

The Fallacy of Trusting in the Flesh

Romans 2:17-29

It is, once again, my great joy and privilege to minister the Word of God to you this morning. We find ourselves in Romans chapter two as we continue our verse by verse study of this amazing epistle. We will be looking at verses 17 through 29 in a few minutes.

In order to prepare your heart and mind for the text this morning, may I ask you: Have you ever made a bad investment?

We kind of laugh because we all have.

Have you ever been conned? Several years ago the news of a massive con emerged. Former American stock broker, investment banker and non executive chairman of the NASDAQ stock market Bernie Madoff admitted to operating what has been described as the largest Ponzi scheme in the history of the world. In March of 2009 Madoff pleaded guilty to 11 federal felonies and admitted to turning his wealth management business into a massive Ponzi scheme that defrauded thousands of investors of literally billions of dollars.

Hollywood and sports celebrities, politicians, business executives, ordinary people all lined up to invest their money with Madoff and somehow cash in on his magical abilities to turn a huge profit. They placed their confidence in him. They even placed their confidence in their own flesh, their ability to make a wise decision. But thousands of these confident investors lost everything having put all of their eggs in the wrong basket.

Unfortunately, a lot of his fellow Jews and numerous Jewish charities had investments with him. They were all stunned by the scam and horribly embarrassed because of their financial ruin. Thousands of lives, families were left in shambles. Several have committed suicide. And on June 29, 2009 Madoff was sentenced to 150 years in prison, the maximum allowed.

Unfortunately, no one warned the investors of what he was up to. In fact, even though there were various experts that warned the government that there is probably a scam going on here, the SEC failed to investigate.

How sad. Investors that had confidence in their abilities to make the right investment, but they were wrong. They place their confidence in an investment firm that was a scam. They had confidence in their government to protect them from anything that might jeopardize their investment, but all of it failed.

And, dear friends, as tragic as that scenario has proven to be, it pales into utter insignificance in comparison to the eternal despair that will result for the man who placed the investment of his soul in a false religious system that cannot save. And this is what the second half of Romans chapter two is all about.

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Here the former rabbi, the apostle Paul who has been radically transformed by the power of Christ warns his kinsmen the Jews about their spiritual investment in Judaism which was doomed to fail. He is warning them that the system in which they have placed their confidence cannot deliver and that the Jewish leaders that they trusted, like the investors in the United States trusted the SEC, these leaders were ignorant of the lie and they, too, were duped. They provided no legitimate oversight.

So Paul now is going to lovingly warn them and expose the fallacy of trusting in the flesh which is the title of my discourse to you this morning.

And to do this he is going to expose three primary reasons that the Jews had that in their mind made them believe that the investment of their soul was absolutely secure. They believed that because they were the sons of Abraham, because they were God's chosen people they had it made. They believed that because they were the custodians of the law of God, that they were exempt from condemnation. And also because they bore the sign or the symbol of the Mosaic covenant in circumcision, that these three things together protected them from any kind of divine judgment.

Now you will remember in chapter one Paul explains why all men are under divine condemnation. Because of their rejection of God's revelation through creation and through conscience, all men are without excuse. And then in chapter two he moves on to build his case that that condemnation extends even to the most moral and religious person apart from Christ, especially speaking through his Jewish kinsmen, because they were absolutely confident that unlike those exceedingly immoral and idolatrous Gentiles, we are the sons of Abraham. We have the law and we bare the sign of circumcision so we will not be subject to God's judgment.

And so now the apostle Paul is going to zero in on these fallacious reasons.

Before I read this text to you, may I say I have many very dear Jewish friends and I know some of them hear this pulpit from time to time. Some of you may be listening now. I have known many Jewish friends since I was a young boy. I went to school with them. And I longed for them to embrace the truth of the gospel of Christ and some have. And I pray that each of you will share my burden for Jewish people. And as we study this text this morning you will understand a little bit better how to do that, because you will learn a little bit more about their mindset.

