

Romans – Justified through faith

Week 6 – Romans 2:17 - 3:8 (Self Confident Jews)

Paul's has addressed depraved gentile society, hypocrites (both Jews and Gentiles) who know what is wrong but do it anyway and judgemental moralizers. Now he turns his attention to the self-confident Jews who have been given...

- i. The law (the revelation of God)
- ii. Circumcision (the *sign* of the covenant of God)

Paul anticipates the Jewish objections to his contention that the Jews are no better off than the gentiles.

The law (2: 17 -24)

Paul uses eight verbs to describe aspects of Jewish self-confidence...

1. Call - you call yourself Jews
2. Rely – you rely on the law – as a shield against disaster
3. Brag – brag about their relationship to God – their monopoly on Him
4. Know – they know His will – ‘the will’ – the absolute to which all others are relative
5. Approve – approve of what is superior – that which, having been tested, has been shown to excel
6. Instructed – instructed by the law
7. Convinced – convinced that they are competent to teach others
8. Have – have the law, the embodiment of knowledge and truth

Paul then asks five rhetorical questions to point out that the moral defeat experienced by the Jews, in their inability to perfectly keep the law, brought about the same discredit on the name of God that military defeat had done in Old Testament times.

Circumcision (2:25 – 29)

Paul refutes the Jewish view that circumcision provided permanent insurance cover against the wrath of God, it really served as a physical sign of a commitment to obedience (v25a). Paul asserts that obedience equals circumcision; the physical act is negated by disobedience, a most shocking idea to the Jews. Even worse was that they would be condemned by people who were obedient but uncircumcised (v27)! However this is not salvation by obedience rather obedience is *evidence* of salvation.

Paul then expands on the idea in Lev 26:41, Deut 10:16 & Deut 30:6 (and elsewhere) that circumcision is more than physical. Paul speaks of a work of circumcision done by the Holy Spirit on our hearts that doesn't just compliment the outward sign but completely replaces the physical symbol.

In applying this truth to ourselves, all we have to do is substitute for the word "circumcision" any of the following: Church membership, baptism, confirmation, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Pioneer and so on.

The great mistake of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews when asked about their relationship to God is to cite their religious affiliation as evidence of their relationship.

"Are you a believer?"
"Of course! I've been a member of First Church for twenty-five years."

"Are you a believer?"
"I'm a Catholic! Does that answer your question?"

"Are you a believer?"
"Why yes, I was baptized right here in Christian Church."

There are as many answers as there are affiliations and rites, but none will convince God, they are all outward "circumcisions" so to speak.

Four Jewish Objections (3:1-8)

Paul's dialogue with himself here could be made up, could be relating real objections raised when he'd been evangelizing in the synagogues or it could be him remembering the likely objections his pre-conversion self, Saul, would have raised.

1. Paul's teaching undermines God's covenant (v1+2)
He's not saying that being a Jew or being circumcised is worthless *just* that it's not enough to prevent Jews from being judged.
2. Paul's teaching nullifies God's faithfulness (v3+4)
He's not saying that because the Jews fail to keep the law or be as faithful as the law demands that therefore God's faithfulness is in doubt! Paul's "not at all!" is a very strong rebuttal in Greek, something like "not on your life" or "not in 1,000 years". God's character is unchanging and faithfulness part of his very essence.
3. Paul's teaching impugns God's justice (v5+6)
He's not saying that our unrighteousness benefits God by making God look more glorious and righteous. If that were so God would be unfair in bringing his judgement on us as would be doing something to his advantage – this is the human argument Paul refers to. Paul refuses to contemplate this, and restates Abraham'
4. Paul's teaching falsely promotes God's glory (v7+8)
The third objection is taken further and is made personal. Paul mentions his slanderous critics and refuses to even dignify these claims with a rebuttal – they're so obviously and self-evidently perverse. He simply dedares that the condemnation of people who advance this argument is deserved.

Law applies not just to actions but Jesus showed also to attitudes.

Paul is showing just being a Jew is not enough for salvation.

Profession does not always signify possession.

An Illustration: Circumcision or baptism or any other rite practiced in an attempt to gain salvation is analogous to a label on a can of fruit or vegetables. If the outer label doesn't match with the inner product, something is "rotten"!

God's promises are not dependent upon man's faithfulness, but on His faithfulness.

Q1. How can we avoid falling into the same mind-set as the Jews regarding outward symbols (circumcision, church membership etc)?

Q2. How can we communicate the Gospel to people who may think they're already saved (church goers, those raised Catholic or christened/confirmed as children etc)?

Memory Verse: "Circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God." - Rom 2: 9b