

INSUFFICIENT

ROMANS 2:17-29

INTRODUCTION

It is often amazing to see criminals, convicted of a crime, seeking to expose their partner in the delusion that they will be treated as “not guilty.” It is odd because, in that moment, there is a real belief that somehow their logic will shed light on the judge such that he will suspend the rule of law having been illuminated and helped by a criminal in doing his job. We know how that ends. This is what Paul is trying to help the Jews to understand. Yes, they are God’s chosen people, but, they have also offended Him many times and in many ways. As a result, they are guilty before the God who chose them because they consistently refused Him. May Holy Spirit keep us from such blunders of foolishness!

HYPOCRISY REVEALED (ROM. 2:17-24)

Pride is a dreadful and yet deceitful passion. Within us all it lies waiting for a moment to express its superiority - and ours - if we are not careful. Position and identity are powerful in not only how we perceive ourselves but others and we see this pride of the Jews being challenged by Paul. He begins by stating the specific ways in which the Jewish nation viewed itself in relation to the Lord and to the Gentiles. In short, they believe themselves to be totally devoted to the law of the Lord (Romans 2:17-18) and well capable of guiding sinners from spiritual darkness to the light of the knowledge (Romans 2:19-20). This is an incredible description of anyone who claims identity with the Lord. The only problem is that it was not, truly, their identity. One’s relation to the Lord is not a matter of perception but practice that comes from a passion for the Lord. Right relation to God is not simply a matter saying the right things, “*You must not steal*” (Romans 2:21) or “*You must not commit adultery*” (Romans 2:22) or to “*boast in the law*” (Romans 2:23). The life and the lips must match! Since hypocrisy reigned with the Jews Paul says “*The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you*” (Romans 2:24). Sadly, this same can be said of some aspects of the church today. We need not look at the television or others to see such truth. We need only to look in the mirror and grieve over the ways and times our life and lips made us to play the role of hypocrite. By His stripes, still, we are still healed!

OBEDIENCE REQUIRED (ROM. 2:25-27)

Circumcision was the sign of the covenant that every Jewish male (and men from other nations that trusted the Lord) had to undergo to show his and his family’s inclusion in the people of God. This was more than merely the physical cutting of the foreskin. It was a sign of obedience to the will and way of over and against every other god. The Jews believed, in some measure, that the sign was actually *the* only sufficient and definitive act that established their union with the God but Paul challenges this presumption. In fact, Paul argues that circumcision actually becomes uncircumcision for the one who disobeys the law of God (Romans 2:25) Thus, an obedient, but uncircumcised man is, in the sight of God, considered circumcised or in good standing with God (Romans 2:26). Paul’s point is simple: God’s way in Christ superseded circumcision and in fact transforms it to something hidden and spiritual. In this way those uncircumcised Greeks who are being judged by the Jews, through their uncircumcised obedience, stand in judgment against the Jews (Romans 2:27). We might sneer at how Jews could be so blind and seek to undermine their foolishness. Yet, there are many Christians who, if asked about the evidence of their salvation, would retreat to the moment of their baptism by submersion as proof. A disobedient baptized Christian is a hypocrite. Paul’s point is simply that the sign of circumcision, like the sign of baptism, are to be seen as merely outward signs of our genuine and inward allegiance to the Lord.

HEART RECOGNIZED (ROM. 2:28-29)

Paul finishes his thought by probing deeper and explaining his words in the previous verses. The sign of circumcision is important because God commanded it. But, like the law of God, it always was to be understood with respect to the heart. In these words Paul will, no doubt, offend some Jews saying that salvation in Christ not only changes one's destiny but it also reverses our identities, spiritually speaking. Real Jews (those who are the people of God) are not identified by the flesh or by physical sign of circumcision. The truth of who we are with the Lord is no longer physical (Romans 2:28). Now, in Christ, by way of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, those who are in Christ are God's true people because they have the sign, not of the flesh, but circumcised hearts (Romans 2:29). What an incredible and yet challenging thought of Paul. The real circumcision which the physical act of circumcision pointed to is actually a heart that was cleaned and filled by the Spirit of God. This does not come from the letter of the law, but can only take place under the powerful in-breaking of life through the Holy Spirit (Romans 2:29).

CONCLUSION

Let's consider the sum of what Paul has taught us in this section of Romans. Our sufficiency is not in our ability nor the "right people or family" we are connected with. Our sufficiency is the work of God in Christ by way of the Holy Spirit. The proof of our being right with God is God's working His life in and through us. It is not the specific acts of ritual that prove anything. In fact, rituals without relationship create a real problem of judgement for us. We must always remember that the Lord calls us to duty for Him out of the depth of our delight in Him.