



Lesson 5 July 2nd, 2016

Ignoring God's Truth Within Us

Study Scripture – Romans 2:17-19

Background Scripture – Romans 2

Key Verse:

Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

INTRODUCTION

People can, and do justify, rationalize, excuse and generally seek to avoid the consequences of their actions; especially when these turn out to be unpleasant. Whether people acknowledge or ignore the reality of a final judgment before the Righteous Judge, Jesus Christ, this event is in everyone's future.

If ever there is going to be an occasion when men will need an excellent excuse for their behavior in light of God's commandments it will be on the Day of Judgment. The Apostle Paul speaks to this issue in his Epistle to the Romans. He delineates two groups that encompass all humanity, Jews and Gentiles and makes a compelling case that all men are guilty before God and without excuse. Men will not be in a position to plea ignorance, heritage or privilege when they face God.

This Study is placed in the context of an analysis of different kinds of persons that inhabit this world. There are obviously wicked people who simply defy God. They defy the words of God and flaunt their immorality, encouraging people to do destructive things.

Then there are persons who are outwardly decent, good-living, and clean cut, with a respectable facade, but who are self-righteous and reject the gospel, inwardly filled with hatred, resentments, and jealousies, but nevertheless think that because they have managed to keep up a respectable looking life, things will be fine. There will be no judgment for them.

It is to be noted that the Apostle has stated that all humans have received revelation from God and thus are without excuse. We know from history that even some pagan philosophers taught certain kinds of morality close to biblical teaching but in every case they did not live up to what they taught. Some isolated tribes we consider backward and uncivilized have some horrible behaviour patterns, but even then they often demonstrate some amazingly "good" elements of morality and treat each other quite well. Pagans therefore, or people living in what we would call the jungle, are not as unenlightened as we like to think.

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Some other hypocrites think that because there is no indication of immediate judgment God is being kind to them. But they choose to ignore the idea and the warning that God is longsuffering and because of His kindness and mercy He is willing to put off final judgment.

It is to be noted that the Apostle has made clear that final judgment will be based on what persons do not just on what they profess. Those who live in such a way that shows they respect the revelation God has given them and show thus they value life with God, rejecting disobedience to God, and selfish ambition, pride, and greed, will be dealt with on the basis of God's impartiality. One writer comments:

“In the end, it doesn't matter whether one is a Jew or Gentile. What matters is how one has lived one's life. In that the Jews are Paul's emerging target, this means that they have no advantage before God in the final judgment. Judgment will be based on deeds, instead of Jewish privilege, makes the case for the impartiality of God”.

Paul refers to Psalm 62:12 and Proverbs 24:12 in his arguments as he warns those that say they believe in God. Psalm 62:12 states:

“Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work”.

And again Paul used the text in Proverbs 24:12 as the basis for his argument:

*“If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it?
And he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it?
And shall not he render to every man according to his work?”*

But what is very dangerous is that there are persons who gladly give the Scriptures their proper place, will state categorically that the Scriptures are the word of God, who will boast that they are friends of God, glory in their knowledge and commitment to study Scripture, but who are acting hypocritically, with little evidence of obedience to the Commandments and Statutes of God.

There are however principles of judgment that should be clearly understood and the Study Scripture begins to identify these and apply them to those living and claiming to know the truth.

As we read the Study text let us imprint on our minds the fact that high-minded multiple claiming Jews are no better than high-minded Gentiles, and no better than high-minded Christians with multiple claims to righteousness. If we ignore the principles of judgment we will simply be living with a false sense of security, for it is not acceptable to God for anyone to transgress His law..



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The church in Rome was comprised of Jews and Gentiles and different parts of the Book of Romans addressed these groups individually and collectively. It is understandable that in this setting, each group would be defending their peculiar situations with a risk of polarization and the Apostle used the occasion of his letter to address both groups and so reconcile their variant opinions. This epistle was also meant to be read by other churches (Col.4:16) and by extension all Christians.

