

Romans 2:25-29

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Preacher: Chris Steward

[0 : 00] You guys be seated. We are continuing through our study of Romans, Romans chapter 2, if you want to turn there.

! And as you are doing it, take a little survey real quick. By show of hands, how many of you have seen the TV show Matlock? Anybody? I just divided the room by age. Matlock, an attorney from Atlanta, Georgia, wore the gray suit every day, or the same gray suit.

And almost in every episode, in dramatic fashion, he would make a closing statement that was far superior to the other attorneys. In Romans chapter 2, Paul has been making a case against the religious, moralistic Jewish people.

You know, those that look down on the Gentiles that Paul listed in Romans chapter 1. So he's making this argument, making this case, and we come to verse 25 through verse 29.

And this is Paul's closing argument for the case that he's making against the religious leaders. So Paul, by the leading of the Holy Spirit, leaves no room for any religious, moralistic person to boast.

[1 : 31] He has removed what they trusted in. And what they found their security in, which was their heritage, them being Jewish, their bloodline, being God's chosen people.

And based on Romans chapter 2, they can also no longer trust in their actions. In fact, Paul called them hypocrites. They can no longer trust in being better than others, because Paul is making a case that, though you may not be Gentiles like Romans chapter 1, you still are just as guilty.

They can't trust in their security of knowing and having knowledge of the law. And this morning, Paul attacks their religious activities or ceremony mainly by discussing circumcision.

So let's read verses 25 through 29. I'll pray and we'll kind of jump right in. For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law.

But if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?

[2 : 47] Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.

But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man, but from God.

Let's pray together. Father, I ask now that you would speak to us this morning. The words that are spoken would be your words. The words that I have written down on a piece of paper would be your words this morning.

That if there's something on there that is false, that you would allow me to pass over those words. God, if something false comes out of my mouth, God, I pray that we would forget those words.

Pray that you are honored and pleased by what is spoken this morning. But more importantly, you're honored and pleased by what you do in the hearts of the people here and what we do in response to what we have heard from you.

[4 : 00] God, we love you. We thank you for Jesus. And it's in his name we pray. Amen. So what I thought I'd do first is, since circumcision is a word that we don't really throw around very much, unless you've had a child or a boy, you probably haven't heard that word in quite a while.

I thought I would kind of explain, not in detail what it is, but why it's here, why it's in the Bible, what was the point of it, and then kind of dig into the text. So, Genesis chapter 17, if you guys want to turn there.

Genesis 17, God has just finished reminding Abraham of the new covenant that he made with Abraham.

That he changes his name from Abram to Abraham. And he says, you're going to be father to many, many generations. I'm going to bless you through your bloodline.

So, Genesis chapter 17, starting in verse 9, we have circumcision for the first time.

[5 : 08] And God said to Abraham, as for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring, after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your offspring after you.

Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. Circumcision was a ceremony meant to remind the people of the covenant made between God and Abraham.

It was a reminder of the promise that God made to bless generation after generation. That Abraham would be the father to many. It was also a way that God was setting apart the people of Israel.

It was a way that even the Jewish people knew that they were Jewish. And they setting them apart from the rest of the people in the area and of the world.

It also was symbolic of the uncleanness that needed to be removed. To communicate in picture form their need to rid themselves of sin.

[6 : 19] By it being the very organ that passed the sin from generation to generation. Circumcision was a reminder of the covenant that had been made and the covenant to come.

A Savior would come and cleanse them from all their unrighteousness. Now that of course is what it started out to be. That's what God's intention was. But men corrupted it into just a religious activity that separated people from one another.

Not in a set apart holiness way, but in a superiority I'm better than they are way. We are God's chosen people. This act proves it.

That we are God's chosen. And eventually because of their sin. Man's sin. What God intended to remind them of him. Had been watered down. And only reminded them of themselves.

And how special they thought they were. So why is all this important? Because unless you've had a child. Circumcision doesn't happen in our churches.

[7 : 29] For sure. Because circumcision to the Jewish people. Is baptism to the Baptists. Is name another religious activity to another religious group.