But please understand that Paul's exposure of this fallacy of Judaism can be broadened to include very kind of false religious system, because there is a shred of commonality among them all, namely the fallacy of trusting in the flesh rather than the righteousness of Christ.

For example, the Mormons believe that they have to earn their salvation by serving a mission and attending LDS meetings. The Jehovah's Witnesses earn their salvation through total obedience to the Watchtower Society. Islam teaches that on the day of judgment one's good evil... or good deeds will... must outweigh their evil deeds and that

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God is going to place them on a scale. Good works are considered heavy and evil deeds are light, thus the person whose balances are heavy with good deeds will go to heaven, while the person whose scales are light will go to hell and so on.

Salvation for the Roman Catholic requires obedience to the seven sacraments. Every religion except Christianity requires some measure of doing good things in order to earn your way to heaven. And even the non religious person foolishly thinks that somehow because I am a good people... a good person, my good deeds will outweigh my bad and therefore God kind of grades on the curve and I am sure I am going to pass the test of his perfect holiness.

And perhaps some of you have your own Christianized version of that. I have prayed a prayer or I have been baptized. I belong to a church. I do a lot of good things in the church.

But as we have studied before, dear friends, none of that either prove or disprove genuine saving faith. Because when God judges a man he is not going to look at your righteousness, but he is going to look for the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And unless you are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, unless you have been washed by the precious blood of the Lamb, you will perish in your sins because only in Christ is a man made righteous.

So Paul's warning to the Jews here has implications for every man who erroneously places his confidence in his own flesh to earn salvation.

Now let's notice Paul's line of reasoning here beginning in verse 17 through verse 29 of Romans two.

But if you bear the name "Jew," and rely upon the Law, and boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written. For indeed circumcision is of value, if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. If therefore the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of

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the Law? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.¹

Three reasons why the Jew was convinced that he was exempt from condemnation, because he was a son of Abraham, because he possessed the law and because he was circumcised. And each of these claims were based upon some measure of truth. So they, indeed, needed clarification and that is what Paul will now do.

Notice the first line of reasoning that Paul attacks. Number one, because he was a son of Abraham.

Verse 17 he says, “But if you bear the name ‘Jew...’”²

Now understand that the term “Jew” was derived from Judah which was one of the 12 tribes and the root meaning is one who is praised. So they wore that name as a badge of honor because they were, indeed, of the seed of Abraham. Unfortunately, however, their heritage had become a source of self righteous pride. They felt superior to the Gentiles. In fact, they hated the Gentiles and they were convinced that because they were Jews they were exempt from divine condemnation. And keep in mind now all through the first part of Romans Paul is building the case that all men are under condemnation. All men are in need of a righteousness that is not of their own, but the righteousness of Christ.

It is interesting. Later in verse 29 Paul will use this root meaning of Jew, which is one who is praised, to expose their self righteous pride and say that true circumcision is of the heart.

He says, “And his praise is not from men, but from God.”³

So the point here is the Jews were very proud of their name, because of the heritage. They understood God’s covenant with their father Abraham recorded in Genesis 12.

You will recall there that God promised that through him he would make them a great nation. He said that, “I will bless you and make your name great.”⁴

“I will curse those who even curse you,” which is a form of divine protection against anti-Semitism.

He says, “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”⁵

¹ Romans 2:17-29.

² Romans 2:17.

³ Romans 2:19.

⁴ Genesis 12:2.

⁵ Genesis 12:3.

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So they had reason to boast, but not in themselves, but because of God's sovereign grace.

You will recall when Jesus condemned the Jews in John eight they were horribly offended.

And they answered him in verse 33 and said, "[But] we are Abraham's offspring."⁶

There you have it. There is the great defense. "We are Abraham's offspring."⁷

But Jesus went on to say to them in verse 39 of John eight:

If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are doing the deeds of your father.⁸

And he went on to say in verse 44, "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father."⁹

"Yes, you are the natural descendants of Abraham, but because of your unbelief, not all of you are spiritual descendants of Abraham. You are of your father the devil."

