mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to "every nation, tribe, language and people" (Rev. 14:6) (Ministerial Association, 2022:173). Ethnocentrism is one of the major factors affecting the SDA Church in Kenya, as it influences the church's ability to make effective evangelism and mission work. According to K. Nkonge (2013:56), evangelism is negatively affected by ethnic tensions because some view the SDA Church as a continuation of ethnocentric supremacy instead of a global religion of all countries, tribes, languages, and individuals. This is also supported by R. Nyaga (2011:64), who claims that ethnically based evangelism restricts the gospel and sabotages the mission to reach all nations.

In the end, this inability to unite the various groups compromises the mission of the church to evangelise people and become credible in fostering Christian unity (Mugambi, 2002:51). In the end, this inability to embrace the different groups of people discredits the church in its evangelistic mission and its ability to propagate Christian unity (Mugambi, 2002:51). The failure to prioritise unity over ethnocentric loyalty has compromised the ability of the church to act as an agent of unity, stable ethnic relations, peace, and reconciliation. Ethnocentrism within the SDA church seriously jeopardises the church's mission, a fact that the church openly concedes. Seventh–day Adventist Church (2018:209) admittedly teaches: "Without unity, the church will fail to accomplish its sacred mission. Unity Makes the Church's Efforts Effective. Where there are dissensions and conflicts in the world, the love and unity of the members of the church, with their various personalities, temperaments, and dispositions, speak more powerfully to the world than anything else. The question here is what steps has the SDA church taken to minimise ethnocentrism in the church.

To sum up, the discussion of literature revealed that ethnocentric loyalties are associated with leadership tension, feelings of exclusion, lack of trust among the ethnic groups and difficulties in public Christian witness in some ecclesial settings in Kenya. There are denominational and congregational variations in these patterns. As a result, they cannot be generalised as Christianity in Kenya.

4.7.4 Pauline Implications for Overcoming Ethnocentrism

The problem of ethnocentrism is not just a sociological and administrative matter in some churches in Kenya; it's a theological issue. Within the theological logic of Romans 2:28–29, it becomes problematic to treat ethnic, denominational, or regional identities as grounds for superiority, exclusion, entitlement, or privileged belonging. Such reliance on outward identity markers stands in tension with Paul's location of authentic covenant identity in inward, Spirit-enabled renewal and divine approval. As a result, a Pauline interpretation of Romans 2:24-29 is not just an emphasis on ethnic equilibrium; it is an inward covenant renewal, a unity of the spirit and a credible public witness to God's people. Ethnocentrism, then, needs to be dealt with in ways other than administrative balancing and ethnic representation. While these may be beneficial, Paul's remedy is a transformation of the inward covenant, not ethnic privilege. For this reason, the theological framework of περιτομὴ καρδίας provides a spiritual basis for reimagining leadership, belonging and unity as realities formed and made visible by the Spirit.

Published literature indicates that Kenyan churches have tried to address ethnocentrism through multi-ethnic clergy, ethnically diverse congregations, intercultural fellowship, theological education, leadership representation, and reconciliation initiatives. Indeed, they help foster harmony in the church and minimise outward signs of exclusion, but they can't do so without inward transformation. In Romans 2:24–29, the more fundamental question is not whether churches are ethnically balanced, but whether ethnic identity is subordinated to covenant identity through the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, denominational strategies are theologically good insofar as they help the broader Pauline goal of renewal in the inward man, covenantal inclusiveness, and the honour of God's name.

From a Roman Catholic perspective, responses to ethnocentrism can be linked to the Church's catholic vision of universality, which transcends ethnic identity. Overall, research on mainline churches in Kenya suggests deliberate ethnic mixing in the churches' organisational structures to reduce negative ethnicity (Ekitala and Wosyanju, 2015:55-65). Such practices can help to lessen ethnic "othering" and foster wider ecclesial inclusion. From Romans 2:24-29, however, these acts are theologically sufficient if they are based on renewing the person from within rather

than on universal institutions. The Pauline concern is that visible catholicity needs to be accompanied by a covenant faithfulness that does not overlook ethnic preferences.

In the Anglican Church of Kenya, various initiatives, including clergy interchange, common theological training, synodical cooperation and post-conflict reconciliation programmes, have aimed at reducing ethnic divisions and promoting ecclesial unity (Gathogo, 2011:121; Githiga, 2001:133; Wamue, 2010:91). These efforts are significant because ethnocentrism can manifest itself in leadership struggles, diocesan identity, and regional loyalty. However, Romans 2:24-29 goes beyond mere representation. The question that is greater than the Pauline one is whether leadership, fellowship, and ecclesial belonging are subject to ethnic loyalty or to the covenantal identity that Paul speaks of as the inner covenant, περιτομὴ καρδίας.

In the PCEA, multi-ethnic urban assemblies, Kiswahili and English worship, integrated educational programs, and theological education have been seen as practical ways of challenging entrenched ethnic grouping and expanding ecclesial involvement (Kinyanjui, 2017:118; Njoroge, 2012:145; Njoroge, 2017:219, 228). These examples show how churches can intentionally create spaces where ethnic identity is not the only basis of belonging. However, the Pauline connotation is that language, education, and urban inclusion must be part of a more profound change of identity. The key to the decision in Romans 2:28-29 is internal covenant faithfulness towards God rather than external membership of a religious community.

Some Pentecostal and Charismatic churches have attempted to minimise ethnicisation through multi-ethnic worship teams, English-language worship services, cosmopolitan urban congregations, and interdenominational prayer forums (Waruta and Kinoti, 2000:76; Ekitala and Wosyanju, 2015:57-61; Mwaura, 2005:161). These strategies may reduce ethnic homogeneity and promote inter-ethnic solidarity within ecclesial communities. But the Pauline critique insists that charismatic life and diversity in outward appearance are not enough without change in the inner person. The significance of περιτομὴ καρδίας is that the Spirit's activity is not only in the worship expression but also in the re-formation of identity beyond ethnic preference, founder loyalty, and social grouping.

Some of the strategies aimed at breaking the ethnocentrism in the SDA context include: union-wide pastoral deployment, use of inclusive language, shared resources for the Sabbath School, union-wide and inter-conference meetings, Bible teaching on unity, and deliberate awareness of ethnocentrism. They may also include fostering ecclesial belonging that transcends ethnic boundaries, recognising diverse expressions of worship, promoting inclusive representation, ensuring transparency in resource allocation, strengthening conflict-resolution structures, and providing cultural sensitivity training (Mugambi, 2002:53; Nyaga, 2011:70, 72, 75; Nkonge, 2013:58; Ministerial Association, 2022:108, 112, 173; Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2018:205, 213-214; Makokha, 2018:215; Onyango, 2010:94, 104; Muthee, 2020:73). These measures can create unity, institutional equity and interethnic engagement. The bigger question in the theological logic of Romans 2:24-29 is whether such actions are communicative and experiential of and in covenant renewal by God's Spirit within believers. Well-designed policies are necessary external correctives and may strengthen representation, accountability, and institutional practice. They are not, however, substitutes for περιτομὴ καρδίας. Without inward, Spirit-enabled renewal, policy alone cannot address the deeper dispositions that sustain ethnic pride and exclusion or the covenantal inconsistency that may occasion the public dishonouring of God's name.

These denominational efforts demonstrate that action is helpful to combat ethnocentrism, but they are not sufficient in themselves. With this backdrop, based on Romans 2:24–29, the externalisation of identity needs to be addressed through an inward covenant renewal, by the work of the Spirit, to bring leadership, belonging, and witness to covenant faithfulness. The following are two conclusions. First, some of the key denominations in Kenya have been interested in advocating ethnic diversity, ethnic representation, and interethnic fellowship as objectives. However, there are still ethnocentric conflicts within some ecclesial contexts. This implies that inclusion in administration is significant but insufficient to address the broader theological challenge of identity. Second, existing ecclesial responses to ethnocentrism may provide important institutional and practical correctives, but they are not always explicitly grounded in Paul's περιτομὴ καρδίας as inward, Spirit-enabled covenant renewal. The constructive contribution of this study is therefore to bring such responses into dialogue with the

theological logic of Romans 2:29. This does not reject ethnicity, but refuses to allow it to become the defining marker of ecclesial belonging, leadership, or worth.

4.8 Περιτομὴ Καρδίας: Toward a Heart–Based Ecclesial Renewal in Kenya

The foregoing analysis has demonstrated that the challenge is not Kenyan denominational identity as such, but the elevation of outward identity markers above covenant faithfulness brought about by the Holy Spirit. The foregoing analysis does not characterise the selected Kenyan denominations as collectively marked by theological crisis or an absence of inward renewal. It identifies specific patterns documented in the literature in which outward religious identity may become detached from covenant faithfulness. These patterns provide the contextual point of encounter for examining περιτομὴ καρδίας as a Pauline category for inward, Spirit-enabled ecclesial renewal. It was this very challenge that Paul condemned (Rom 2:24–29), saying that external ceremonies without renewal of the heart were a scandal to God before the non–believer.

Paul's appeal to περιτομὴ καρδίας provides a theological lens for the selected contextual concerns. It exposes the possibility that outward religious identity may become detached from inward covenant faithfulness (Fitzmyer, 1993:154; Cranfield, 2004:172–175; Dunn, 2018:118, 124). Applied analogically, Paul's argument does not reject legitimate rituals, doctrines, or institutional identities. Rather, it calls every ecclesial tradition to evaluate its visible religious life in the light of Spirit-enabled obedience, moral integrity, and divine approval rather than human recognition (Rom. 2:28–29; Wright, 2002e:465; Jewett, 2007:219).

Applied to selected Kenyan ecclesial contexts, περιτομὴ καρδίας functions as a constructive theological norm rather than a denomination-specific indictment. It provides a basis for examining contexts in which outward Christian identity may become detached from inward covenant faithfulness. The Pauline concern may therefore be brought into dialogue with sacramental, liturgical, doctrinal, lifestyle, charismatic, and institutional practices when these are treated as sufficient markers of spiritual authenticity apart from Spirit-enabled obedience, integrity, and divine approval. The problem is not the practices themselves, but their possible

separation from the inward covenant reality they are intended to embody (Cranfield, 2004:172–175; Dunn, 2018:124; Wright, 2002e:465; Jewett, 2007:219).

