

Condemnation of the Jews

Romans 2:25—3:9

Paul continues to show the Jews that they are as condemned as any other person. They were putting their hope in the Law and on God, in that they felt privileged that He chose to work with and reveal Himself through them. Paul show them that not only do these things not remove God's condemnation, but they actually condemn them even more than if they didn't have these advantages.

Circumcision (verses 25—29)

Circumcision was given to Abraham, and his descendants through Jacob, as a token, or sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12:1—3; 15:18—21; 17:11). It was a reminder that God would make Israel a mighty nation along with giving them a good portion of land. The Jews understood that circumcision was a very important and significant procedure. It was given only to Israel and it kept in front of them the promise of future blessings from God. However, they were using it to elevate their position in the eyes of the rest of the world. The procedure became more important than the actual promise. It was used to give them a feeling of being godly and righteous when in reality, it bolstered their self-righteousness.

Paul cuts through all of their self-righteous haughtiness by looking past the outward appearance and focusing in on their ability to obey the Law and on the attitude of their heart. These two are tied together since the Law was actually designed to reveal the evilness of the heart. It's apparent that Paul understood their mentality, having rubbed shoulders with them in the past. He declares that circumcision on its own is not able to impart any righteousness to the Jew. It was only significant if they seriously worked at keeping the requirements of the Law. Those who are circumcised, but willfully breaking the Law, are no better than the person who is not circumcised. The inverse is also true. Those who have not been circumcised but keep the Law are counted as being circumcised.

The point is, a person cannot become spiritual by performing a physical act. The person who is not circumcised but has the right heart will have the praise of God. Those who are circumcised, but are careless in keeping the Law will be judged by the Law (1 Corinthians 7:19). This is not applicable to any believer today. We are not under Law, we are under God's grace (Romans 6:14). We fulfill the Law through Jesus Christ who kept the Law perfectly. God commanded Israelite males to be circumcised, but it was much more important to have the right heart (Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4). They may be physically circumcised yet fail to be spiritually circumcised (Jeremiah 9:25—26). This spiritual circumcision is the work of the Lord upon the heart (Deuteronomy 30:6).

We in the Church, the Body of Christ, are also circumcised by Christ spiritually (Colossians 2:11). This circumcision cuts off the sinful flesh and allows the believer to walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25). This separation of the sinful nature enables us to worship God in the Spirit because from God's viewpoint, our flesh (the carnal man) is dead (Philippians 3:3).

There are some who understand that Paul was continuing to minister to Israel as a nation, and was working to bring in the Millennial Kingdom, right up until the end of the book of Acts. Taking a look at circumcision may shed some light on this. First, Paul writes that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision. His ministry was exclusively to Israel and it is only to Israel

that circumcision was given (Matthew 10:6; Romans 15:8). This same ministry to Israel was passed on to Peter, James, John and the rest of the Disciples. With Paul came a great change in how God began dealing with mankind. Israel was temporarily cast aside (Romans 11:11) and Paul is raised up as a minister to the Gentiles (Romans 15:16). Two different groups of people being ministered to by two distinct groups, each with a different message. Circumcision was given specifically to Israel by God as a sign and reminder of the covenant with Abraham. This covenant will be fulfilled at the Second Coming when the Kingdom is set up. The covenant (Abrahamic) and sign of the covenant (circumcision) concern Israel exclusively, and have nothing to do with the Church, the Body of Christ.

In contrast to Israel's program, Paul says that in this Dispensation of Grace, circumcision is meaningless (Galatians 5:6; 6:15). Circumcision was no longer needed because God was no longer dealing with Israel as a nation and the Abrahamic covenant was no longer in play. Understanding this helps to determine when the church began. Actually, it shows that the church could not have begun as late as Acts 28 since Paul penned Galatians around Acts 18. The beginning of the church was actually tied in with the stoning of Stephen and the raising up of Paul (Saul).

So, why was Paul to go to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile (Romans 1:16)? This is where it is important to understand the difference between God working with the nation of Israel and His dealing with individual Jews. After Israel rejected the offer of the Kingdom three times, God pulled the offer of the Kingdom from the nation of Israel, but was still merciful in making sure individuals were offered salvation in this Dispensation of Grace. (Three rejections: offered by the Father through John the Baptist, offered by Jesus Christ and offered by Stephen. John was killed without protest. Jesus was killed by request. Stephen was stoned by their hands). Paul went to the Jews first, until the end of the book of Acts with the Gospel of Grace, not the Gospel of the Kingdom. There was no use in preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom after the removal of the offer at the stoning of Stephen.

Anticipated questions

Having taken away everything the Jews depend upon for their salvation, Paul answers questions that they would naturally ask him. The first one concerns their position as a chosen nation. If what you say is true, then what profit is there to being a Jew?

Paul answers that they were advantaged because they knew God and they knew what He expected of them. They were the nation through whom the word of God came (Romans 3:2). No other nation can boast of having God's word coming through them. From this knowledge, they would have the revelation and warning about the coming judgment and wrath that God would direct against those who reject Him. This is a huge advantage.

Paul then answers the question about God's faithfulness, even if a nation is unfaithful. This does not change God's faithfulness at all.

The next question concerns God's righteousness. Is God unrighteous for inflicting His wrath on the unrighteous since it actually demonstrates His righteousness? This is convoluted thinking by a mind corrupted by sin. The same idea is found in God using Assyria and Babylon to punish Israel for their sin, and then turn around and punish Assyria and Babylon (Jeremiah 50:17—18). There is never any excuse for sin.

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