And so just because they were Abraham's physical descendants, did not mean that they were also his spiritual descendants. That was Jesus' point.

So they understood nothing of the spiritual heritage associated with God's covenant to Abraham, that because of the Lord Jesus Christ who would come from that lineage, who was also a Jew, through him the whole world would be blessed.

In fact, Jesus went on to say in verse 58 of John eight, "Before Abraham was born, I am."¹⁰

Now to the Jew, this was like throwing hot water in their face. This absolutely infuriated them, because they understood the phrase "I am." You see that was the root meaning of Yahweh of Jehovah God. This was blasphemy. Jesus was telling them that before Abraham was born, I am. In other words, before he was even born, I existed as God.

What was their reaction? Verse 59 of John eight we read, "Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple."¹¹

⁶ John 8:33.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ John 8:39-41.

⁹ John 8:44.

¹⁰ John 8:58.

¹¹ John 8:59.

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Now some may say, “Well, how could anyone believe that their physical heritage could exempt them from condemnation?”

Well, let me digress for a moment and tell you that this happens even in Christian circles from time to time. In fact, we have had dear people who have visited this church and condemned me because... and left the church because I would not baptize their infant children and in their mind place them into the covenant family. Like many others they believe that infant baptism basically replaced Jewish circumcision and would, therefore, transfer upon a child the saving blessings of the covenant of grace.

Well, his is nothing more than a hybrid of the Jewish belief that as long as they were circumcised they were a descendant of Abraham through the line of Isaac. As long as all of that was there, then they were exempt from God’s judgment.

John MacArthur made an interesting comment along this line and I quote, “Some Protestant denominations, though denying that infant baptism in itself has power to save, nevertheless maintain that the ritual has direct spiritual benefit for the child. Martin Luther, for instance, believed that through this sacrament, God miraculously grants saving faith to the infant who itself is incapable of believing. Others view infant baptism as confirmation of the child’s salvation by virtue of its being born into a Christian family and thereby into the new covenant of Jesus Christ.” MacArthur went on to say, “According to Scripture, however, a person who is raised in a Christian home and trained in a Christian environment is not saved by such a heritage, valuable as it is, nor does baptism or any other Christian rite in itself possess or bestow any spiritual benefit. Apart from true faith held by the person receiving it, no ritual or ceremony has any spiritual value whatsoever. Baptism is not a sacrament. And without faith it becomes a sacrilege,” end quote.

So Paul begins here in the same place where Jesus exposed the Jews in John eight. This wasn’t exactly what they wanted to hear. And he is going to continue on to expose the fallacy of trusting in the flesh, especially as it related to their heritage which was their most prized possession, yet one that had absolutely no saving value.

Now Paul goes on in verse 17 to introduce the second reason why the Jew was convinced that he was exempt from condemnation. Not only because he was the of the son of Abraham, but because he possessed the law.

Notice he says, back to verse 17:

But if you bear the name "Jew," and rely upon the Law, and boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law.¹²

¹² Romans 2:17-18.

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Now this is a very telling text. It speaks of what fueled Jewish pride. It says they relied upon the law. Now in this context the law referred to the whole of the Old Testament, not merely the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses, of the Mosaic law.

Now to be sure, they were both the recipients as well as the custodians of the law that God had given them, his revelation of himself about who he was and how we are to respond to him. But they all knew far more than they obeyed.

Sound familiar? We know much more than we obey.

Now rabbis of that day and even to this day, were notorious for tampering with the law. If the standard is too high, what do you do? You lower it. That is what they would do. And one of the ways they would cut themselves a little slack is they would say, "You know, obviously we can't keep all the law here. So if you just study the law and keep the outward ceremonies, you know, the feasts, the convocations, the sacrifices, then God will be satisfied."

In fact, just studying the Scriptures became one of the highest forms of worship for the Jews.