The literature reviewed above in this chapter provides context-specific illustrations of this theological concern. It highlights some examples of sacramental liturgical formalism, doctrinal or lifestyle legalism, leadership or accountability issues, and performative spirituality (Shorter, 1998:114; Gifford, 2009:61, 68–72; Njoroge, 2008:153; Ndeti, 2019:156; Knight, 2000:144; Gathogo, 2011:124–129; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013:172). These examples are intended to be illustrative, not representative, and should not be seen as a representation of the whole denomination. Instead, they illustrate the potential for the externalisation of legitimate Christian practice if it is not connected to internal piety and covenant fidelity. In this way, the reference of περιτομὴ καρδίας does not supplant the sacrament of baptism, liturgical worship, doctrinal adherence, observance of the sabbath, lifestyle discipline, or charismatic expression. It invites these visible practices to be expressions and manifestations of covenant faithfulness, which is enabled by the work of the Holy Spirit.

A parallel theological issue is the one that involves the use of ethnic/denominational identity as grounds for exclusion, entitlement, privilege of leadership, or spiritual superiority. While Romans 2:28–29 relativises outward covenant markers when they are treated as sufficient grounds of covenant identity, Paul locates authentic covenant identity in the inward, Spirit-enabled reality of περιτομὴ καρδίας and divine approval. Romans 2:28–29 challenges reliance on outward covenant markers as sufficient grounds of covenant identity when they are detached from inward, Spirit-enabled renewal (Dunn, 2018:124–125; Wright, 2002e:467).

An analogous theological concern arises where ethnic or denominational identity becomes a basis for exclusion, entitlement, leadership privilege, or spiritual superiority. Romans 2:28–29 challenges reliance on outward covenant markers as sufficient grounds for covenant identity when they are detached from inward, Spirit-enabled renewal. Paul instead locates authentic covenant identity in περιτομὴ καρδίας and divine approval (Dunn, 2018:124–125; Wright, 2002e:467). The literature reviewed in this chapter identifies related concerns in selected Kenyan ecclesial settings, particularly regarding ethnicity, leadership, and belonging. Where outward

Christian identity becomes detached from transformed conduct, a disjunction may emerge between professed faith and lived witness (Gifford, 2009:77–89).

The application is analogical rather than historical. It does not equate Kenyan Christians or denominations with Paul's first-century interlocutors. Rather, it brings the theological logic of Romans 2:24–29 into constructive dialogue with contemporary tensions between visible Christian identity and inward covenant faithfulness. In this dialogue, περιτομὴ καρδίας functions as a constructive Pauline theological resource for inward, Spirit-enabled ecclesial renewal.

Romans 2:29 marks the constructive theological turn in Paul's argument by locating decisive covenant identity in περιτομὴ καρδίας—an inward, Spirit-enabled renewal—rather than in reliance on outward covenant markers detached from obedience (Wright, 2002e:465; Dunn, 2018:118). Theological logic can be extended analogically to situations in the life of the church in the present day, but not confused with those situations with which Paul was dealing in the first century. In every tradition of the Christian faith, legitimate religious expressions and identities are problematised when they are taken as reliable indicators of spiritual authenticity, without reference to the covenant's internal fidelity. Other scholars agree that salvation and hence "true covenant" is not in outward status or recognition but in the inward work of the Spirit and divine judgment (Jewett 2007:219; Cranfield 2004:175).

The shift from outward religious performance to Spirit-enabled sincerity, humility, and moral renewal challenges aspects of Kenyan religious culture. Paul was adamant that to be theologically faithful, one must have a Spirit–renewed heart (Rom. 2:29; Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4; Wright, 2002e:434; Dunn, 2018:124). In each ecclesial tradition, legitimate Christian practices can also become external indicators of spiritual authenticity if they are not connected to the work of grace, inward renewal, and the transforming power of the Spirit (Knight, 2000:127–128, 144; Gathogo, 2011:127). This may occur through doctrinal observance, lifestyle discipline, liturgical worship, or charismatic expression. The theological problem is not the practices themselves, but their separation from the inward covenant faithfulness described in Romans 2:29.

The shift developed in this chapter is more diagnostic than remedial, especially for the Kenyan context. From the above forms of moral corruption- hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, and ethnocentrism- it is clear that outward manifestations of religion can be removed from inner transformation. In such instances, the Church's public credibility is put into question. This is because its external expressions of faith no longer correlate with the Spirit–enabled practices of obedience, integrity, and servant leadership. Such a shift is from external to "inner" (περιτομὴ καρδίας) religious assurance, which provides the theological context for evaluating similar ecclesial models in Kenya without claiming that they are merely an echo of the first–century Jewish context (Dunn, 2018:118; Cranfield, 2004:175; Wright, 2002e:465).

The practical consequences of this Pauline shift are explored in Chapter Five. This chapter has thus identified the contextual issue: outward religiosity, in the absence of inward renewal, contributes to the public dishonouring of God's name. The next chapter develops περιτομὴ καρδίας as a six-fold biblical–theological framework and articulates it for Kenyan Christianity.

4.9 Conclusion

The Kenyan patterns discussed in this chapter are contextual parallels to Paul's teaching in Romans 2:24–29 and not equivalent. The theological analogy rests on four Pauline principles. First, the contradiction between covenant profession and conduct can occasion the dishonouring of God's name (2:24). Second, outward covenant signs cannot sustain covenant confidence when detached from obedience (2:25–27). Third, outward status is insufficient to define authentic covenant identity (2:28). Fourth, Paul decisively locates covenant identity in inward, Spirit-enabled renewal and the approval of God (2:29). This is not to say that Kenyan churches do this in the same way as First–Century Jews did with their circumcision, but that outward religious identity can similarly be detached from inner transformation. Read in light of Romans 12:1–2, this renewal is not self–generated or institutional, but rests on God's mercy and love. In this chapter, the focus turned from diagnosis to a Pauline theology of heart renewal. Chapter five develops περιτομὴ καρδίας constructively as a biblical–theological account of Ethical Renewal, Authentic Witness, Grace–Enabled Obedience, Inward Faith, Covenantal Inclusivity, and Spirit-Enabled Renewal.

CHAPTER FIVE

TOWARD A BIBLICAL–THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF περιτομὴ καρδίας FOR ETHICAL RENEWAL AND THE HONOUR OF GOD IN KENYAN CHRISTIANITY

5.1 Introduction

Following up on the exegetical insights of Chapter Three and the contextual diagnosis of Chapter Four, this chapter offers a Pauline theological account of ethical renewal for Kenyan Christianity. The theological task now is to respond to the diagnosis with a constructive theological framework drawn from Romans 2:24–29. If God's name is publicly dishonoured by inconsistent covenantal behaviours, if religious privilege is validated only when accompanied by genuine obedience, and if covenant identity is inward and Spirit–driven, what theological framework emerges for ecclesial identity, accountability, and witness? The chapter responds by developing a theological framework for inward, Spirit-enabled ecclesial renewal in selected Kenyan contexts. This framework is not imposed upon the text. It emerges from the theological logic of Romans 2:24–29.

5.2 Theological Basis for the Applicability of περιτομὴ καρδίας

Building on the methodological sequence established in Chapter One, this chapter brings the exegetically established theological logic of Romans 2:24–29 into constructive dialogue with selected Kenyan ecclesial realities. The theological basis for interpreting Paul's concept of renewal, περιτομὴ καρδίας, in Kenyan Christianity is provided. The framework is not forced onto the text. It arises from the reasoning of Romans 2:24–29. Romans 2:24 keeps public witness and the honour of God's name in view; Romans 2:25–27 subjects the religious privilege to covenant faithfulness; Romans 2:28 challenges outward definitions of covenant identity; and Romans 2:29 locates true covenant life in the transforming work of the Spirit. The point here is not to redefine blasphemy or repeat the methodology, but to show how Paul's argument can serve as a theological resource for addressing external religiosity and weak public witness. The model is thus theological and heuristic and not a formula that can be simply mechanised and applied to all ecclesial situations.

5.2.1 Paul's Theological Basis for Utilising περιτομὴ καρδίας

Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας is part of a biblical–theological shift in the location of covenant faithfulness from an external sign to the inner heart. The book of Deuteronomy already conflates imperatives and promises: Israel is obliged to circumcise its heart (Deut. 10:16), but it is God who circumcises their heart so that they can love him wholeheartedly (Deut. 30:6). While it is not a rejection of ritual, it becomes an emphasis on the covenant–renewal sign. Paul follows this logic in Romans 2:24–29 with his explanation that implied blasphemy, the circumcision of Jews and Gentiles (depending on faithful, obedient hearts), and the redefinition of boundaries of the covenant depends on the obedient heart rather than the outer rituals (Wright, 2002e:524; Dunn, 2018:120; Moo, 2018:159).

In addition to the Deuteronomic foundation, the prophetic tradition further developed the theme of περιτομὴ καρδίας. Jeremiah urged Judah to circumcise themselves to their Lord (Jer. 4:4), and later he deplored that they were physically circumcised with uncircumcised hearts (Jer. 9:25–26). This critique by the prophets shows that circumcision is not theologically complete without an inner conversion, ethical obedience, and faithfulness to the covenant (Brueggemann, 2018:52). Prophet Ezekiel continues this theme by assuring God's people of a new heart and a new spirit to produce genuine obedience (Ezek. 36:26–27). This was important for Paul because it shows that covenant renewal was a matter of God's initiative rather than external obedience. In this sense, Paul's juxtaposition of sign and transformation in Romans 2:24–29 follows the line of the Hebrew prophetic critique of sacrificial cult, legalism, and public religiosity (Isa. 1:11–17; Amos 5:21–24; Block, 1998:354; Wright, 2013:428).

The foregoing biblical development has three theological implications, which Paul explored in Romans 2:24–29. First, Paul challenges reliance on ethnicity, possession of the Torah, or physical circumcision as sufficient grounds for confidence in the covenant when detached from obedience. Romans 2:28–29 instead locates authentic covenant identity in inward, Spirit-enabled transformation. Second, law and grace are redefined: the law remains important, but not to establish self–righteousness. Rather, covenant obedience is possible only after God's transformative work, and hypocrisy may become the condition through which God's name is publicly dishonoured. Third, the Spirit is the key worker of covenant faithfulness, so that the

people of God are transformed not by their religious actions but by their holiness, love, justice, and covenant obedience. These implications provide the theological basis for the constructive framework developed in this chapter (Dunn, 1998:151; Jewett, 2007:219; Cranfield, 2004:173; Barclay, 2015:411).