The Apostle asserts that the gospel is God's power for salvation for both Jew and Gentile, all men, (Romans 1:16). He shows that all men are sinners, based on their rejection of God's revelation through His creation (1:18-23). All men can clearly see some of God's invisible attributes through observing His creation. They can see His *eternal power* and His *divine nature* (1:20).

Men should respond to this revelation of God's nature by honoring Him as God and by giving Him thanks (1:21). Instead of worshipping God and serving Him, men rejected His revelation and became corrupt in their thinking and actions, worshipping the creature rather than the Creator (1:21-23). As a result, God *gave them over*, He withdrew His restraining grace on sin as a manifestation of His wrath.

The sins of the Gentiles were obvious, even blatant, as it is today! They openly practiced idolatry, immorality, sexual perversion, and other evils. Jewish listeners to the Apostle's argument and other self-righteous types would readily have agreed with the indictment of the Gentiles but the Apostle was not finished.

The Jews were certainly privileged to have received God's law and be in covenant with Him. This very obvious blessing had become a snare to some as the symbols and signs of their favored position with God were made into the reality that they were God's people no matter what! Circumcision and other rites were seen as guaranteed acceptance with God. This was a gross misinterpretation of God's intent, despite the constant warnings of the prophets.

Paul addressed the Jew in particular in our Study Text, which is part of a larger section of his letter, chapter 1:18 to chapter 3:20. They had built up a false security based on their nationality, their reception of the law and circumcision. They felt themselves secure before God and that some day they would enter the kingdom. They felt that they would never be judged or punished or condemned for these reasons and these were the basic elements of their security.

Note that the self-righteous, whether Jew or Gentile, tend to be smug in their self-delusions about what God requires of His people. Paul will systematically dismantle their 'straw houses' and reveal the true righteousness of God that declares

"There is none righteous, not even one; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God".
It is necessary to tear down people's false security in order to reveal their danger and then to offer to them the true security, faith in Jesus Christ.



It is most important therefore that we look carefully at what the Apostle states when he takes up the case of what one writer calls “**the religious devotee of his day**”.

He warns us today:

“Today we need only substitute the title “church member” to bring it up to date—because we American church members (this also applies to church members all over the world) are in the same condition as the Jew was in the culture of Paul’s day.

We have a great body of truth that we delight in, and we feel proud of our knowledge and our understanding of it.

But unfortunately, we oftentimes hope and think that knowledge, in itself, is what is going to deliver us in the sight of God”.

THE TEXT

The preceding verses point to the hypocrisy of those who condemn others while guilty themselves and explains the basis for God’s just judgment on all men. They affirm that God “... *will render to each person according to his deeds; ... For there is no partiality with God*”.

Verse 17 - 18. *the name Jew ...* The unidentified person or persons of verses one to sixteen is here identified as “Jew”. Paul addresses a portion of his audience very directly here, with emphasis on *thou* as if to speak to each Jewish Christian individually and deals with the first plank of their supposed security with God, their heritage or nationality.

The person or persons were proud of their Abrahamic descent and felt secure in their heritage; they were the chosen nation, (Exod. 19:5-6). Just being a Jew meant that they were God's specially favored people and surely would not ever be brought to judgment, but note Jesus’ own words,

“And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness”: (Matthew 8:12). So just being Jewish was clearly no security, (Luke 3:8).

“The Jew believed that everyone was destined for judgment except himself. It would not be any special goodness which kept him immune from the wrath of God, but simply the fact that he was a Jew.”

There are people today who feel that their heritage may secure them with God. Maybe they were raised in a religious family or received a religious tradition, or perhaps they have gone to church. Perhaps their parents taught them the gospel of Christ and they feel that because of some factor in their heritage God is obligated to them. Maybe as a child they were put through baptism and training and confirmation. Fact is, there is no security in heritage.



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Secondly, Paul dealt with their false security based on knowledge of God's law. They believed that because they had the law of God and knew the Law of God, they were 'in' and even boasted. They rested in the Law.

