

**Not Ashamed  
(Week 7)  
Romans 2:17-29  
“Circumcision of The Heart”**

**Introduction**

**“...This one will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt — My covenant that they broke even though I AM their Master’ — The LORD’S declaration. ‘Instead, this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days’ — The LORD’S declaration. ‘I will put My teaching within them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be MY people...’”** **Jeremiah 31:32-33**

The second chapter of *Romans* is primarily written to the Jews in Paul’s day who believed that they were saved simply due to their heritage. Jesus Himself encountered much of this same sentiment by Jewish leaders, who refused to put their faith in Him. They were convinced that just because they were descendants of Abraham, God’s chosen people, they needed no further reconciliation to enable them to stand in the presence of a Holy and Righteous God. But the sad truth of the matter is that apart from trusting in Christ and Christ alone, no one can be saved from the judgment that is coming upon the world. No matter your heritage, every man must decide for themselves just Who Jesus is, and then act according to that decision.

When the religious leaders in Israel refused to accept Christ as the Son of God, they attempted to lecture Him, claiming themselves to be the legitimate children of Abraham and that God was their only Father.

**“Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, because I came from God and I AM here. For I didn’t come on my own, but He sent Me.’”** **John 8:42**

So you see, the only hope for man, every man, is to believe on the Name of Jesus.

When writing to the church at Rome, Paul also wanted to dispel any and all notions that there will be any who are saved simply on the basis of heritage. Salvation can only come through Christ, and there will be no exceptions based upon lineage. The Jews in Paul’s day looked upon Gentiles as inferior and wicked. They believed them to be, of all people, desperately in need of “saving”. But to those who had The Law, the descendants of Abraham, the Jews who had been chosen of God, surely, God had accepted them. It was a barrier that at times seemed impenetrable. For it is one thing to convince someone who is lost that they are in need of salvation, but to those who have declared themselves to be righteous, it is another matter entirely. But this was a challenge that Paul felt worthy of accepting. He longed to see his fellow Israelites partake of the saving grace that was offered up on the cross of calvary. But first, he needed to convince his own countrymen of their need of a Savior.

In **Romans 2:17-29**, Paul explains that no one will be saved based upon **Connection, Churchgoing, or Ceremony**. We are not saved by “Externals”, but rather, by what takes place on the inside. The true children of God must experience rebirth from within. For the sake of his fellow Jews, Paul calls this regeneration, *The Circumcision of The Heart* (**vs. 29**).

## **Not Saved by Connections**

**“Now if you call yourself a Jew, and rely on The Law, and boast in God....**

**Romans 2:17**

As I have stated previously, many Jews thought that they were saved simply because of their heritage. They believed that because they had “lived according to The Law of Moses”, that God had accepted them. Sadly, what they did not realize is that no one can live up to the perfect standards set forth by The Law of Moses. Just as their Gentile counterparts, they too, whether they would admit it or not, had fallen short of the glory of God.

It is easy for us to read this passage and believe that it does not apply to most of us, since we are not of Jewish descent. However, I have known many a Gentile who thought they were saved because of their “Christian Heritage”. Just because you came from a “good Christian home” does NOT make you a Christian. Everyone will be judged upon what they have done personally with Jesus. No one will be saved based upon their father, mother, or even grandmother’s faith. The question will always be the same, when it comes to Jesus:

**“But YOU’, He asked them, ‘Who do YOU say that I AM?’”** **Mark 8:29** (emphasis added)

## **Not Saved By “Churchgoing”**

**“and know His will, and approve the things that are superior, being instructed from The Law, and if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light to those in darkness, and instructor of the ignorant, a teacher of the immature, having the embodiment of knowledge and truth in the law — you then, who teach another, don’t you teach yourself? You who preach, ‘You must not steal’ — do you steal? You who say, ‘You must not commit adultery’ — do you commit adultery? You who detest idols, do you rob their temples? You who boast in The Law, do you dishonor God by breaking The Law? For, as it is written: The Name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”**

**Romans 2:18-24**

By the time a Jewish boy reaches the age of thirteen and is ready for his bar mitzvah, he has already memorized large portions of the Law of Moses. He knows his *Old Testament*, pretty much by heart, for he has studied it diligently throughout his young life. He studies faithfully in the synagogue, as well as, at home. He observes the Jewish feasts of The Law in order to reinforce his understanding of God’s Word. Needless to say, the average Jew is far superior in his knowledge of scripture than the average Christian. But just “knowing” The Law is not enough. In order to be holy, we must be “doers of The Law”, as well as, hearers.

**“For the hearers of The Law are not righteous before God, but the doers of The Law will be justified.”**

**Romans 2:13**

So there you have it. Although the Jews knew the law by heart, they still were unable to live by it. They preached in their synagogues, “Do not steal”, but they themselves were robbers. They preached, “Do not commit adultery”, and yet, they were adulterous. Which brings us to the question, was Paul saying that all Jews were thieves and adulterers? Perhaps not in a physical sense, but a simple reading of the Sermon on The Mount (**Matthew 5-7**) will help us to understand that in the eyes of God, it’s what’s in your heart that matters, not just what you actually go out and do. Someone who covets that which belongs to his neighbor is a “thief at heart”. A man who looks lustfully at a woman, who is not his wife, has committed “adultery in his heart”. This is the standard by which all men will be judged. Not based entirely upon our deeds, but upon our thoughts as well! Who can survive this kind of judgment? Answer: No one!