5.2.2 Ecclesial Applicability of Paul's Logic beyond the Roman Context

It is important here to reemphasise that Paul speaks within first-century Judaism, not contemporary Kenyan Christianity. The contexts differ, but analogous questions arise concerning covenant identity, outward piety, and inward renewal. In either context, religious symbols can be over-emphasised, and covenantal loyalty reduced. Consequently, Romans 2:24–29 is theologically relevant in every place where the public witness of the church is compromised by hypocrisy; where religious privilege is mistaken for self–justification; and where the church is defined by its outward appearance instead of its internal transformation. This study, therefore, explores Paul's logic heuristically for Kenyan Christianity, not because Kenyan churches are monolithic, but because the issues identified in Chapter Four reflect similar trends of external religion, moral inconsistency, and witness. The historical context remains first-century Judaism, while the contemporary application is theological and analogical. Normatively, Romans 2:24–29 provides a Pauline framework for examining selected moral concerns in African Christianity.

5.3 Developing the Biblical–Theological Framework

Given the above, the constructive objective of this section is to provide a sixfold biblical–theological framework that follows Paul's logic in Romans 2:24-29. It is not a framework that is being applied to the text from an earlier reform agenda. Instead, it is drawn from the theological argument in Romans 2:24-29 and offered as a heuristic model, not as a formula for the renewal of all the churches in Kenya. It explains the theological norms discernible in Paul's thinking and how they might be relevant to a new life in the church marked by external religiosity. Thus, it is not only a critique of distortion, but a clear and positive statement of theological principles to inform the process of ecclesial renewal.

5.3.1 External Religiosity in the Selected Kenyan Ecclesial Contexts

The characteristics of moral inconsistencies, hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, and ethnocentrism observed in the published literature from specific Kenyan ecclesial settings were analysed in Chapter Four. These patterns were seen as examples of theological issues that were pertinent to them, not necessarily to the Christianity of the Kenyan people in general. The constructive purpose of this section is, then, not to restate the diagnosis but to show how the distortions are theologically interpreted in the context of Romans 2:24–29. Theologically, public religiosity is significant from a Pauline standpoint when outward religious practices are disassociated from inner change, thereby turning covenant signs, institutional commitments, or public religiosity into a stumbling block for the honour of God's name. At this point, the chapter's task is constructive. Theologically, it turns the life of the church towards integrity, accountability, inward faith, covenant identity, and Spirit–filled renewal. These are not only unethical anomalies but theological deviations, too, where outward religiosity substitutes for inward covenant faithfulness.

5.3.2 A Six-fold Biblical–Theological Framework of περιτομὴ καρδίας

The sixfold framework is constructive rather than diagnostic. Chapter Four identified selected patterns in which outward religious identity may become detached from inward covenant faithfulness. The present section does not repeat that diagnosis but develops a constructive theological response from Romans 2:24–29 through ethical renewal, authentic witness, grace-enabled obedience, inward faith, covenantal inclusivity, and Spirit-enabled renewal. This framework emanates from the exegetical logic already developed in Romans 2:24–29, particularly Paul's critique of the idea of religious privilege and his new definition of covenant identity according to inward transformation (Dunn, 2018:105–107; Moo, 2018:165–176; Jewett, 2007:219). Each subsection below follows four movements: Pauline basis, the Kenyan distortion addressed, the remedial logic of περιτομὴ καρδίας, and the constructive ecclesial implication.

The six dimensions are neither independent remedies nor sequential stages. They mutually reinforce a constructive theological vision centred on περιτομὴ καρδίας. Ethical renewal and authentic witness express the public consequences of covenant integrity. Grace-enabled

obedience and inward faith connect outward practice with inward faithfulness. Covenantal inclusivity expresses renewed belonging. Spirit-enabled renewal is the integrating theological dynamic that enables and sustains the other five dimensions. The six dimensions should not, however, be understood as lexical categories explicitly stated in Romans 2:24–29. Rather, they are constructive biblical–theological dimensions derived from the passage's movement from the public dishonouring of God's name (v. 24), through the conditional value of outward covenant signs and obedience (vv. 25–27), to inward covenant identity, the Spirit and divine approval (vv. 28–29).

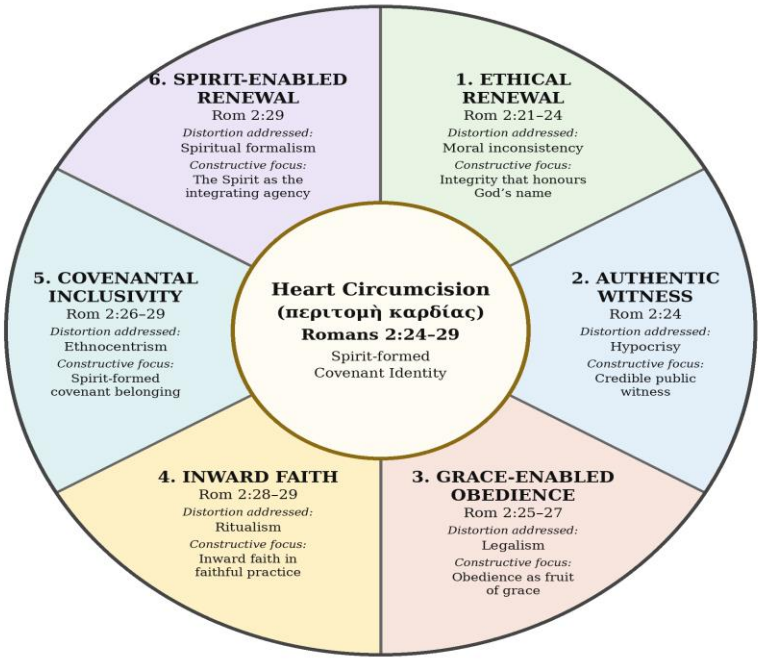


Figure 1: The Sixfold Framework as an Integrated Matrix

Figure 1 presents περιτομὴ καρδίας as the theological centre of the sixfold framework, as explained in detail below. It relates each dimension to its principal Pauline textual basis, the contextual concern it addresses (identified in Chapter Four), and its constructive ecclesial focus. The figure represents an integrated constructive theological framework rather than sequential stages, a diagnostic model, or an empirical classification of Kenyan Christianity.

5.3.2.1 Framework of Ethical Renewal: Overcoming Moral Depravity

Paul's message in Romans 2:24-29 offers a theological foundation for ethical renewal because the identity of religion is not the same as ethical renewal. Romans 2:21–24 reveals the tension between religious teaching and moral inconsistency, while Romans 2:25–29 reveals the tension between covenant identity, obedience, and inward transformation. Ethical renewal thus comes from Paul's emphasis that covenant privilege, ritual possession and knowledge of the Law do not suffice to "cover" moral lapses. The point isn't that ethics takes the place of grace, but that grace results in tangible integrity that it stipulated in the covenant.

This model is relevant to Kenyan Christianity because it addresses moral inconsistency between outward Christian identity and inward character. It does not return to the scandals discussed in Chapter Four, but sets a theological norm for evaluating moral deformation. This is achieved through the concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας, which points to the inner work of the Spirit rather than to institutional reputation, denominational identity, or external religious expression. Within the sixfold framework, Ethical Renewal calls the church to exemplarily embody holiness, justice, love, and accountability as outward expressions of inward covenant renewal.

5.3.2.2 Framework of Authentic Witness: Confronting Hypocrisy

Public witness is a theological concern in Romans 2:24 because the behaviour of God's covenant people affects the honour of God's name among those outside the covenant community. Paul's concern is not only about reputational damage to the covenant community but also about the way God's name is discredited before the nations when confession and conduct are disconnected. Romans 2:17-24 shows that boasting in the Law and failing to observe its moral requirements is a blasphemous failure of the covenant. Therefore, the act of witnessing to the public glory of God's name is lived out in relation to verse 24 and verse 29 - it is a matter of internal covenant identity rather than external religious claims (Dunn, 2018:120; Moo, 2018:165).

In Kenyan Christianity, this framework applies to hypocrisy, understood here as the gap between public religious profession and actual conduct within the church. The point is not so much to recap the examples in Chapter Four, but to determine the theological standard for evaluating such

inconsistencies. When Christian confession is disconnected from leadership, stewardship, and moral practice, the credibility of public Christian witness may be weakened, and reputational dishonour may follow. Authentic Witness, therefore, means that the credibility of the church has nothing to do with the reputation or denomination of the church, with its rituals, or with the charismatic manner in which it appears, but is a matter of the visible harmony between what is confessed and what is practised.

Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας, therefore, encourages the alignment of faith and conduct, addressing the hypocrisy that arises when Christian identity is claimed but not lived. In this model, witness is not primarily about institutional image, but about the individuals' covenantal integrity. The Kenyan Church must, therefore, be led transparently, stewarded faithfully, disciplined responsibly, and live morally with the help of the Holy Spirit. Authentic Witness is the credible embodiment of the church's public confession in truthful, accountable, and coherent life before God and society.

5.3.2.3 Framework of Grace–Enabled Obedience: Accountability without Legalism

Pauline basis for grace-enabled obedience is Romans 2:25-27, in which circumcision means nothing unless there is covenantal obedience. Paul's argument is not an attack on obedience, law, or covenant responsibility, but a criticism of the reliance upon religious status when covenant behaviour runs counter to God's will. In this context, "law" clearly means Torah, rather than a vague "moral law." Paul's concern is the contradiction between having the Law and failing to live out its moral purpose. Thus, it cannot be said that Romans chapter two promotes antinomianism. Moreover, it is equally incorrect to claim that it endorses legalism. It takes obedience and brings it into covenant faithfulness; obedience becomes the fruit of inward renewal and not the basis for self-justification (Schreiner, 2018:146; Moo, 2018:165-176).