But note, if a person calls him or herself *a Jew* as a way of claiming status as one of God's people, if such a person rely on the Law of Moses to establish that standing, if that person expresses pride in being a member of God's people and not part of the pagan rabble who know nothing of the true God; Paul now begins to show that such confidence is misplaced.

Since the dawn of Israel's history, true membership in God's people depended on more than just belonging to the nation or receiving God's law. Israel's prophets decried confidence that was placed in outward markers of identity, (Deut.30:6; Jer.7:4; 8:8).

... know His will ...approve the things that are more excellent... instructed out of the Law, this is about what they had learned and on the basis of which they felt themselves secure. They were able to discern what was right and what was wrong, make moral distinctions based on biblical principles.

They received oral instruction in the home and also in the synagogue; they knew God's Law. They had tremendous knowledge of God's truth as revealed in the Old Testament and this became another basis for believing that one was right with God. Acceptance with God does not come in what one knows but what one does in response to what is know.

"Israel, who followed after the law of righteousness hath not attained to the law of righteousness." (Rom. 9:31). They had an intellectual grasp of the law but did not apply it to their daily lives, (Rom.2:12; James 1:22).

If knowledge is divorced from application then it only becomes the basis for greater condemnation.

To summarize and make firm in our memories the advantages that Jews of Paul's day had we again list so that it will be a warning to us:

- They relied on possessing the Law, just as many today rely on the fact that they have many different versions of the Bible in their homes, and identify with one version as superior.
- They bragged about their relationship with God. Do we do that today?
- They always knew well the will of God because they had the Ten Commandments and the Scriptures. Do we today boast about our knowledge of the Word of God and think that that is sufficient?
- The Jews approved of what was superior, rejecting certain attitudes and actions, choosing what they considered as morally superior.



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- Do we have that kind of pride, pontificating on things like drinking coffee, playing cards, not even drinking wine, not listening to some kinds of music or having that kind in church, not ever dancing etc.?
- The Jews bragged that they were instructed in the Law, and could quote great passages of Scripture.

Do we think that they give us a special standing before God.

We should however note that the advantages were not in themselves wrong, but the question is, Can we depend on them for righteousness?

Verses 19 – 20. Paul continued to show the privileged position of the Jew and one can sense the conceit, arrogance and self-assurance of some of those so blessed.

... and are confident ... has the idea of a constant state of being persuaded.

... you yourself are a guide ... literally means somebody who leads a person along a path; they believed they could lead people out of intellectual, moral and spiritual ignorance. They saw themselves as teachers of the ignorant and teachers of the inexperienced. But in Matthew 23:16 Jesus called them *blind guides*; He said that *if the blind, lead the blind, both fall into the ditch*. These Jews saw themselves as the guides and lights of the world.

Do we have those ready to correct anybody, and impart truth to those we feel are not quite knowledgeable?

Are we ready to assume those we meet have not been exposed to God's revelation and so to be treated as 'foolish'?

In a sense they should have been the channel through which God reached the rest of the world, (Isaiah 42:6; Matt. 5:14). Jesus comment on them as teachers of the Gentiles is far from flattering however!

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. (Matt. 23:15).

... an instructor of the foolish, The term "instructor" here means a "corrector." It emphasizes training or discipline (Heb. 12:9).

a teacher of babes... is used to speak of baby Christians. It's a term that was commonly used by the Jews to speak of those who were entering into Judaism from a Gentile background. And so they felt capable to instruct the converts from paganism.

As the argument continues it becomes more obvious that Paul is describing one who takes a condescending position. The term translated *instructor* is used especially of those who teach children, and that implication is strengthened in the phrase *a teacher of babes*.



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... *the form of knowledge* ... has the idea of a sketch or a scheme or an outline or a framework. It is also used in 2 Timothy 3:5 where you have a form of godliness without power and that was the case here! They had a sketch or a structure or a framework or an outline or a scheme of things but they did not have the full content. They lacked the substance but still felt secure in their knowledge.