It is important because though we don't have ceremonies of circumcision. We in this room have ceremonies of baptism. Both are an outward expression of what God has done on the inside.

Or at least that's what God intended them to be. And that is where Paul is leading us in the text this morning. There are three points this morning.

The first being that circumcision or any religious activity in Christianity is valuable and is worthless.

It is valuable and it is worthless. The second being that circumcision is not just for the Jews.

And the third, circumcision is a matter of the heart. Now I'm sorry I didn't get very creative with these three points. There's no wordsmithing. It's straight from the text. So let's go.

[8 : 30] First point. Circumcision or any religious activity in Christianity or Christendom is valuable and worthless. Verse 25 says, For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law.

But if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. The value in being circumcised only occurs when the law is obeyed.

It is the only thing that justifies the religious act. That's what Paul is saying. A religious act though is just that. It's just an act unless God has already changed the heart by which one can obey the law.

That's the only way a religious act is important. This verse will be considered blasphemous to the Jewish people of Paul's time. Because not only has Paul questioned the value of this religious activity of circumcision.

He has also said that it has no worth. It's worthless. Like the Gentiles who they thought were worthless dogs. If they cannot obey the law.

[9 : 40] So what religious life they have made with self-effort and self-determination is now being destroyed by Paul's letter.

And for us, by the word of God. But this shouldn't surprise us at all. Especially up to this point in Romans. Paul has destroyed any ability for a religious person to trust in any of their action.

He's destroyed any ability to trust in our own action that is not around Christ. That is not founded in the act and action of God through Christ.

See, this is what the gospel does. It tears apart and destroys any ability of yours or mine to boast in. It destroys any ability for you or my own righteousness to make a difference.

Because the gospel is completely 100% dependent on the work of Christ. So what Paul is saying here to us is that our religious activities, our baptism, our singing the songs, if you keep the law, are good.

[10:57] But if you don't, it is worthless. In other words, it is worthless unless it is a direct result of Jesus Christ in your life by which we obey the law.

See, the gospel leaves no room for you and I to boast. None. It is a very one-sided action. We respond to the gospel, but after God has revealed himself to us.

We can't even boast in our own religious activities. That's the point of Romans chapter 2. We cannot boast in anything we do except in Christ.

And it is Christ who allows us or Christ in us that allows us to obey the law and only that.

So circumcision or any religious activity is valuable and worthless. But not only that, in verse 26 and 27, circumcision is not just for the Jews.

[11:57] Now, we're just progressing through the text here, so when we get to the conclusion of verse 29, you'll see that Paul kind of flips everything upside down.

Verse 26 and 27, circumcision is not just for the Jews. Now, originally, circumcision was one of the ways that God set apart the people of Israel.

Okay? But now Paul is saying to all of us that circumcision is no longer just for the Jews. So being set apart is not just for the Jews now.

Verse 26. So if a man who is uncircumcised, meaning a Gentile, keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?

Then he who is physically uncircumcised, but keeps the law, will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision, but break the law.

[12:55] Becoming a Christian, becoming set apart, has nothing to do with who you are. It has nothing to do with what you have done. And this is what Paul is telling the Jewish religious leaders.

It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter who you are anymore. A Muslim can be converted. A Buddhist can be converted. A Catholic can be converted.

A Hindu can be converted. A church-going American can be converted. It has nothing to do with us. And becoming a Christian is all about Jesus Christ and His call on a life.

Paul again shakes up the religious Jewish people because they thought that they were the elect. They thought that they were God's chosen people. Now, for the time they were, but they were representing the spiritual church.

They were representing God and Christ's church. They thought being members of this elite club was an eternal membership. They thought that they were part of this elite club in town.

[13:57] And like any club, they had control of who was going to be the members and who was not. They thought that they were going to be able to send out the invitations and invite who they wanted to. But that's not the case.

Jesus Christ is the gatekeeper. He is the one that invites. He is the one who sends out those invitations. Last week in Philippians chapter 3, we talked about Paul's resume.