In Kenyan Christianity, this framework addresses the danger of legalism, in which rules, church norms, doctrinal correctness, ritual observance, or moral codes may become substitutes for inward transformation. In some ecclesial contexts, doctrinal, liturgical, dietary, moral, or other teachings regarding Sabbath/Sunday observance may be of real theological worth. Yet when they

are separated from grace, humility, and the transformative power of the Spirit, they are distorted. Obedience may become religious performance, a marker of spiritual identity, or a basis for judging others, rather than a grateful response to God's renewing work. The concern is not discipline, doctrine, or obedience, but outward conformity without the corresponding transformation of the inner person.

The theological response to legalism is περιτομὴ καρδίας, which reorients obedience around grace and the transforming work of the Spirit. It does not diminish accountability, moral growth, doctrinal faithfulness, or communal responsibility. Instead, these arise from a transformed heart responsive and obedient to God's will. This, therefore, invites the Church in Kenya to embrace discipleship shaped by ethical discernment, grace-responsive obedience, accountable leadership, and communal responsibility. Its constructive value is that it preserves the place of obedience without reducing Christian faith to external compliance, fear, status, or denominational performance. Thus, grace-enabled obedience fosters the covenant's credibility and protects the church from embarrassing God's name by keeping the rules without transforming the person from the inside.

5.3.2.4 Framework of Inward Faith: Transcending Ritualism

Romans 2:25-29 provides a foundation for the framework of inward faith. It does so by making it clear that the outward covenantal signs lose their covenantal power when they are not accompanied by obedience and inward transformation. Paul is not against ritual, circumcision, or outward religious practice per se. But he critiques the notion that ritual and circumcision, or religious observance in general, can be the basis of covenant identity without a transformed heart. Faith looks inward and is Spirit-driven but not private nor disembodied. The idea of moving from outward circumcision to "circumcision of the heart" (περιτομὴ καρδίας) emphasises that outward religious conduct is subject to inward conversion, covenant faithfulness, and honouring of God's name (Dunn, 2018:124; Moo, 2018:165–176).

This framework can be used to address the issue of ritualism in Kenyan Christianity, where external rituals are not linked to inner transformation. This is manifested in participation in the

sacraments, liturgical celebrations, symbols, and charismatic signs. These practices are not condemned, as they can convey covenant faithfulness. When detached from ethical responsibility, discipleship, and Spirit-enabled transformation, they may become markers of religious correctness, authority, or spiritual superiority. There is a concern not with ritual itself but ritual externalism, that is, showing ritual rather than having faith.

This concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας can be used to counter ritualism and to reestablish the internal aspect of covenant identity. It brings faith, obedience, and Spirit-enabled transformation to the forefront, without rejecting ritual, worship, or ecclesial practice. This context is where Christian practices are meaningful only when they embody transformed life, further the process of discipleship and maintain covenant faithfulness. The framework of inward faith, then, compels the Kenyan Church to learn to practice worship, sacrament, liturgy, and charismatic expression as outward manifestations of the transformed life, rather than as means to that spirit-enabled life. This is in contrast to making ritual the primary source of spiritual emptiness rather than spiritual transformation.

5.3.2.5 Framework of Covenantal Inclusivity: Overcoming Ethnocentrism

The argument for covenantal inclusivity in Romans 2:28–29 is rooted in Paul's redefinition of Jewishness and covenant identity beyond ethnic or ritual status. Paul does not annul Judaism or the historical validity of circumcision as the symbol of the covenant. Paul does not provide a framework for ethnic or ritual superiority. Instead, he redefines covenant identity by locating true belonging in the inward reality of the transformed heart. In this broader discussion of Romans, this anticipates the introduction of Jews and Gentiles into God's one people by faith. Covenantal belonging is thus reoriented towards God's work in the soul instead of outward distinctions of privilege or superiority.

It is crucial to note that Paul is challenging identity markers when they become grounds for covenant confidence, not creating a church without culture or tradition. It does not eliminate ethnic, cultural, or ecclesial differences, but brings them under the control of Spirit-initiated covenant devotion. In this respect, then, it is περιτομὴ καρδίας, not ethnicity and/or

denominationalism, that provides an inner standard for evaluating all assertions of identity. The question is no longer about having the proper outward sign, but about the inward transformation, genuine obedience, humility, and covenantal fidelity before God.

This framework is relevant to Kenyan Christianity, where ethnocentrism may arise when ethnic affiliation, regional loyalty, denominational identity, or institutional privilege displaces the Spirit-created identity of the people of God. The aim of this study is not to revisit the specific ethnic and denominational conflicts discussed in Chapter Four, but to identify the theological distortion beneath such conflicts. When an ethnic or denominational identity is used to exclude others, to assert entitlement to leadership, to control resources, or to claim spiritual superiority, only then does it become an external sign of covenant identity. This is a theological-synthetic parallel to the externalism Paul opposes in Romans 2:24-29.

This, in turn, calls on the Kenyan Church to be a community in which leadership, fellowship, recognition, and belonging are not based on exclusionary social markers but on a Spirit-formed identity. It encourages churches to appreciate the cultural and denominational uniqueness without sacrificing the unity of the people of God's covenant. In this sense, περιτομὴ καρδίας has both an inward, personal dimension and a communal, ecclesial dimension, as part of the sixfold framework. It restores the church to a renewed heart whose external unity is a testimony to the glory of God to the world.

5.3.2.6 Integrative Framework: Spirit-enabled Renewal as the Capstone

The capstone of the six-fold biblical–theological framework is Romans 2:29, where Paul locates true covenant identity in the Spirit rather than in the letter. It is described as an integrative framework because it brings the five dimensions together under Spirit-enabled Renewal. The Spirit is not merely one dimension of Paul's argument. In Romans 2:29, the Spirit is the divine agent of the inward renewal that characterises authentic covenant identity. But Ethical Renewal, Authentic Witness, Grace-Enabled Obedience, Inward Faith, and Covenantal Inclusivity are not achieved simply through institutional reform, moral exhortation, or ecclesial programmes. They need the renewing ministry of the Holy Spirit to re-form covenant identity from within the heart.

The above five frameworks can be interpreted as moral ideals or church programmes if they are not seen in this integrative function. Apart from the Spirit, Ethical Renewal risks becoming moralism; Authentic Witness, reputation management; Grace-Enabled Obedience, external conformity; Inward Faith, private spirituality; and Covenantal Inclusivity, mere social inclusion. Such a reduction of the Spirit's role is incompatible with the theological logic of Romans 2:29. It builds the entire structure on the basis of undergoing transformation by the Spirit. The theological dynamic that is the integrating and enabling power of the six dimensions, and the centre of the sixfold framework, is περιτομὴ καρδίας, which is celebrated as the Spirit-enabled Renewal.

In Kenyan Christianity, this framework provides a way of responding to the tendency to fantasise about renewal through external programmes, institutional rhetoric, charismatic showmanship, moral reform, or ecclesial activism, without any corresponding internal transformation. This does not deny the value of programmes, worship, leadership development, or visible expressions of faith. Rather, it insists that such expressions must arise from Spirit-formed character, moral accountability, and renewed covenant life. In this sense, περιτομὴ καρδίας reorients Kenyan ecclesial renewal away from external performance and toward inward transformation that becomes visible in ethical, relational, and communal faithfulness.

The constructive implication is that the focus for church renewal in Kenya should be on Spirit-enabled renewal, from which all other aspects of church reform should emanate. Formation of leaders, discipleship, worship, communal accountability, and public witness should be initiated and guided by the Holy Spirit, not by institutional image and religious performance. Spirit-enabled Renewal is the capstone of the six-fold framework, and that means the study's proposal should not be seen as a code of ethics or a management initiative. It views περιτομὴ καρδίας as a Pauline concept of changed covenant life, recognising that what is said outside the body is matched by what happens inside; and thus, honours God's name before the world.

Viewed together, the six-fold framework demonstrates that περιτομὴ καρδίας is a positive Pauline paradigm for ecclesial renewal. Ethical renewal is about moral incongruity and is based on the

transformation of the inside out. Authentic Witness addresses hypocrisy, insisting on consistency between words and deeds. Grace-based obedience is a corrective to legalistic thinking and reconciles accountability with not believing but doing. Inward faith responds to ritualism by refusing to allow outward religious practice to replace the Spirit-enabled transformation. When the challenges of ethnocentrism are addressed through covenantal inclusivity, belonging is reconfigured not around ethnic, ritual, or institutional superiority, but around renewed covenant identity. Spirit renewal is the synthesis of all these aspects: the transformation of the ecclesia is not to be found in human performance or a good image alone, but in the work of God. The framework is not a restatement of the diagnosis in Chapter Four; however, it is the theological answer that emerges from Romans 2:24-29. It shows that the remedy for outward religiosity is not to discard ethics, witness, obedience, ritual, or identity, but to ground them in inward Spirit-enabled transformation, as signified by περιτομὴ καρδίας.

5.4 Applicability of περιτομὴ καρδίας

Within selected Kenyan ecclesial contexts, the concerns identified in Chapter Four include ritualism, legalistic tendencies, ethnocentric forms of belonging, and charismatic expressions that may become detached from inward renewal. As a result, this section explores the significance of περιτομὴ καρδίας for the selected Kenyan ecclesial and cultural contexts. This is not a repeat of the contextual analysis in Chapter Four, but rather an illustration of how the constructive possibilities in this chapter may be brought to bear on questions of honour, ritual identity, and social belonging. The theological principle is Pauline: real covenant life is not based on external action but on internal, genuine transformation, brought about by the Holy Spirit, which honours God's name.

The applicability of περιτομὴ καρδίας is based on both the realities of Kenyan Christianity and its traditional realities. On the one hand, the literature reviewed in Chapter Four identifies selected patterns of ethnocentrism, ritualism, hypocrisy, legalistic tendencies, and externalised forms of prosperity-oriented religiosity in particular ecclesial contexts. Such patterns may weaken public Christian witness and ecclesial unity. On the other hand, male circumcision has

been practised since ancient times by some traditional African communities, especially in some Kenyan contexts, which altered identity, roles, and collective affiliation (Mbiti, 1991:120; Gathogo, 2008:45). Their discourse is useful in illustrating how περιτομὴ καρδίας can be theologically applied to the Kenyan Church. Additionally, it also provides insight into how its African interpretation, in terms of transformation, inclusion and identity, is culturally functional. Four areas are covered in this section. The first area analyses the relationship between περιτομὴ καρδίας and honour–shame dynamics for Kenyan Christian culture.