Verse 21. *Thou therefore which teachest another, thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?*

Paul turns from describing the individual who claims privilege as God's person to pointing out that person's failures with a series of pointed rhetorical questions. While the sins are specific they should also be seen as representing the people's general and in some cases specific behavior.

... *teachest thou not thyself?* It is one thing to claim to be a guide, a light or a teacher but heeding one's own teaching is another. Are Paul's readers practicing what they preach? Are they living consistent with what they were teaching?

... *dost thou steal?*... while many would have denied ever stealing we must keep in mind that being innocent of theft outwardly is not all there is to this issue. Jesus stressed that true righteousness exists on the inside as well as the outside (Matthew 23:25-28). (See Psalm 50:16-20).

Do we consider that receiving special perks because of our position in the faith, and having access to more funds and income from poor congregations and from poor believers than might be appropriate considered to be stealing? Are we also like the Pharisees who "robbed widows", by taking advantage of them financially (Mark 12:40. See also Isaiah 10:1-2) or simply ignoring their plight?

The Law of Moses made the same point with the last of the Ten Commandments prohibiting coveting, which is an inward disposition (Exodus 20:17).

Withholding of tithes to the temple (Malachi 3:8-10) or failing to give support to the poor (Isaiah 10:1, 2) were forms of theft in the view of Israel's prophets. Selfishness constitutes theft from the standpoint of the God who examines the human heart.

Verse 22. *Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?*

The description of hypocrisy and the lack of applying rigorous biblical standards to ourselves continue. Those who condemn the pagan world's sexual immorality need to consider whether their own hearts harbored lust (Matthew 5:27, 28).

One writer comments on their historically recorded behaviour as follows:



“They were not above a little hanky-panky with slave girls they had to deal with”.

Do we enjoy the TV programs, Soap operas, or movies which specialize in promoting people’s sexual adventures and vicariously participate? Or do some believers in high positions even secretly enjoy pornography?

Those who condemn idolatry need to consider whether their behavior is more in line with worship of an idol than devotion to the true God. Israel’s prophets had condemned hypocritical worship in the temple as being more directed to false gods than the true God (Jeremiah 7:9-11). Those who claim to know God’s word must be at least as mindful of such things as they are of others’ failures.

Evidently it was not uncommon for Jews to rob the temples of the Gentiles (Acts 19:37). They may have done this by using the precious metals from idolatrous articles stolen from pagan temples (Deut. 7:26). The Text also suggests they were ready to profit from trade with pagan temples, getting top dollar from the trade by driving a hard bargain. By doing so, they betrayed their own idolatry, which was love of money. Furthermore, rather than staying away from what they professed to abhor, they went after pagan idols.

Do we invest in or run businesses which deal in products that the Law reject as unclean or dangerous to health?

Undoubtedly Paul did not mean that every single Jew practiced these sins, but these sins represented the contradiction between claim and conduct, profession and practice that marked Judaism.

Verse 23. *You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?*

Paul states the obvious contradiction. The person who boasts *in the law*, the one who claims special identity and privilege because he or she knows God’s law, that same individual is a law-breaker!

Note that it says when you break the law you dishonor God. Sin is always against God, (Psalm 51). To break the law was to step across a line, to fall short or to violate the standard. So here they were claiming, we are the people of God, we boast in God, and we break God's laws. They accepted all of the blessing of God, the heritage and the knowledge, and then lived in violation of all that revelation.

If knowledge does not lead to obedience and more than that then to boast in such a thing, that behavior can only lead to invite judgment and condemnation, not to receive blessing.

The right response is to make our identity not in what we know but in what God has done for us. God’s people have always been God’s people because of His grace, not because of their



knowledge or any accomplishment. To make our stand on God's grace leads to obedience that reflects our gratitude to and dependency on the one who has saved us.

