

INWARD AND OUTWARD CIRCUMCISION

Romans 2:25-29

Our passage this morning is Romans 2:25-29. Earlier in Chapter 2, Paul addressed a very hallowed area of Jewish thought and life: the law. He now turns to an equally honored tradition: the rite of circumcision.

The Jews delighted in tracing their traditions and practices back to the very dawn of the Hebrew experience. With great conviction they told the story of Jehovah's choice of Abraham to be the father of their nation: the nation through whom the Messiah would come.

With great fervor they spoke of the covenant that God had made with Abraham, committing himself to be the nation's God and promising them the land of Israel. They often quoted Genesis 17:10 to their children: "This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised."

From God's viewpoint, the essence of the covenant was, "I will be their God." From the people's perspective, the proper response was to submit to circumcision as a sign and a seal of their acceptance of God's mastery over their lives and their expectation that he would be as good as ~~their~~ word."

But, now, Paul was convinced that the sign had lost its significance to many of his kinsmen and the rite was just a ritual that had no reality attached to it.

It's like so many in our churches today who have the ritual but not the reality. They come to church every Sunday, they sing the hymns, they obey the rules, but there is no submission to God in their hearts. Such people are no different from those who crucified our Lord!

25. "For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision."

Romans 2:25-29 makes it clear that it is not the outward sign that counts: it is the inward attitude. Saying you are a christian; living an upright and moral life; and going to church services regularly does not mean a thing to God if you haven't asked Jesus to save you!

Circumcision was a mark on the body of the Jewish nation. It was ordered by God on the day that He made His covenant of Grace with Abraham. By that mark, the people of God could be immediately identified.

In fact, during the Second World War, stories came to light

of Nazi raiding parties who went out to pillage and loot the homes and properties of Jews. Circumcision was the means of identification. Any who possessed the mark were killed. Those who didn't possess the mark were spared.

The mark was physical, but it was intended by God to be an outward sign of an inward condition. Deuteronomy 30:6 says, "The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed to love the Lord thy God, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."

Without the inward condition, the outward sign is nothing. If you are married, your wedding ring is an honorable thing so long as you remain faithful to your partner. But, if you commit adultery, your wedding ring is nothing but a piece of metal.

26. "Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?"

Of course, in reality, neither the Jews nor the Gentiles could ever hope to keep the law on their own. But the Jews were proud and thought the very fact that they were Jews was sufficient to guarantee them God's favor no matter how they actually lived. The Gentiles Paul was referring to in this verse were the ones who knew they were hopeless sinners. But, like Abraham, they believed God and it was counted unto them for righteousness.

Ludwig Nommensen, a pioneer missionary to the Batak tribesmen, was told that he could stay for two years, during which time he studied the customs and traditions that ruled the people. At the end of that time the chief asked him if there was anything in the Christian religion that differed from the traditions of the Batak. "We, too, have laws that say we must not steal, nor take ~~our~~ neighbor's wife, nor bear false witness," the chief said.

The missionary answered quietly, "My Master gives the power to keep His laws." The chief was startled. "Can you teach my people that?" he asked. "No, I cannot, but God can give them that power if they ask for it and listen to His Word."

The missionary was permitted to stay another six months, during which time he taught just one thing - the power of God. At the end of that time, the chief said, "Stay: your law is better than ours. Ours tells us what we ought to do. Your God says, 'Come, I will walk with you and give you strength to do

the good thing.'"

There are now about a half a million Batak Christians, with their own independent church organizations.

27. "And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?"

If you have had the advantage of a christian upbringing: if you have been nurtured in the Word of God for many years; but you have still rejected His promises and His salvation through the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ, then those who have not had your advantages but have still accepted Christ will rise up in the judgment as a testimony against you.

They won't even have to say anything. Just the fact that you know they exist will be your judgment: because you will have all eternity to thoroughly consider the opportunities you had and the price you have to pay for having ignored them.

Dr. Wilber Penfield, director of the Montreal Neurological Institute, said in a report to the Smithsonian Institute:

"Your brain contains a permanent record of your past that is like a single continuous strip of movie film, complete with sound track. This 'film library' records your whole waking life from childhood on. You can live again those scenes from your past, one at a time, when a surgeon applies a gentle electrical current to a certain point on the temporal cortex of your brain."

The report goes on to say that as you relive the scene from your past, you feel exactly the same emotions that you did during the original experience.

This is one of the most horrifying descriptions of Hell I have ever heard: to spend all eternity, alone with your thoughts, with no other person anywhere. Totally alone forever, with nothing to do but constantly relive the missed opportunities and the wrong decisions that kept you separated from God and unfit for His company!

You see, we have all transgressed God's law. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. If we try to rely on our own merits, we are doomed to failure and eternity in the Lake of Fire, where there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth! FOREVER!

There is an old illustration about the game of jumping to Catalina Island. It's about twenty-five miles directly across the Pacific Ocean to Catalina from the pier in Santa Monica, California. We get to the end of the pier and we run and jump off the end to see who can jump to Catalina. Now, up to the present, nobody has made it. There have been some mighty good jumps, but nobody yet has made it.

Its a delightful game because when you jump, you get wet, and you can say to the other fellow, "I jumped farther than you did." And it is true. Some jump farther. I see some people that I'm sure could outjump me. But I'll tell you this, if you do you'll get wetter than I will. The farther you jump the more water you get, but you won't make Catalina. All come short of Catalina although some jump farther than others. "All come short of the glory of God," although some are not as great sinners as others.

28. "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly: neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh:"

Outward appearances may impress the men and women we come in contact with every day, but they don't impress God. God looks at the heart!

I was reading recently about the man-of-war, a marine creature that is often carried ashore by strong winds and waves. It's called "man-of-war" because it floats on the surface of the sea with its sail-like crest displayed. This creature gives no indication at all of its deadly character. Above the water it appears like a graceful, iridescent bubble. But below the surface it trails behind it myriads of poisonous tentacles. The tentacles often stretch down a hundred feet or more.

This strange creature is aided in its deadly work by homeus, the shepherd fish, which, partially immune to the venom of the man-of-war, swims in and out of the deadly strands. But larger fish, seeing an easy catch, rush to seize him, only to be snared and quickly paralyzed by the poison stings, thus providing a meal for homeus and his deadly host.

29. "But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

Men look at outward appearances, but God sees into the very heart of our beings and sees each and every unsavory secret that we'd like to keep hidden.

We may impress other men, and receive their praise and accolades, but such things are very fleeting. When the Chicago Bears won the Superbowl a couple of years ago, we here in Chicago were all excited. But the excitement has worn off now. The praise of men is very little in comparison to God's praise.

Babe Ruth, the famous baseball player, once compared himself with an aged minister he knew. "Most of the people who have really counted in my life were not famous," the Babe said. "Nobody ever heard of them, except those who knew and loved them. I knew an old minister once. His hair was white. His face shone. I have written my name on thousands of baseballs in my life. That old minister wrote his name on just a few simple hearts. How I envy him. He was not trying to please himself. Fame never came to him. I am listed as a famous home-runner, yet beside that obscure minister, who was so good and so wise, I never got to first base!"

Matthew 6:33 says, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things will be added unto you."

Let us be such seekers!

Hallelujah! Amen!

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