5.4.1 Honour–Shame and περιτομὴ καρδίας

The analysis of Romans 2:24 and 2:29 together recasts honour and shame by relocating true honour from human recognition to divine approval. For Paul, it is no longer a lack of outward signs of covenant life that is shameful, but hypocrisy that does not honour God's name publicly. For the Kenyan church, such a redefinition undermines the honour systems that underpin denominational affiliation, church position, ethnic affiliation, or public religiosity as signals of honour. Theologically, the issue extends beyond social reputation to covenant faithfulness. Honour is associated with correspondence between inward devotion and outward moral integrity, while shame may arise where outward religiosity conceals moral inconsistency. The theological response to reliance on status, spectacle, or religious prestige is περιτομὴ καρδίας, the inward, Spirit-enabled renewal of the heart.

The inversion of honour and shame in Romans 2:24-29 is a clear example of its relevance to the modern-day church in Kenya. The main sources of honour are likely to be denominational identity, ecclesiastical titles, ethnic loyalties, sacramental attendance, positions in the ministry and even the outward manifestation of religiosity. Promotions, publicity, and social esteem can be signs of honour in some ecclesial contexts. However, the true test of honour is moral integrity, humility, and character development by the Holy Spirit. Reliance on outward religious identity detached from inward covenant faithfulness creates a moral contradiction. Where public professions of holiness are contradicted by documented corruption, ethnocentrism, immorality, or competitive religiosity, the gap between profession and conduct may weaken Christian witness. Within the theological logic of Romans 2:24, such inconsistency may also occasion the

public dishonouring of God's name, a public shame. So, περιτομὴ καρδίας is not limited to a corrective in first-century Judaism, but is also a corrective measure for contemporary Kenyan Christianity. True covenant identity is not in denominational honour or charisma or in ethnic family but in integrity and moral faithfulness and in Spirit-–enabled transformation.

Paul's critique of outward religiosity and "ethnically biased" honour systems in Romans 2:24-29 targets religious systems grounded in external actions. Within first-century Judaism, circumcision and possession of the Torah could function as forms of symbolic capital, marking covenant identity and belonging. This gave them covenantal honour and social legitimacy. Paul shifts that covenant identity to inner transformation, through the power of the Holy Spirit, which is called "circumcision of the heart" (Rom. 2:29). Paul relocates decisive approval from human recognition to divine approval (Rom. 2:29). Outward religious claims cannot sustain covenant credibility when contradicted by moral inconsistency. Such contradiction may instead occasion shame, the public dishonouring of God's name (Rom. 2:24).

Paul's criticism of outward religiosity therefore bears direct applicability for the Kenyan Church. The remnants of patronal systems, ethnocentric codes of honour and sacralised leadership persist in the ecclesial life (Mbiti, 1991:231; Mugambi, 1989:122). These patterns may be read analogically through Paul's contrast between outward religious identity and inward covenant faithfulness, without implying historical equivalence between the two contexts. Even though religious expression has been traditionally defined in terms of denominational pride, liturgical performance, and spiritual showmanship, it is also tainted with corruption, embezzlement, favouritism, ethnocentrism, and moral compromise. The paradoxes are implicit blasphemy, the indirect slander of the name of God, Moral incoherence, and spiritual hypocrisy. The prophetic and corrective force of περιτομὴ καρδίας lies in its reorientation of covenant identity towards inward, Spirit-enabled renewal, against confidence in outward religious identity detached from obedience (Wright, 2002e:405; Bediako, 1995:116).

The Church is therefore called to forgo the quest for human approval and to cultivate inner renewal by being humble, loved, upright, and faithful. Such Spirit–sanctioned transformation alone restores the honour of God's name and overcomes the implied blasphemy that results from

hypocritical religion. περιτομὴ καρδίας, in turn, is the biblical–theological remedy to merit–based religiosity. It also serves as the moral compass of the Church. It calls the Church to recover a communal identity grounded in honesty, Spirit-inspired love, and grace-enabled honour, rather than in human acclaim.

The utmost traces of the paradigm are audible in the religio–cultural situations of Africa, where circumcision used to receive identity–conferring, honour–giving, and morally binding connotations. In most African cultures, circumcision signified entry into adulthood and was accompanied by discipline, loyalty, and social responsibility (Mbiti 1991:119–124; Nthamburi 1991:87–92). The uncircumcised individual was considered to be incomplete and marginal in society (Mugambi 1995:45–47; Murove 2009:34). In other places, initiation even took a near–sacramental status, which was considered to guarantee the achievement of spiritual status and societal prestige (Oduyoye 2001:37–39; Nyamiti 2006:62–65). Therefore, the metaphor that is being spiritualised by Paul should not disregard the cultural richness of circumcision in Africa. Similar to Judaism, the African tradition used it to generate identity, grant honour, and control moral life. Paul does not devalue cultural rites. Rather, he reorganises them according to God's considerations, ethical authenticity, and change sanctioned by the Spirit.

Such honour relations are also observable in the Kenyan ecclesial setting, only in a different form, in the form of the church buildings instead of the initiation ceremonies. Other current indicators of honour include denominational prestige, pastoral office, charismatic gift, ethnic affiliations and religious performance in public (Mbiti 1991:229 – 231). In such cases, institutional pride and outward manifestations of spirituality may replace humility, love, justice, and moral integrity which the Christian identity should reflect. Oduyoye (2001:57–62) is concerned about Christianity becoming a religion with no moral content. Similarly, Nthamburi (1989:103–108) calls on churches in Africa to transcend numerical growth, liturgical display, and cultural dominance in order to become true disciples of Christ. An analogous theological contradiction arises where titles, networks, prosperity narratives, or sacramental performance become markers of religious honour while moral failure contradicts Christian profession. This parallels the theological pattern of Romans 2:23, where boasting in covenant privilege is contradicted by transgression that dishonours God.

In this sense, περιτομὴ καρδίας is a theological–moral solution. Inward covenant renewal does not abolish outward identity but reorients its significance. Paul locates authentic covenant identity in inward renewal associated with the Spirit, from which a life of justice, humility, and covenant faithfulness should flow. This is consistent with the reconstructionist ethic of Mugambi (1995:112-118), the sense of dignity and justice of Oduyoye (2001:37-42), and Mbiti's (1991:229-231) reminder that communal morality is formed through religion. The honour–shame reversal of Paul, therefore, challenges African ecclesial cultures of patronage that too easily define human worth by influence, ethnicity, and status. Honour is from God, not from institutional authority or social popularity. For the Kenyan Church, experiencing περιτομὴ καρδίας is about building character over the attainment of titles, service over the realisation of status, integrity over the acquisition of image. It will give the name of God a high place in society and strengthen the Christian witness to corruption, tribalism, and performative piety. The things that determine whether it is a covenant identity are God's approval and a Spirit–changed life, rather than popular applause, as Paul assumed. Based on the externality of the religious and honour-related systems that Paul criticised, the following section examines how περιτομὴ καρδίας is used as an effective solution to modern moral, ritual, and ethical problems in Kenyan Christianity.

5.4.2 περιτομὴ καρδίας in Kenyan Christianity

As a contextual remedy, περιτομὴ καρδίας is not an abstract slogan but a theological norm that makes the church depart from outward religiosity and enter the inward faithfulness brought about by the Spirit. Through the six-fold biblical–theological framework, the church is required to be ethical, to witness, to obey through grace, to have inward faith, to be inclusive, and to be renewed through the Spirit. Its virtue is the requirement of witness, worship, leadership, and community in public to be always subject to and approved by inward Spirit–enabled renewal. Thus, περιτομὴ καρδίας does not prescribe a mechanistic programme for ecclesial reform. It provides a constructive theological norm for orienting visible Christian identity, practice, and witness towards inward, Spirit-enabled covenant faithfulness.

The concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας is best utilised by combining the six-fold biblical–theological framework with a theological context that refigures the concept of covenant identity through the decoding of the law by grace and the Spirit, the giver of renewal. The six-fold biblical–theological framework articulates theological beliefs by implementing reforms to address moral, ethical, ritual, and communal distortions; the theological foundation safeguards dogmatic faith (Cranfield, 2004:173; Dunn, 2018:124; Moo, 2018:165). This twofold strategy explains why heart–centred transformation is needed and how it could be applied in a contextual way in Kenyan churches. In the absence of this integration, it can be easy to have superficial or culturally distorted ethical or ritual reforms.

As a contextual solution to the external religiosity in Kenyan Christianity, περιτομὴ καρδίας should be recast. First, the framework of ethical renewal deals with the issue of moral depravity. This is evident in Paul's critique in Romans 2:21–24, where he argues that knowledge of the law or ritual observance cannot replace moral integrity (Dunn, 2018:120). Paul's overriding emphasis is that moral integrity before God matters more than religious knowledge, covenant privilege, or ritual possession (Rom. 2:21–24), and this provides the basis for ethical renewal. The distortions faced here in Kenya include a lack of consistency in the born-again believer's life, that is, when a person professes to be a Christian in public but shows no integrity. περιτομὴ καρδίας is the answer to this—it's the understanding that renewal is found in the inner work of the Holy Spirit, not in institutional reputation or an external religious identity. Ethical Renewal is a framework that invites the church to become a sign of holiness, justice, and accountability, as a manifestation of an inward transformation of covenant.

Second, the framework of Authentic Witness addresses hypocrisy. Paul accused those who did not practice their teaching of dishonouring God's name (Rom 2:23–24; Jewett, 2007:219). Similarly, in Kenya, the credibility of the ecclesiastical leaders who preach about holiness yet indulge in corrupt and other immoral behaviours indeed compromises their church's credibility (Gathogo, 2011:88). The validity, relevance, and applicability of περιτομὴ καρδίας is that it reconstructs witness as Spirit–enabled authenticity as opposed to performative religiosity. It works by ensuring that evangelism is not compromised by hypocrisy but is enabled by

consistency between preaching and action, and between faith and practice. Such an orientation restores credibility, reduces social scepticism, and enables the Kenyan Church to exemplify integrity as a missional asset to society.