Maybe you have been where I have been in Israel. You have seen at least pictures of the wailing wall where the Jews go and right to the left there you can go into a tunnel, it is called the western wall tunnel and if you go in about 150 feet there is a small synagogue there and only the men, obviously, can go there. But I remember going in there and that is the closest point that the Jew can get to where they believe the holy of holies once stood which would be up above now in the Muslim's Dome of the Rock which is an interesting, interesting thought to say the least.

And if you go into that area you will see that it is crowded with young men as well as older men and they have rather large desks and stools that they sit on and they will be... they will have the scrolls opened up and they will be studying the law, going back and forth with all of their regalia on with very thick glasses. And it is interesting. When I say thick glasses it is like you can tell they have eye problems. And that is a badge of honor because it shows that you have studied so hard that you have basically done damage to your eyes.

And so even to this day the idea of just studying the Scriptures is an act of worship.

But, you know, knowing the will of God and doing the will of God are two radically different things. It is interesting that prostitution in Israel is defined primarily by three groups, by foreign workers, by Arabs and by orthodox Jews. It is interesting that an orthodox Jew, you see, is not allowed by their law to have relations with their wife for a minimum of 12 days after the beginning of her monthly cycle. However, during that time he can receive a temporary divorce that would allow him to be intimate with a foreign prostitute.

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Now examples like this abound not only in modern Judaism, but in ancient Judaism. And so with this in mind, Paul rightly states.

“You have boasted in God.” And it says, he says, “They knew his will and approved the things that are essential.”

Now there is some sarcasm going on here. In other words, “You had all you needed to understand God and to serve him.”

He says here, “Being instructed out of the law.”¹³

My, what a privileged people, to have the law of God, to be instructed by it. The word “instructed” is *katēcew* (kat-ay-kheh'-o) in the original language. We get our word catechism from that.

It is interesting. The rabbinic law required fathers to teach their sons the Torah as well as a trade. In fact, in Deuteronomy six verse seven we read that, “You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”¹⁴

In most places in ancient Judaism and many to this day, they start at the age of five, especially with their little boys and they begin to intensively train them in the Old Testament. They are taught at home. They are taught in the synagogue. They are systematically taught the Old Testament Scriptures.

I remember back in the early 70s when I was at Moody Bible Institute we had a thing called the practical Christian work assignment. And one of my assignments for a semester was to go to a Jewish suburb, to a private Jewish boys' school where they had invited me to come and to teach 13 and 14 year old boys the fundamentals of basketball because I played on the team there and also at the close of that to make some practical applications from the book of Proverbs.

Now, interestingly enough, that began at about 3:15. And they had been in the study of Proverbs from one o'clock to three o'clock on Tuesdays. And so you see that even to this day it is very important for even the children to know the Word of God, the Old Testament law. And in the first century Jews were highly educated, especially in the Scriptures. They were able to quote long passages of Scripture. And often they would do this in public to kind of demonstrate their spiritual prowess.

But I want you to notice Paul's sarcasm continues as he lists four particular ways the Jews considered themselves to be the spiritually elite of all the nations.

Verse 19. Number one, he says, “[You] are confident that you yourself are a guide to the

¹³ Romans 2:18.

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 6:7.

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blind.”¹⁵ Secondly, “alight to those who are in darkness.”¹⁶ Thirdly, verse 20, “a corrector of the foolish.”¹⁷ Fourthly, “a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth.”¹⁸

In other words, he is saying, “You consider yourselves to be the spiritual and moral experts, the ones who can teach the Gentiles, who are obviously blind and foolish concerning these things, also the teachers of the immature,” which would refer, primarily to, I believe, the Gentile proselytes.

So you are confident in these roles.

And it is interesting. Those roles all centered around the law.

But notice what Paul says at the end of verse 20 that they had, “in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth.”¹⁹

Embodiment in the original language is *morfwsiv* (mor'-fo-sis) and *morfwsiv* (mor'-fo-sis) is a term that basically means a form or a substance of something. It refers to the semblance or the appearance, an outline of something.