Verse 24. ... *the name of God is blasphemed* ... this is manifestly true in every generation. If they and us claim to know Christ, if we claim to know God, and then we live a sinful, wicked life, we just blaspheme God, plain and simple.

Consider Ezekiel 36:17-20.

"Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way and by their doings: their way was before me as the uncleanness of a removed woman. Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it. And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them.

And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land."

God's name is blasphemed among the ungodly when He disciplines His people for their disobedience. The world then thinks God to be unfair, unkind, judgmental, burdensome, overbearing and His name is dishonored. Similarly when they lived a sinful, wretched life people just concluded that their God must be evil just like they were evil!

... *it is written*... Paul quotes Isaiah 52:5 and thus the issue of bringing disgrace to the name of God is hardly new. Hypocrisy among God's people brings His reputation into disrepute among those who do not know Him. Israel's calling was to bring light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6). But Israel's failure to obey God creates an excuse for *the Gentiles* to continue to reject Israel's God. Christians disobedience today bring the same result.

Obviously the Jews' Gentile neighbors saw their inconsistency and despised Yahweh because of their behavior. The Jews did not apply their own teaching to themselves.

One writer admits his own difficulty in the matter of belief and then behaving in line with the truth and we can if we are honest share his feeling:

"There are many subjects where I would rather claim the name of God and offer his truth to other people and urge them to take it seriously than to have to live with the implications in my own life.

People reject Christ because of the way his followers behave. It was true of the first-century Romans and Greeks who ridiculed the God of the Jews because of their hypocrisy.

Many people today ignore the gospel because of the behavior of believers, either because of the moral failure of prominent leaders, or because of the way ordinary people like we treat our neighbors. The name of the Lord is blasphemed".



As Paul accused the Jews of turning people away from Yahweh, thus blaspheming God, we should not feel so comfortable. One North American scholar laments:

“I do not think I have to detail how true it is of American Christianity as a whole. And not only in this country, but around the world Christians have caused people to turn from God because of our attitudes and the way we approach people.

I have often thought it is amazing how the people who keep close records on how many they win to Christ never keep any records on how many they drive away. And the name of the Lord is blasphemed because of that”.

Verse 25. *For indeed circumcision is of value ...* Circumcision was almost on par with the Mosaic Law in terms of assurance to the Jews that they had a guaranteed place in God’s kingdom. Most of the Jews in Paul’s day believed that God would not permit any observant Jew to enter perdition.

It was the sign that God gave to Abraham to show that God had made a covenant with him (Genesis 17:1-14). Circumcision identified the male members of the people of that covenant, bound to obey God’s commands and anticipating fulfillment of His covenant promises. Thus circumcision was a valuable, important act for the people of Israel.

But to receive circumcision without keeping God’s law was to render this covenantal sign meaningless. The prophet Jeremiah stressed that genuine circumcision is focused on the inner person (Jeremiah 4:4). To claim to belong to God on the basis of physical circumcision alone is to reduce God to one who cares only for appearances.

As God’s revelation progressed, it was very evident that external rites and practices lost their value if people’s hearts were not right with God. The reality was that in light of their disobedience, Paul’s readers had rendered their circumcision of no value.

The issue of circumcision was important for Paul’s readers. Some first-century Jewish Christians insisted that Gentile Christians must be circumcised to belong to God’s people. Paul, along with the other Apostles and church leaders, insists that the fulfillment of God’s promises in Christ means that anyone can belong to God’s people without that indicator (Acts 15:1-29; Galatians 2:1-16).

Verse 26. *So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?*

To this point, Paul has described the person who claims membership in God’s people but does not follow God’s will as expressed in His law. Now Paul describes the opposite: the person who has no claim to membership in God’s historic people but follows God’s law nonetheless,

A good example is Cornelius, a Roman centurion described as *“A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always”*



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(Acts 10:2). His generosity to the needy contrasted with supposedly devout Jews of his day who use tradition to sidestep the Law of Moses (Mark 7:6-13).