Third, the Grace–Enabled Obedience framework diminishes legalism. Without this heart–obedience, in Paul's view, circumcision was of no salvific value at all (Rom 2:25; Moo, 2018:166). Across Christian traditions, doctrinal, sacramental, dietary, and disciplinary practices may become legalistic when outward conformity is treated as sufficient evidence of inward renewal apart from grace, a transformed heart, and ethical obedience. The significance and usefulness of περιτομὴ καρδίας lie in its redefinition of covenant identity (obedience) through grace rather than through external obedience and denominations. This happens because it replaces the pride of law-keeping and fosters humility rooted in inner transformation. Belonging in Christ is inclusive, relational, and grace-oriented, not exclusive and rule-governed.

Fourth, the framework of inward faith provides a constructive response to ritualism. Paul does not reject outward religious practice. Rather, he challenges reliance on it when it is detached from inward covenant faithfulness (Rom 2:28–29; Cranfield, 2004:173). The constructive use of the Inward Faith framework is thus not about discarding the ritual but rather about turning it towards the inward reality of the covenant it is designed to communicate. Within a theology of περιτομὴ καρδίας, outward practices remain meaningful when they express and contribute to Spirit-enabled faith, obedience, and discipleship. Ritual and inward faith are therefore not set against each other. Outward practice gives visible expression to transformed covenant life rather than replacing it. This reorientation brings worship back to its true revelation of covenant faithfulness, rooted in renewal within by the Spirit.

Fifth, the framework of covenant identity opposed ethnocentrism and denominationalism. Paul was against ethnocentric boasting of Jews over the Gentiles, and he referred to the inward definition of covenant membership, which was powered by the Spirit (Rom 2:28–29; Wright, 2002e:466). Some churches in Kenya exhibit such distortions through ethnocentric leadership and appointments, ethnocentric congregational patterns, and inter-denominational rivalry (Githiga, 2001:97; Njoroge, 2018:44). The usefulness and applicability of περιτομὴ καρδίας is

based on identity in Christ, not on ethnocentric or denominational identity. It works through the creation of reconciled communities that cut across ethnicity, the breaking down of exclusivist hierarchies, and the unity in diversity. This offers a theological means to counter Kenya's ethnocentric politics and to foster the Church as God's covenant family, characterised by inclusivity.

Sixth, Spirit-enabled renewal integrates and sustains the preceding five dimensions by locating the source of transformation in God's work rather than in visible religious performance (Rom. 2:29; Cranfield, 2004:173–175; Dunn, 2018:124). In both charismatic and non-charismatic settings, outward expressions of spiritual vitality should embody Spirit-formed holiness, humility, integrity, and sustained discipleship.

In sum, περιτομὴ καρδίας is a biblical–theological remedy for external religiosity as reflected in selected Kenyan Christian contexts. All six frameworks reinstated Paul's corrective paradigm. They reframe covenant faithfulness as Spirit-enabled transformation rather than outward religious display or religious performance. Paul reorients covenant identity away from reliance on outward performance and ritual towards inward transformation associated with the Spirit (Wright, 2013:876; Dunn, 2018:124). Ethical Renewal, Authentic Witness, Grace–Enabled Obedience, Inward Faith, Covenantal Inclusivity, and Spirit-enabled Renewal are all integrated into the model's paradigm. It also calls on the churches in Kenya to transcend formalism towards true discipleship, characterised by integrity, inclusiveness, and transformative worship. Thus, περιτομὴ καρδίας provides a constructive theological response to external religiosity and a norm for biblical, ethical, and practical ecclesial renewal. It provides a basis for ecclesial renewal rooted in inward transformation and expressed through a credible public witness that honours God's name.

5.4.3 περιτομὴ καρδίας in the Kenyan Traditional Context

Guided by African Biblical Hermeneutics, this section employs aspects of Kenyan traditional culture as a contextual lens for illuminating the deeper meaning of περιτομὴ καρδίας in Romans

2:28–29. Similarly, traditional Kenyan circumcision practices are distinct from contemporary ecclesial contexts, but they may provide limited contextual insight into the identity-forming significance of visible rites. This suggests that the African rites and values may provide insights into the meaning of circumcision as a marker of identity, community, responsibility, and social legitimacy. They do not, however, replace the exegetical logic of Romans 2:24-29. They do not control Paul's meaning. The comparison functions only as a contextual analogy. It does not imply that Paul's theology derives from, or is historically equivalent to, African initiation rites. Instead, it is the "moral, communal and identity-forming" significance of a rite of the body that is visible that helps to explain the symbolism of circumcision in Africa. In this sense, the traditional Kenyan context does not replace Paul's argument, but serves as a contextual reference point for understanding how a visible rite can function as a sign of community, morality and belonging (Adamo, 2001:45). Paul, however, relocates covenant identity and legitimacy from the external sign to inward, Spirit-enabled transformation (Dunn, 1998:120; Wright, 2002e:231).

Male Circumcision has served as a rite of passage into adulthood, a sense of belonging to the community, a sense of moral responsibility and recognised social status for many circumcising communities in Kenya (Mbiti, 1991:120-121; Njoroge, 2019:88). It was not just symbolic but also performative: it was a transition from childhood to adulthood and an initiation into a moral and social community. In this way, the circumcision of Kenyan natives may serve as a useful parallel to Paul's case, because in both cases, circumcision can have significance other than physical circumcision. But the comparison should be drawn to a certain extent. Paul's theological focus is more specific: covenant identity is located "in Spirit and not in letter" (Rom. 2:29), not in the external rite. The continuity lies in circumcision's power to mark identity, while the discontinuity lies in Paul's move from physical circumcision to the heart renewed by the Spirit and rightly related to God.

Kenyan traditional circumcision is thus a good example of the positive and negative aspects of the importance of visible markers of identity. Rites can represent discipline, belonging or inclusivity, courage, vigilance, social responsibility, and community acknowledgement. However, they can also create exclusion, hierarchy and boundaries between insiders and outsiders. This double function is hermeneutically important because it explains why Paul's

redefinition of circumcision becomes necessary. Just because the ritual distinction of circumcision can be symbolic, it does not mean that the final covenantal identity cannot be based on something else – ethnic privilege or inherited standing. Ritual status can displace moral and covenant faithfulness when outward signs are used as the foundation for identity. Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας as covenantal identity, however, is internalised, rather than externalised (Rom 2:28–29; Dunn, 1998:120; Moo, 2018:165; Jewett, 2007:213).

This analogy can thus be used only if there are clear breaks in the continuity and breaks in the discontinuities with Paul. African rites of circumcision demonstrate the significance of the bodily mark in organising identity, belonging, and morality; in Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας, however, covenant identity is no longer tied to the body, but to the heart renewed by the Spirit. The issue is not that circumcision for the Africans equals heart circumcision for Paul, but that both show the symbolic nature of circumcision as an identity marker. The central theme in Paul's argument is not social adulthood, ethnic membership, or ritual fulfilment, but inward covenant renewal before God. As such, the controlling theological text for this point is Romans 2:28–29.

Paul's concept, therefore, has clear relevance for Kenyan Christianity. While circumcision functioned as a visible marker of belonging and covenant identity, contemporary churches may likewise treat denominational affiliation, ecclesial office, ritual participation, or ethnic identity as sufficient markers of spiritual authenticity. Within African Biblical Hermeneutics, περιτομὴ καρδίας may serve as a theological corrective, affirming African identity and moral responsibility while challenging ritual complacency, ethnocentrism, and externalised religiosity in Kenyan Christianity. It calls the church to a covenant identity not secured by baptism, religious affiliation, or institutional belonging alone, but grounded in inward transformation and expressed through integrity and faithfulness enabled by the Spirit of God.

5.4.4 Critical Appraisal of the Applicability of περιτομὴ καρδίας

Instead of seeing Kenyan traditional circumcision as equivalent to Paul's use of the term, περιτομὴ καρδίας, this section regards circumcision as a contextual analogy. The circumcision of the body in Kenya's traditional culture is used to demonstrate the role of body rites in forming

identities, belonging, and social status. However, Paul's περιτομὴ καρδίας is not about a rite of cultural initiation but about a spiritual and theological reality. It thus examines the appropriateness and restrictions of traditional African circumcision as a contextual comparison for understanding the concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας in African Biblical Hermeneutics. Traditional circumcision can help shed light on some aspects of identity, transition, belonging, and communal formation, but the analogy is still incomplete and must give way to Paul's line of argument in Romans 2:24-29. Paul is not talking about physical circumcision, but circumcision of the heart, which is the true sign of covenant identity, moral purity, and divine favour as well as approval.

Traditional circumcision has hermeneutical value as a cultural analogy of identity, belonging, and transition. Within African Biblical Hermeneutics, however, this analogy remains subordinate to the exegetical claims of Romans 2:24–29. Contextual reading, therefore, has allowed text and culture to be in dialogue while preserving the theological priority of the biblical text and the covenantal significance of περιτομὴ καρδίας (Adamo, 2001:45; West, 2015:235–237). Accordingly, the present appraisal does not equate traditional circumcision with heart circumcision; rather, it evaluates where the analogy is illuminating and where it becomes distorting. The Pauline concept is not ritual, social status, or ethnic identity, but inward Spirit–enabled transformation, covenantal inclusion, and integrity before God.

For example, traditional Kenyan circumcision carried major significance for identity, moral formation, rites of passage, and gendered membership within the community (Mbiti, 1991:121–123; Gathogo, 2008:17; Njoroge, 2019:92). In that respect, it helps to illuminate the social and symbolic force of circumcision in Paul's world. At the same time, however, traditional initiation could also reinforce patriarchal hierarchy, coercive conformity, and the exclusion of the uncircumcised (Gachiri, 2001:48; Kimani, 2015:46–47). But theologically, Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας redefines covenant identity as circumcision of the heart through inward, Spirit–enabled transformation rather than through physical circumcision. Traditional initiation must therefore be evaluated in light of Romans 2:24–29. Where the cultural practice illuminates identity, community, and moral integrity, it may serve as a valid analogy; where it is invoked to

support ethnic superiority, legalism, privilege, or ritual pride, it stands under Pauline critique (Dunn, 1998:124; Moo, 2018:167; Cranfield, 2004:155; Wright, 2002e:466).