In fact, in 2 Timothy 3:5 Paul, you will recall, describes phony Christians, phony Christian leaders as holding to a form. There it is, *morfwsiv* (mor'-fo-sis), same word, “holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these.”²⁰

So perhaps a better translation here in verse 20 of Romans two is that Paul is saying, “You have a form. You have a semblance. You have a superficial appearance of knowledge and of truth.”

To put it in our vernacular, “You are all sizzle, but no steak.”

Then, in order to further arouse their conscience, notice what he says in verse 21.’

“You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?”²¹

Said differently, “Do you practice what you preach?”

Of course he knows that they are all guilty there. In fact, we are all guilty there, right?

¹⁵ Romans 2:19.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Romans 2:20.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ 2 Timothy 3:5.

²¹ Romans 2:21.

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He goes on to say, “You who preach that one should not steal, do you steal?”²²

The background here is interesting. The Jews were notorious for taking advantage of others in that day. Of course, they were well trained by their leaders, were they not? The leaders ran the temple scam. They all knew they were getting scammed. And it was kind of part of the culture to out scam the scammers. So they would withhold their tithes and offerings. There were all kinds of things they would do.

You will recall that Isaiah condemned them because they, according to Isaiah 56:11, “turned to their own way, Each one to his unjust gain.”²³

Ezekiel included this in his catalog of sins that he described in chapter 22 verse 12. He says, ““In you they have taken bribes to shed blood; you have taken interest and profits, and you have injured your neighbors for gain by oppression, and you have forgotten Me,” declares the Lord.”²⁴

Hosea the prophet described how Israel even adopted the ways of the Canaanites who were also crooks. In Hosea 12:7 he says that they were merchants, “in whose hands are false balances, [who] loves to oppress.”²⁵

And then in Amos chapter eight and verse five the prophet described how that they would make, quote, “ bushel smaller and the shekel bigger,”²⁶ and how they cheat their neighbors, quote, “with dishonest scales.”²⁷

God even indicted them in Micah chapter six verse 11. He says:

Can I justify wicked scales And a bag of deceptive weights? For the rich men of the city are full of violence, Her residents speak lies, And their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.²⁸

So basically Paul is saying to them, “Yes, you know the law. You preach the law, but you do not obey the law.”

Beloved, we have to ask ourselves. Do we practice what we preach? Do we truly live out what we claim to believe? Do our private lives really match our public persona?

I must say that one of the most shocking and disappointing things early on in my Christian life, especially as I finished up seminary and began to do counseling and consulting and various kinds of ministry, the most shocking thing was to see men and

²² Ibid.

²³ Isaiah 56:11.

²⁴ Ezekiel 22:12.

²⁵ Hosea 12:7.

²⁶ Amos 8:5.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Micah 6:11-12.

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even women who were doctrinally sound, who knew the Word of God backwards and forwards and yet they were downright wicked, slanderous liars, immoral people.

I could turn on television. Some of them I see to this day. I go to the bookstores and see their books. False teachers as crooked as a barrel of snakes. And yet they knew the Word of God.

They had, as Paul said, “A form of godliness.”

You know, nothing shocks me anymore, because I have really seen it all in many ways and I have grown accustomed to it. Nevertheless, it still grieves my heart because it brings such dishonor on the Lord.

And the other thing it does is it gives me great pause to guard my own heart as it should each of us.

So in verse 22 Paul continues to expose his proud kinsmen, these great teachers of the law, the very law that condemned them.’

Verse 22. “You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?”²⁹

And, obviously, many of them did, if noting more than committing it in their heart.

he says, “You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?”³⁰

And, of course, they would do this by withholding their tithes, their offerings. Josephus even reports of various scams that the Jews would use to embezzle money from the temple.

And with respect to this charge of abhorring idols, yet do you rob temples, Paul may also here be referring to a very wicked practice that some of the Jews would do in ancient days. They would plunder the pagan temples after defeating those enemies and then profit from the idols that they stole. This was strictly prohibited.