Turn to Philippians chapter 3. We're going to stand a couple minutes there and then come back to Romans. Philippians chapter 3. We're reading verse 7 and kind of go back a couple of verses and then move forward again.

Starting in verse 7, Paul says, same author, same guy. It says, but whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord. So we're not sidetracking here.

[15:05] We're not chasing rabbits. This has to do with our sermon this morning. What gain did Paul have? But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss. Well, that gain is his resume in verses 5 and 6.

It says, circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a heaver of Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

So all of that, Paul says, it was gain. But I count all of that as loss. And why is all that gain?

Why does he count all that as gain? Because being God's chosen has its benefits. Like being schooled in the law. They were taught God's word.

They had knowledge of the law. That was to point to Christ. They were beneficiaries of God's favor up to this point. But now because of Christ, Paul can write in Romans chapter 2, in verse 27, then he who is physically uncircumcised, the Gentiles, but keeps the law, will condemn you who have the written code.

[16:20] They will condemn the Jewish religious people. Because the Jewish people had all the advantage. They had everything set before them.

God clearly moved among them. And still they have stubborn hearts. And still they refuse to believe in Christ. That's gain.

Those things are gain that Paul lists. But he has to lose them all and says, I counted all as loss for the sake of Christ. Because Christ is much better. He counts all of that as loss.

And not in a way like, I wish I could have that, but I will sacrifice. It's not in that at all. But in a willingness because something is far better.

Now it's an odd comparison because it's not like comparing garbage to filet steak. Though that's an easy decision.

[17:17] Because the stuff that Paul lists in 5 and 6, his heritage, his teaching, his zeal, those were good things at the time. They had value. What makes it odd is that what did have value no longer has value.

It's flipped. So what was filet is now garbage compared to Christ. In fact, everything compared to Christ is far worse than garbage.

It is worthless. And compared to Christ, our best is nothing. And he says in Philippians, the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

The surpassing worth. Paul says the worth of knowing Jesus is far greater than anything else. Look at that. It isn't just a knowledge either.

He says, surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. It is a personal relationship. It is having that intimacy that has surpassing worth.

[18:28] Not our religious activities. Not our baptism. Not circumcision. Not the songs we sing. Not the books we read or the five points we master.

It's none of that. Knowing and having a relationship with Christ is far better. Surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus. is an intimate, real, pure, convicting knowledge of Christ.

So let's read further in Philippians chapter 3 verses 8 and 9. Indeed, I count everything as lost because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. For His sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law.

But that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. He isn't just losing something.

It is losing something that he saw was damaging to him. That Paul saw as a detriment to him. Paul saw that his religion, his self-righteousness, in verse 9 he says, righteousness of my own that came from the law.

[19:48] Religious activity was damaging or damaging to him. And it's damaging to you and to me. Our self-righteousness damages us. It is what we must lose.

We must put aside. And this is the point that Paul is trying to get at here saying circumcision is worthless unless you obey the law. And you can't obey the law without Christ.

So your religious activity is worthless to the Jewish people. We must break from our moralistic view and gain a kingdom view.

We must break from our religious traditions and practice holiness. We must break from our religious apathy and pursue Christ no matter where that takes us.

Knowing Christ is far better than anything else. Far better. And because Christ is far better and received only by faith not by works Paul can say in Romans chapter 2 that circumcision is for all people as long as it is a result of Christ and not a religious activity.

[21:02] The pursuit of the law through religious activities gets us nowhere. And it is why religion is damaging to our souls.

Religion leads to death and Jesus is life. So we've built up to this point verse 28 and 29. And the third final point circumcision is a matter of the heart.

It says verse 28 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly nor is circumcision outward and physical. In other words what makes a person a Jew is not what they wear.

It's not what they practice or what they do. It is who they are. They're born into it. It's a blood thing. And likewise circumcision is much more than just a physical act. It is more. It isn't this religious activity or religious practice. In verse 29 Paul clearly communicates this.

[22 : 06] It says but a Jew is one inwardly and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the spirit not by the letter.