Read through African Biblical Hermeneutics; this analogy is most useful where traditional circumcision is used to help clarify identity, belonging, responsibility, solidarity, and recognised status within a community. In these ways, circumcision was a performative process that established maturity, organised inclusion and exclusion, supported a sense of communal responsibility, and granted social authority. But Paul radicalises such reasoning by transferring all such meaning into the realm of inner, Spirit–enabled change. In Romans 2:24–29, however, identity is no longer grounded in ritual, covenantal belonging is no longer exclusionary, responsibility is no longer socially enforced, solidarity is no longer ethnically bounded, and legitimacy is no longer determined by ceremonial seniority. These are all reconstituted through covenant faithfulness rather than external signs.

African traditional circumcision can thus serve as a limited contextual analogy, but is incapable of serving as the theological norm. That norm is Paul's idea of περιτομὴ καρδίας, understood as a covenant renewal through the inward Spirit's enabling of the heart. The analogy makes sense in one respect: it illuminates the critique of covenant identity that Paul offers, namely, that covenant identity can be reduced to ritual status. Accordingly, the analogy can domesticate or distort Paul's critique when covenant identity becomes associated with ethnic privilege or social hierarchy. Paul locates decisive covenant identity in inward, Spirit-enabled transformation rather than reliance on outward initiation or status. African Biblical Hermeneutics therefore requires critical appraisal to preserve both contextual intelligibility and Pauline theological control of the text. As a result, περιτομὴ καρδίας cannot be reduced to African cultural symbolism or rites of initiation. It remains a Pauline theological concept grounded in the Spirit, covenant identity, and divine approval.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has developed a six-fold biblical–theological framework in which περιτομὴ καρδίας is the constructive response to the exterior religiosity diagnosed in previous chapters. Based on

the exegetical and theological interpretation of Romans 2:24–29 and guided by African Biblical Hermeneutics, the chapter has demonstrated that Paul finds covenant identity, moral responsibility, and the honouring of God's name not in the status of rituals, ethnic privilege, or the outward performance of religion. Rather, true covenant identity is grounded in inward transformation enabled by the Spirit. In this way, Paul redefines covenant belonging in terms of περιτομὴ καρδίας rather than external religious status. Thus, the six-fold integrated biblical–theological framework is a restorative and coherent logic of ethics: Authentic Witness, Grace–Enabled Obedience, Inward Faith, Inclusive Covenant Identity, and Spirit–Enabled Renewal. All these are held within Pauline theological logic for Kenyan Christianity.

The chapter has also shown that the power of περιτομὴ καρδίας is, in its nature, corrective and transformative. Paul redefines covenant identity in terms of the "heart" rather than ritual or ethnic privilege, locating true belonging in inward renewal effected by the Holy Spirit. In this way, he draws on Deuteronomic and prophetic traditions that emphasise covenant obedience arising from inward transformation. On that basis, the developed six-fold biblical–theological framework offers a theologically grounded approach to addressing the issues of moral failure, hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, denominational exclusivism, and ethnocentrism in the life of the church. It also explains how confession and practice can be aligned so that the church's testimony is more credible, more ethically responsible, and more faithful to the honour of God's name.

The chapter has also shown that selected African circumcision traditions may function as limited contextual analogies for the identity-forming and boundary-marking role of visible rites. Their hermeneutical value remains subordinate to Paul's argument and does not imply historical or theological equivalence with περιτομὴ καρδίας. Thus, the chapter has fulfilled its constructive theological task by developing a disciplined framework for inward, Spirit-enabled ecclesial renewal from the theological logic of Paul's περιτομὴ καρδίας and by bringing it into constructive dialogue with selected Kenyan ecclesial contexts. Chapter Six now summarises the study's findings, contributions, limitations, and implications.

CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTION, AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This study has examined the problem of outward religiosity that dishonours God's name in light of Paul's reinterpretation of circumcision in Romans 2:24–29. Paul's understanding of inward, Spirit-enabled covenant identity in περιτομὴ καρδίας has been brought into constructive dialogue with selected patterns of external religiosity documented in Kenyan ecclesial literature. This is because it goes beyond the outward religious privilege to the inward transformation made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit. This chapter synthesises the findings, presents the main results, outlines the contributions to knowledge, theological and ecclesial implications, limitations, and areas for further research, and concludes with a reflection on the findings.

6.2 Summary of the Research Findings

The study yielded four general findings. First, from a historical-covenantal perspective, the study has shown that Paul's argument in Romans 2:24–29 must be understood in light of the broader history of circumcision as a covenant sign, bodily practice, identity marker, and boundary marker. Circumcision was not an Israelite innovation. Within Israel, however, it was given distinctive covenantal significance as a sign of Abrahamic belonging, obligation, and identity. Paul's critique of circumcision in Romans 2:24–29 becomes intelligible only against this wider background. Within Paul's argument, the outward sign of the covenant is insufficient when detached from obedience. Decisive covenant identity is located in inward, Spirit-enabled transformation. Romans 2:24-29, then, is an exegesis of Paul's broader theme in Romans 1-4: under God's judgment, the human inability to be consistently moral, the privilege of the Jews as covenant people, and the concept of righteousness in the law-boasting and circumcision groups. In this argument, Romans 2:24 makes the theological point that "covenantal" inconsistency brings public dishonour to God's name, while Romans 2:28–29 climaxes the passage by locating authentic covenant identity in inward, Spirit-enabled renewal.

Second, the contextual analysis identified selected patterns of moral inconsistency, hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, and ethnocentrism documented in Kenyan ecclesial literature. These patterns may be read analogically as instances in which outward religious identity becomes detached from inward transformation. This does not equate Kenyan Christianity with Paul's first-century Jewish interlocutors. Rather, it identifies an analogous theological tension between outward profession and inward covenant faithfulness that may weaken public Christian witness and bring about public shame.

Third, theologically, the study argues that περιτομὴ καρδίας is the climactic theological response in Romans 2:24–29 to the contradiction between outward covenant identity and disobedient conduct that occasions the public dishonouring of God's name. It does not destroy visible forms of religion, the spirit of obedience, ritual, or communal identity, but it puts them in the service of the Spirit's inward renewal. Paul is not concerned with the rejection of religious identity per se, but with its redirection in the context of covenant faithfulness made possible by the Spirit.

Fourth, constructively, the study has produced a six-fold biblical–theological framework of Ethical Renewal, Authentic Witness, Grace-Enabled Obedience, Inward Faith, Covenantal Inclusivity and Spirit-Enabled Renewal. This framework shows how moral inconsistency, hypocrisy, legalistic tendencies, ritualism, and ethnocentrism identified in selected Kenyan ecclesial contexts may be addressed through the theological logic of περιτομὴ καρδίας. Together, these findings suggest that ecclesial identity, moral responsibility, and public witness should be rooted in an inward transformation of the covenant, brought about by the Spirit.

6.3 Major Findings of the Study

This section summarises the major findings and original contribution, drawing from the summary presented in section 6.2. The findings correspond to the study's four objectives: establishing the historical and theological background to Romans 2:24–29; undertaking a close exegesis of the passage; examining selected Kenyan ecclesial patterns; and developing a constructive biblical-theological framework for ecclesial renewal from the theological logic of περιτομὴ καρδίας.

First, the study has argued that Romans 2:24–29 develops a coherent problem–response movement. Romans 2:24 identifies the public dishonouring of God's name arising from covenantal inconsistency. Romans 2:25–27 tests the value of outward covenant signs in relation to obedience. Romans 2:28–29 then climaxes the argument by locating authentic covenant identity in inward, Spirit-enabled renewal. In this movement, there is a reversal in Romans 2:26-27; that is, obedient uncircumcision exposes and judges the disobedient circumcised. The passage is therefore not limited to critiquing outward religious confidence. It connects the public dishonouring of God's name with inward, Spirit-enabled transformation and locates authentic covenant identity in that inward renewal.

Second, the study has restricted the concept of implied blasphemy to "reputational dishonour," and not applied it as an umbrella term for all immoral acts. This controlled definition does not allow the concept to get too broad, for it still carries the force of Paul's charge in Romans 2:24. Thirdly, the study has shown that the concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας does not refer exclusively to the private or individual, but is a communal/missional one. Through περιτομὴ καρδίας, the Spirit-enabled transformation finds visible expression in covenant faithfulness, credible Christian witness, and conduct that honours God's name.

Fourth, the study has developed Paul's theological logic into a sixfold biblical–theological framework for Kenyan Christianity: Ethical Renewal, Authentic Witness, Grace-Enabled Obedience, Inward Faith, Covenantal Inclusivity, and Spirit-Enabled Renewal. If outward religiosity in Kenyan Christianity reflects a disconnection between external religious expression and inward transformation, then Paul's critique of circumcision in Romans 2:24–29 provides a relevant contextual analogy. This framework illustrates how the concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας can be used to remedy moral inconsistency, hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, and ethnocentrism that discredit the church and dishonour God's name. Thus, it does not turn the study into a sociological description or moral exhortation. Together, these findings support the study's contribution: a sustained problem–response reading of Romans 2:24–29 that traces the movement from the public dishonouring of God's name to inward, Spirit-enabled covenant identity in περιτομὴ καρδίας and that, from this theological movement, develops a constructive framework for Kenyan Christianity.

6.4 Contribution to Knowledge

The study makes a fourfold contribution that is distinct from the summary of findings above. First, it contributes to Pauline interpretation through a sustained reading of the theological relationship between Romans 2:24 and 2:29. It argues that Romans 2:24–29 develops a coherent problem–response movement. Romans 2:24 identifies the public dishonouring of God's name arising from covenantal inconsistency. Romans 2:25–27 then tests outward covenant privilege in relation to obedience. Romans 2:28–29 climaxes the movement in περιτομὴ καρδίας, locating authentic covenant identity in inward, Spirit-enabled renewal. The distinctive contribution is therefore to read the public crisis of verse 24 and the inward covenant identity of verse 29 as integral parts of the same theological movement.

Second, the study develops "reputational dishonour" as a controlled contextual category for interpreting the public effect described in Romans 2:24. The category is not proposed as a lexical equivalent of βλασφημεῖται, but as a way of describing how covenantal inconsistency may occasion the public dishonouring of God's name. It therefore distinguishes reputational dishonour arising from conduct from direct verbal blasphemy and guards against labelling every instance of Christian moral failure as "blasphemy."