Deuteronomy chapter seven verse 25 God says, “The graven images of their gods you are to burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it for yourselves, lest you be snared by it, for it is an abomination to the LORD your God.”³¹

As a footnote, may I say to you, dear Christian, it would be an abomination to the Lord for you to have within your possession any form of pagan idol or any item of worship. It is easy to pick these things up as we travel around the world. Our homes should give no quarter to that type of abomination.

²⁹ Romans 2:22.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Deuteronomy 7:25.

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So ultimately Paul is saying, “What inconsistency here. You take refuge in the law that you teach and yet you refuse to obey, this very law that condemns you?”

Verse 23 he says, “You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?”³²

Obviously they do. And then he quotes Isaiah 52:5 in verse 24.

He says, “For ‘THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU,’ just as it is written.”³³

Can you imagine what the Gentiles would have thought of many of these Jews? Here we have these Jews that boast that theirs is the only God, that none of our gods are anything at all. They brag about being the recipients as well as the custodians of the law and they love to teach the law, to preach the law and to pretend that they live the law even though they tamper with it to somehow get around its obligations. They call us idolaters. They treat us like dogs and yet they are hypocrites. Why would anyone want anything to do with this God, with his law?

I fear that the sting of that lash falls upon all of our backs, doesn't it? We claim to be Christians, slaves of Christ and yet how often do our lives reflect Christ? We claim to be the undeserved recipients of his grace, transformed by his power. The Holy Spirit dwelling within us, our bodies the temple of the Holy Spirit and because of the Holy Spirit we are able to not only understand the Word of God, but apply it to our lives.

And yet I wonder what those who know us best say about us. It is a humbling thought, isn't it?

Dear friend, if your life does not match your profession of faith in Christ, if when you leave this building or when you are not around other believers your life is lived in open rebellion, please do us all of a favor and conceal your faith, because all you are doing is bringing ridicule and reproach upon Christ. You are bringing scorn upon his Word and the Church.

You are like what he says in verse 24. “THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU.”³⁴

If you have no desire to truly love and serve Christ, please don't bring your hypocrisy into the Church. Your life not only dishonors Christ, but your hypocrisy is an metastasizing corruption that begins to infect everyone, especially our children.

³² Romans 2:23.

³³ Romans 2:24.

³⁴ Ibid.

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Well, finally, Paul continues in verse 25 to introduce the third reason why the Jew was convinced that he was exempt from condemnation. Not only because he was a son of Abraham and he possessed the law, but, thirdly, because he was circumcised.

Notice verse 45. He says, “For indeed circumcision is of value, if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.”³⁵

Now bear in mind that God commanded the covenant people that on the eighth day after his birth, Jewish boys were to be circumcised. This was not only a sign that he was a member of the covenant nation, but more importantly the cutting away of the male foreskin was symbolic of sin that is spread through every child that is born. Cutting away of the male foreskin of his reproductive organ symbolically demonstrated that all men are born into sin. So there is a need of a cleansing. There is a need for something to happen. It is a stark reminder that every child is born a sinner. He is in desperate need of a deep cleansing. But ultimately a cleansing of the heart, a work that only God can accomplish.

God spoke through Moses in Deuteronomy 30 and verse six, said this.

“The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.”³⁶

And the prophet Jeremiah said in chapter four, verse four where the Lord commands the men of Judah saying, “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart.”³⁷ That is the issue.

So circumcision was also a mark of judgment, a sign that men needed to be saved. And even more so if the circumcised man lived in disobedience. So Paul’s point was simply this. This external rite of circumcision is absolutely meaningless unless it reflects and inward reality. Otherwise it is merely an outward symbol.

Now please understand, however, that now those of us who are in Christ we are complete in Christ according to Colossians 2:10 and in verse 11 we read: “And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.”³⁸

Isn’t that a precious thought? You see, because of Christ we are no longer dominated by the flesh. It has been removed. We are, according to 2 Corinthians 5:17 “a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”³⁹

³⁵ Romans 2:25.