His praise is not from man but from God. See Paul if Paul hasn't already rocked the religious leaders his closing statements do.

If they weren't mad already they're mad now. For Paul now says that circumcision is no longer a religious action but a God action.

It's no longer something you do it's what I do is what God is saying. It is no longer something that we can do. Now hear me we can do it.

We can baptize. We can sing the songs. We can read our Bibles but without being born again without becoming a Christian it still leads to eternity without God.

[23 : 07] And the religious leaders were banking on their action leading to salvation. Their action being what saved them is only what God can do.

If circumcision represented the old the dirty the fleshy filthy being removed to show a membership in God's family then what more is circumcision of the heart?

Circumcision of the heart is God removing the old filthy sinful flesh from our bodies and giving us a new heart. Ezekiel 11 verse 19 and 20 I'm going to read it but pay attention to these pronouns.

Ezekiel 11 19 and 20 this is God speaking and I will give them one heart and a new spirit I will put within them I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them and they shall be my people and I will be their God that's good news that is God speaking God acting the heart of stone the dead heart without life is removed by God and in its place is the heart of flesh a new heart where we may walk in his way obey his laws and glorify him if what Paul is saying is circumcision is a heart things if circumcision is a matter of the heart done only by God then

I would argue that obeying him is also a matter of heart both require a supernatural action on our lives both require God to work and both are done through Jesus Christ the religious leaders the Jews they followed the law the law was their confidence that's where they put their confidence in it was what they thought that would lead to salvation through when the Messiah came the Messiah would come and reward the greatest of servants if I can just follow these rules and so they followed the letter of the law they followed it Paul says righteous following the law in Philippians 3 they lived within the guidelines that was set up so they could follow and obey but

[25 : 52] Paul writes that circumcision is a matter of the heart by the spirit not by the letter so whatever confidence they had whatever confidence you have in your baptism or in your walking down the aisle or in your songs that you sing or the things that you read whatever confidence you have has been thwarted whatever security you have has been destroyed by this truth that circumcision is a matter of the heart by the spirit it is the holy spirit that circumcises no longer a priest it started out being something done in the house then it went down to the it was a priestly activity that the priest did after eight days of the child being born now it's the Holy Spirit doing it for us and it will never change in Acts chapter two Paul right after Peter's sermon at Pentecost in verse 37 and 38 right after a sermon

Peter gets done laying down the gauntlet on the people there at Pentecost and they say now when they heard this they were cut to the heart by Peter what he had just spoken and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles brothers what shall we do what shall we do and Peter said to them repent be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit is a gift to those who become Christians so if you are a Christian and you have a circumcised heart you have a new heart if you're not a Christian you can have a new heart we have a new heart because God chose to love us by sending his son to live a sinless life and because of that sinless life we can have new hearts on the cross

Jesus had you and me in mind and not in a hallmark corny Christian picture way he had you and me in mind when he said it is finished he was drawing a conclusion to the need of any religious activity to set apart people it is finished from that moment on all who become Christians have been set apart based solely on his work not on anything that that person does based on his work the father's call and the Holy Spirit's draw God has been at work for the world till now for his glory and

our joy and he will succeed so our question this morning is will we depend on him and achieve will we depend on him to achieve it and be part of his work or will we be dependent on our own work and be a detriment ourselves to those who are doing kingdom work a life that has been circumcised a heart that has been circumcised is a new heart it is someone who does everything for the glory and worship of

God verse 29 the last sentence his praise is not from man but from God another way to say that the praise of God is his goal it is his drive the praise of man no longer entices it is the praise of God and that is what you and I must pursue that is what you and I must cling to the praise of God Paul has laid it out for us he's concluded chapter two and of course he didn't have chapters when he wrote this but he concluded this thought by saying your greatest religious activity is worthless apart from obeying the law and you can't obey the law without Christ he's laid it out clearly for them and for us this morning so my question to you is do you see what Paul is communicating what are you trusting in what what what is your circumcision this morning what is it that you think you've done and in reality it's been worthless let's pray together a

Thank you.