Jesus told his Jewish listeners:

**“For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.”** **Matthew 5:20**

So what was He saying exactly? Simply this: You can go to church and hear The Word, and you can even attempt to go out and live by it. But no matter how hard you try, you can never attain righteousness. It isn't enough to just go to church and hear the truth. You have to live out that truth, and no one can do that, no matter how “spiritual” that they think they are. What each of us needs is someone who can live perfectly in our stead, Someone Who will cover us in His perfect righteousness, so we can stand unashamed before a Holy God. What we all need is a Savior. Going to church and hearing the truth, or even memorizing the truth, cannot save. Jesus... SAVES!

Paul goes on to say, that even though the Jews abhorred idols, they robbed from the temples of idols. The meaning of this statement is obscure at best, but it is possibly a reference to someone making a profit from those who commit idolatry, or possibly even eating food that had been sacrificed to idols (**Acts 15:29; 1 Corinthians 10:25-31**). Once again it signifies hypocrisy, claiming to do what is right, but in reality doing what is wrong.

Paul continues with his thought by saying that when someone claims to be right with God, but commits sins that others can see, they show themselves to be hypocrites. And what's worse, they give those who are enemies of God a “reason to blaspheme”. I believe that this is a reference to King David, when he sinned against The LORD by taking Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, and after conceiving a child with her, having the poor man killed in battle. The prophet Nathan came to David and told him that his sin had given the enemies of The LORD the opportunity to blaspheme. What this means is; when someone who claims to know God, does evil, then unbelievers can mock their faith as disingenuous. They can even claim God is powerless, for just look at how His supposed “children” live, and yet, get away with it! This is called “losing your saltiness” according to Jesus (**Matthew 5:13**). When we say that we believe one thing and then do another, we show the world that our faith is worthless. What we need is not an external set of values, but one that changes us from the inside out. Listen to the prayer of David after he had sinned with Bathsheba.

**“God, create a clean heart for me and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not banish me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore the joy of Your salvation to me, and sustain me by giving me a willing spirit.”** **Psalms 51:10-12**

Now, THAT is a sinners prayer! David knew external worship wasn't enough. What he needed was a change on the inside, a change of heart, so that he could live in a manner that would be pleasing to The LORD. Simply knowing the Word doesn't save, but being a “doer” of the Word is the real standard, and no one can live according to The Word without a regenerated heart. What we need is The Spirit of God living within us! Simply going to church or being “religious” can't save you, but Jesus can.

### **Not Saved by Ceremony**

**“Circumcision benefits you, if you observe The Law, but if you are a lawbreaker, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. So if an uncircumcised man keeps The Law's requirements, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? A man who is physically uncircumcised, but who keeps The Law, will judge you who are a lawbreaker in spite of having the letter of The Law and circumcision. For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, and true circumcision is not something visible in the flesh. On the contrary, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart — by The Spirit, not the letter. That person's praise is not from people but from God.”** **Romans 2:25-29**

The Covenant of Circumcision goes all the way back to Abraham. It symbolized the covenant that God made with Abraham to bless him and to bless all the nations of the world through his offspring. Jesus is a descendant of Abraham. He is the One through whom the entire world has been blessed. Since that covenant of circumcision that God made with Abraham, all Jewish males are circumcised on the eighth day after they are born. It is an outward sign meant to symbolize a spiritual truth, that the people of God have been set apart to serve Him.

When you think about it, the ritual of circumcision is simply a picture of the cross, and what it represents. By making a cut crosswise, the flesh is removed by the shedding of blood. This is done to mark the person as different from the rest of mankind. This is why the Gentiles were often referred to by the Jews as the "uncircumcised". But Paul explains for us that just because someone has experienced the circumcision "ceremony" doesn't actually make them set apart for God's glory. A person who has been physically circumcised, but lives like a pagan, is in fact... a pagan. The ritual doesn't save. It only symbolizes true salvation.

To be truly born again, one must have had the flesh (sinfulness) cut away from his heart. Simply put, they must be changed on the inside, not just externally. We are not saved by religious rites and rituals. We are saved by faith in Jesus Christ.

So how does this apply to us you might ask? Simple. Many people believe that they have been saved by their participation in religious ceremonies. Baptism, for example, is a religious ceremony. It is an external manifestation of what should have taken place in a person internally. Baptism represents the death, burial, and resurrection of someone, who has placed their faith in Christ. The person that they were is dead and buried, and a new creation is resurrected in their place. This is why in the church we only baptize someone AFTER they have been born again. The Baptism doesn't actually save them, it is merely an outward symbol of an inward truth!

The bottom line is simple. In order for a person to receive salvation, they must undergo a transformation on the inside. Paul calls this transformation "*Circumcision of The Heart*". It means The Spirit of God has renewed us from within. We are not saved by the externals, such as **Connection** (our heritage), **Churchgoing** (merely hearing the teachings of God), or even by religious **Ceremony**. We are saved by placing our faith in Christ alone and allowing His Spirit to change us from the inside out. Only then, can we live a life that is pleasing to God. Only then, shall we be clothed in a righteousness that far surpasses our own and even that of the most devout Pharisee. We are clothed in the righteousness of Christ Himself!

So who is it then that needs Jesus? We all do. He is our only hope. To reject Him based upon the false assumption that you are good enough as you are is both misguided and disastrous. Hell will be filled, not only with unrepentant sinners, but also with those who thought that they were acceptable to God based upon their own merit. As Paul will remind us all in the next chapter:

**"For ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."**

**Romans 3:23**

So how can we know, if we have been truly changed in our hearts, rather than just some external form or worship? Simple. When your heart has been regenerated, you will LOVE The Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and you will LOVE your neighbor as yourself. You begin to worship and serve out of love, rather than obligation. This is the difference between religion and relationship. Your works cannot save you, but knowing Christ as your Lord and Savior can and will. All you need to do is come to Him by faith.

**"For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift — not from works, so that NO ONE can boast."**

**Ephesians 2:8-9**

Let all of God's chosen people, saved by grace alone, say... TRUTH!!!