Third, the study contributes methodologically to African Biblical Hermeneutics by demonstrating a textually controlled dialogue between Pauline exegesis and Kenyan contextual reflection. The Kenyan context identifies the questions and provides the point of contextual encounter, but it does not determine the meaning of Romans 2:24–29. The exegetical findings remain normative, while contextual realities bring questions of identity, public witness, and ecclesial faithfulness under the text's scrutiny. The study therefore models an African contextual hermeneutic in which context illuminates the significance of the biblical text without controlling its meaning.

Lastly, the study contributes to Kenyan ecclesial theology by developing a sixfold biblical-theological framework from the theological logic of περιτομὴ καρδίας. The framework offers a

constructive theological response to the externalisation of Christian faith through six interrelated dimensions: Ethical Renewal, Authentic Witness, Grace-Enabled Obedience, Inward Faith, Covenantal Inclusivity, and Spirit-Enabled Renewal. These dimensions are neither separate remedies nor sequential stages. Rather, they respond constructively to selected patterns of moral inconsistency, hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, and ethnocentrism documented in Kenyan ecclesial literature. At the centre of the framework is περιτομὴ καρδίας, while Spirit-enabled renewal functions as the integrating and enabling theological dynamic that holds the six dimensions together. The framework therefore directs outward Christian identity and practice towards inward, Spirit-enabled covenant faithfulness and credible public witness.

6.5 Theological and Ecclesial Implications

This is not programmatic research, but theological research. The study does not focus foremost on administrative changes, institutional mechanisms, or policy changes, although such changes may be required. Rather, it proposes that the covenant identity is re-created, renewed, and enfleshed through περιτομὴ καρδίας and that these visible manifestations of the church need to be transformed from within by the Spirit.

First, one must look at the change of heart effected by the Spirit, and not at a person's outward appearance, to determine whether he or she is a Christian. The elements of doctrinal profession, denominational affiliation, ritual engagement, and ecclesial office are significant but cannot replace covenant fidelity. The study does not proscribe religious identity but requires it to be validated by inner change in the person and by the person's integrity and moral consistency.

Second, public Christian witness is not merely a sociological concern but a theological one. When the behaviour of God's people goes against their profession, then it's not just a case of reputational damage but the dishonouring of God's name. Patterns of moral inconsistency, hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, and ethnocentrism in Kenyan ecclesial literature are examined from a theological perspective of Romans 2. Theological analysis identifies these patterns as matters of Christian witness. Within the logic of Romans 2:24, the contradiction between profession and conduct may occasion the public dishonouring of God's name.

Third, the renewal of the Church must go beyond external renewal. Policies, programmes, disciplinary procedures, and institutional statements are all key, but are not enough if they are not based on inward transformation. The Pauline remedy is not the refutation of the visible forms of the church but the putting of the visible church under the renewal of the heart by the Spirit of God.

Fourth, there is a need for a different vision of renewal in the churches in Kenya that is ethical, communal, and missional. This renewal (περιτομὴ καρδίας) is expressed through Ethical Renewal, Authentic Witness, Grace-Enabled Obedience, Inward Faith, Covenantal Inclusivity, and Spirit-Enabled Renewal. The implications are that it is not just about the respect for institutions, but about the changing of the covenant community, its inner life, and its outward confession.

6.6 Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study was deliberately limited to make the exegetical, theological, and contextual argument of this work more manageable, enabling it to focus on Romans 2:24–29 and its implications for Kenyan Christianity. This study was limited to the exegetical and theological analysis of Romans 2:24–29 and its constructive application to selected Kenyan Christian contexts. It was not meant to do empirical, sociological or survey research, but to build a biblical–theological argument based on Paul's use of περιτομὴ καρδίας. Hence, the Kenyan examples referred to in the study are drawn not from interviews, questionnaires, surveys, or ethnographic fieldwork, but from published literature, public theological reflection, and selected ecclesial observations.

In the Second place, the study also focused only on some expressions of exterior religiosity: moral inconsistency, hypocrisy, legalism, ritualism, and ethnocentrism. The categories are not comprehensive and are not intended to represent all the challenges encountered by the different Christian faith communities in Kenya. They were chosen, however, because they dealt with Paul's stress on an outward religious identity, the failure to maintain it, and the dishonouring of

God's name. The study is not designed to provide a comprehensive picture of all the churches or any denominational groups in Kenya, but rather to illustrate. The study is, therefore, not intended to find out the extent or frequency of such patterns, or the denominations to which they belong in Kenyan Christianity. This would require an empirical study and sampling of those denominations, which go beyond the scope of the present theological study based on literature. In the future, these patterns could be studied empirically in known ecclesial communities to determine how they are perceived, lived, and responded to in specific denominational and congregational contexts.

Third, this framework was primarily based on Romans 2:24-29, with other biblical traditions listed as supporting texts. The other Pauline texts on circumcision, the law, the work of the Spirit, faith, new creation, and the Jew–Gentile relationship were only included when they were useful to the argument in Romans 2:24-29. Other texts might be studied more extensively in a more comprehensive study, such as Galatians 5:6, Galatians 6:15, Philippians 3:2-11, and Romans 8. These limitations do not diminish the study's findings. Rather, they delimit its scope and indicate areas for further exegetical, contextual, sociological, and ecclesial research.

6.7 Areas for Further Research

For the exegetical-theological questions raised by the study, and its own non-empirical approach, four directions for further study are suggested. First, future research might be directed towards the reception, teaching, and application of the sixfold biblical–theological understanding of περιτομὴ καρδίας in different denominations in Kenya. As this study is not empirical, future research could use interviews, surveys, or case studies to explore the perceptions of bishops, pastors, elders, and church members regarding external religiosity, public witness, and inward renewal.

Second, further studies on the relationship between ethnicity and Christianity in the Kenyan context may be needed regarding περιτομὴ καρδίας. This study has only looked at one manifestation of external identity — ethnocentrism —but other research could consider the interactions among ethnic identity, church leadership, resource distribution, and ecclesial

belonging in a particular denominational context. It would be helpful to test the practical usefulness of the proposed framework of covenantal inclusivity against actual patterns of ethnic loyalty, exclusion, and leadership contestation in church life.

Third, other Pauline texts, such as Galatians 5:6, Galatians 6:15, Philippians 3:2–11 and Romans 8, could be compared with Romans 2:24–29. This will aid in further exploring their similarities and differences. Such a study would help clarify how Paul relates circumcision to faith, the Spirit to new creation, and both to covenant identity. This would also help to explain how Paul's concept of inward renewal (Romans 12:2) fits into his larger theology of Spirit-enabled transformation.

Fourth, further studies could focus on the reception history and the practical-theological application of περιτομὴ καρδίας in African Christianity. This may provide an opportunity to examine how περιτομὴ καρδίας has been understood, developed, lived, and taught in pastoral formation, discipleship, church leadership training, and theological education. It would extend the present study by bringing together elements of exegesis, contextual theology, reception history, and practical theology, without allowing contextual application to undermine the exegesis of Romans 2:24-29. These areas for further research would extend the present study without reopening its central argument. Romans 2:24–29 has already been shown to provide a Pauline framework in which outward religious identity is subordinated to inward covenant transformation enabled by the Spirit.

6.8 Final Concluding Reflections

This investigation has maintained that the inconsistent behaviours of the covenant people dishonour God's name, and that περιτομὴ καρδίας functions in Paul's argument as a theological remedy to outward religiosity. Religious identity, possession of religious ritual and covenant privilege do not replace an inner change of life, as Romans 2:24-29 makes clear. Paul's argument is not against visible religious forms themselves, but against reliance on them when detached from inward, Spirit-enabled covenant faithfulness.

The same Pauline theological logic may be brought into constructive dialogue with selected Evangelical contexts in Kenya. Where Christian identity is reduced to denominational affiliation, ritual practice, ethnic solidarity, or outward moral conformity, an analogous theological tension may arise when these visible markers become detached from inward, Spirit-enabled covenant faithfulness. The use of Romans 2:24-29 for the Kenyan church should not be institutional or moralistic but rather a theological call to be renewed in the inner person, consistent in the moral person, and faithful in the public person.

The results of this study indicate that the concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας is not merely a personal spiritual metaphor but also a theological paradigm for new-covenant identity, public witness, and ecclesial transformation. It is a synthesis of the divisions of external religiosity: confession and conduct; identity and obedience; ritual and renewal; community; and witness. By linking Romans 2:24 and Romans 2:29, the study has demonstrated that the dishonouring of God's name is met not by the rejection of the visible forms of the church, but by the reordering of these forms in light of a covenant faithfulness sanctioned by the Spirit. The constructive implication of the study for the selected ecclesial contexts in Kenya is that the outward expression of ecclesial structures, denominational identities and rituals should not replace the inward, Spirit-driven covenant faithfulness. Within the study's argument, this inward covenant reality is theologically grounded in Paul's concept of περιτομὴ καρδίας in Romans 2:29.

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Appendix: Ethics Review Committee (ERB Approval No. 255)

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSITY

Private Bag 00217 Limuru,
Kenya
Email: office@spu.ac.ke
Website: www.spu.ac.ke

Tel Office: +254 (0) 20-2020505/10
Mobile: +254 (0) 728-669000
(0) 736-424440

REF: SPU/246/2024 **Date: 9th October 2024**

TO: Benard Ombori
St. Paul's University

Dear Benard,

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REF: An Exploration of Paul's Metaphor of Circumcision of the Heart (Rom 2:25-29): The Antidote for Ethnocentrism in the Kenyan Church, A Case of the Seventh - day Adventist Church

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Greetings,

This is to inform you that SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee has reviewed the above-named research proposal. **Your ERB approval number is 255, for the period between 9th October 2024 – 9th October 2025 (1 year).**

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements;

i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments) will be used.
ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee.
iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee within 72 hours of notification
iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affected safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect

the integrity of the research must be reported to *SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee* within 72 hours

v. Clearance for export of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.

vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.

vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days upon completion of the study to SPU- Institutional Scientific Ethics Review Committee.

viii. Please note that it is within the ISERC's mandate to monitor your research and to do random visits to the site. All research is subject to post approval monitoring.

Prior to commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) ***https://research-portal.nacosti.go.ke*** **and also obtain other clearances needed.**

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Daniel Nzengya, PhD
Chairperson
SPU- Institutional Scientific & Ethics Review Committee