In other words, a Gentile who keeps the law of God is going to be included in the covenant blessing even if he is not circumcised. Paul reinforces the point of verse twenty-five, circumcision is simply a symbol that might or might not have value. If you break the law, it is not going to help you and if you keep the law, it is not necessary.

One writer provides a helpful illustration:

“In our day cans and bottles have labels on them to indicate what is inside. Circumcision was a label and implied that the Jew was obedient to God. However if he was not completely obedient the label was not only worthless but misleading. The contents of the can are more important than the label. Similarly if a Gentile was completely obedient to God the absence of the label of circumcision was not of major consequence. The Jews had put more emphasis on the presence of the label than on the contents of the can. Paul's point was that disobedience brings condemnation and perfect obedience theoretically brings salvation, regardless of whether one is a Jew or a Gentile.”

Verse 27. *And 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?*

When Gentiles exhibit obedience to God, they provide a sharp contrast with the lack of obedience on the part of many in Israel. When Gentiles follow God's law even though they do not know Him, they bring shame on Jews who claim to know Him but fail to obey.

So simply being circumcised, simply belonging to the right group, brings no advantage. In fact, it brings the threat of judgment for those who claim the identity but do not live by it.

Disobedience and hypocrisy brings consequences. Here Paul poses another question to underline this fact.

... *will he not judge you* ... the Gentile will not really assume the role of a judge; God is the judge. However, the Gentile will be a witness for the prosecution. If a Jew claims ignorance, God can point to the uncircumcised Gentile that did what was right and though he did not know what the Jew knew, therefore he is living testimony to the Jew's guilt.

... *the letter of the Law*... the Jews had the written law.

Verse 28. *For he is not a Jew* ... Clearly some of the Christians in Rome who claimed special standing because of their Jewish identity and longstanding knowledge of God's law had reduced God's concerns and their responsibility to the externals only.

Paul wraps up his argument in these remaining verses. The essence of being God's people is not one's physical heritage, it is not one's biological descent, (Matthew 3:9); your heart is the issue. A true Jew is a child of God inwardly, spiritually.



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Not however that “Gentiles” are not “Jews”, and are not made Jews when they come to Christ. That is not necessary for salvation and for acceptance into the kingdom of God.

We must be careful to note however that being a child of Israel had and still have certain advantages. How God treats them is pivotal to our understanding prophetic history. They, though they failed so often, bore the heat of the day as indicated in the Parable of the Workers called to work in the fields at different times of the day. God has repositioned them so that Gentiles could be called to Him, but He has not cast them away. In Romans 11 Paul emphasizes that they are the natural branches, the original Olive Tree, and Gentiles are grafted in among them. He warns:

Verse 18. *“Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.*

Verse 19. *Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be graphed in.*

Verse 20. *Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear:*

Verse 21. *For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.....*

Verse 25. *For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles come in.*

Verse 26. *And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:*

Verse 27. *For this is my covenant with them, when I shall take away their sin”.*

The man who has not accepted Christ is hopelessly lost, whether he be Jew, or whether he be Gentile.

Scripture is plain on this matter. Focus therefore on coming to Christ and be forgiven, be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and be always led by the Spirit, growing in grace.

The inward reality is where the problem exists for the seemingly righteous person. We may imagine ourselves good enough to belong to God if we consider only outward appearance and behavior in contrast with that of others. Yet the inward reality is what shows us our need despite our seeming status

(Matthew 23:27). Likewise when our outward failures seem to condemn us, the inward reality of our readiness to receive God’s merciful forgiveness is what makes us able truly to be part of His people (Luke 18:9-14).

Verse 29. *circumcision is that which is of the heart...* It is the cutting away of evil from the heart. It is the cutting away of the unclean from the heart. . *“... all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart. (Jeremiah 9:26)*. The problem persisted to Paul’s day and today the people of God are still those that are circumcised in heart.