³⁶ Deuteronomy 30:6.

³⁷ Jeremiah 4:4.

³⁸ Colossians 2:11.

³⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

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So Paul continues to hammer this false notion of being exempt from divine condemnation because of circumcision. In summary he is saying circumcision cannot save you if you fail to keep the law. And, obviously, nobody can keep the law. So there is a real problem here. Ultimately where he is going is you have got to have the righteousness of Christ.

And then notice in verse 26 he says, “If therefore the uncircumcised man [referring to the Gentile] keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?”⁴⁰

Obviously the answer is yes.

You see, the issue is obedience to the law, not circumcision. But he is saying that the lack of circumcision would no more condemn the Gentile than would possession of circumcision save the Jew. That is the idea.

And then Paul drives the final stake through the heart of their pride in verse 27. He says, “And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?”⁴¹

In other words, he is saying, “The morality of the uncircumcised Gentile who does not know the law will stand as even a greater condemnation and judgment upon the circumcised Jew who knew the law, but did not obey it.”

You know, this is true for every religious Christian today.

Again, it is not your baptism. It is not your church membership that will save you. It is your faith in the righteousness of Christ alone proven by your faithful love and devotion to him. Moreover, dear religious Christian, hear this now. The more you have been exposed to the truth, the more you know about the doctrines of Christianity, the more responsible you are to live consistently with those truths, you see, increased knowledge of saving grace only heightens guilt and condemnation to those who reject it. So, bottom line. Paul is saying, “Your circumcision provides no merit for salvation. The issues is the keeping of the law which no man can do. Therefore you are all under condemnation.”

And eventually he is going to say, “But let me give you the good news. It is the gospel, the gospel of the righteousness of Christ to all who will believe.”

He is saying, “Salvation has nothing to do with the externals, with outward symbols or works. It is the result of a transformed heart, a work that only God can do.”

And like so many people today even in Christian circles, the Jew placed his faith in all the wrong things. He had confidence in his flesh, not in Christ. He was convinced that

⁴⁰ Romans 2:26.

⁴¹ Romans 2:27.

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because he was a son of Abraham, possessed the law and circumcision that he was immune to divine condemnation.

This is the fallacy of trusting in the flesh. The same charge could be levied against every proud Christian who is a Christian in name only, those who wear the trappings of Christianity.

Boy, we all know what it looks like, especially in our culture, don't we? But your life really doesn't reflect Christ because you have never had a changed heart. You say you are a Christian, then show me Christ in your life.

I wish to leave you with the testimony of the apostle Paul whom God had graciously delivered from all of these things. Like the Securities and Exchange Commission that failed to warn the people of their false confidence, I should say unlike them, Paul is going to warn, as he is here, his kinsmen the Jews of the truth. And here is what he said to the saints in Philippi in Philippians three beginning at verse one.

He says, "And it is a safeguard for you."⁴²

In other words, "What I am telling you now is going to protect you, this warning."

He says:

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more.⁴³

Then he gives the reasons why.

...circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.⁴⁴

Boy, if anybody would make the cut, it would be Paul. But what does he go on to say.

"But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ."⁴⁵

⁴² Philippians 3:1.

⁴³ Philippians 3:2-4.

⁴⁴ Philippians 3:5-6.

⁴⁵ Philippians 3:7.

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Then he concludes in verse nine saying, “Not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.”⁴⁶

Let’s pray together.

Father, thank you for the righteousness of Christ that can be ours, not through any merit of our own, but solely because of the gift of grace. Lord, speak to each heart and I pray that the ground of each heart which has now been broken up by the preaching of the Word will receive the gospel seed. And, Lord, I pray that by the power of your Spirit that seed might germinate and bear much fruit to the praise of your glory. We ask this in Jesus’ name and for his sake. Amen.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to pastor, Bible teacher and author David Harrell. For more information or to order additional tapes or CDs of pastor Harrell’s messages, please visit OliveTreeResources.org.

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⁴⁶ Philippians 3:9.