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... *his praise is not from men* ...The Jews outwardly sought to receive praise from men, but a true Jew receives praise from God. By the way, the word "Jew" comes from Judah, and Judah means "praised." "*Whose praise is not of men but God*" is a play on words. He is a true Jew for he lives up to his name. He is praised by God. That is a true Jew.

Paul was saying the person who really praises God is not one who merely wears the label of circumcision but one who really obeys God. Such a person has a circumcised heart (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25-26; Ezek. 44:9).

Heart circumcision is a spiritual operation that the Holy Spirit performs, not a physical operation that conforms to the letter of the Mosaic Law. The truly obedient person will not only praise God, but God will also praise him. He will not just receive the praise of men for his professed obedience to God.

God's focus has always been first on the inward life. He spoke to Cain about that inward reality before Cain committed his terrible deed. He reminded Samuel, who was seeking the king whom God had chosen, that

"man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart"

(1 Samuel 16:7). God's aim has always been to write His Word on the hearts of His people (Jeremiah 31:33).

The letter, simply knowing what God has said, offers no benefit if it is unaccompanied by the inner spiritual life. To live otherwise is to care more about what people think than about God's evaluation. For Him to do His redemptive work in us, we must recognize our inner selves for what they are, surrender our pride, and allow God to create in us new attitudes of obedient submission.

The new sign of inclusion in the family of God is possession of the Holy Spirit. All God's covenant people will be so characterized. Ezekiel 36:26-27.

CONCLUSION

Paul's challenge to us, whether leaders or not, is to live with such integrity that the cause of Christ is never subject to reproach (1 Timothy 3:2-7; 1 Peter 2:12). It seems to be a part of human nature to as one writer stated

"make a great profession and not live up to it".

Paul reminded his readers that reality is more important than profession and obedience more vital than testimony. Circumcision would not shield them from God's wrath if they failed to do all He commanded.

Jesus criticized religious leaders for appearing outwardly as "*righteous unto men*" while being "*full of hypocrisy and iniquity*" on the inside (Matthew 23:28). Some Christians in Rome



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apparently placed their faith in the externals of religious observance instead of the internal virtues of a living faith. The danger of becoming “hollow Christians” is ever with us.

For the vast majority of us today, claiming spiritual privilege because of Jewish identity or circumcision seems very foreign. But we know how easy it is to claim such privilege on similar grounds. Looking at the chaotic world around us, we are tempted to congratulate ourselves that we know God and His Word. It is easy to observe the ignorance of the world and contrast that ignorance with what we know of God. Then it is all too easy to take the next step and think the difference has to do with something special about ourselves.

The truth is however that we would be helped in understanding this Study Scripture if we transfer what is said about “circumcision” to “baptism”. We have the same problem of outward spirituality versus inward spirituality.

Be warned that the rite (baptism, accepted as a church member, inducted as a Pastor, Deacon, Elder, or Leader, or any other ceremony) without the reality of the righteousness which is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is of no value. We have to turn away from things which govern the senses and make us feel “good” to trust in the grace of God and the blood that has been shed on Calvary.

Rites are good. Knowledge is good. But without the reality of the possession of Christ it is only unrighteousness. Being outwardly religious with the tithing, the modest clothing, carrying around the large Bible, or having the many Bible versions and Commentaries on the latest electronic device is not sufficient. It might very well be hypocrisy, a word describing an actor who wears a mask and speaks from under that mask, playing a part, while being a different person underneath it all.

We would be better off contemplating the contrast between the good that other people see in us outwardly and the evil that we know still lives in our hearts. That reflection will lead us to think how God has welcomed us by His grace despite our failures.

Paul intent was to have people abandon all credits, heritage, knowledge, tradition, rites and rituals and to cling to the only One that guarantees our acceptance with God, Jesus Christ, Lord and Savior!

The fearful denunciation of Revelation 21:8 should spur us to follow the leading of the Apostle Paul.

Under no circumstances therefore should anyone of us ignore God’s truth within us.

