

The Impartial Judge Part 4

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[0 : 00] You guys, open your Bibles up to Romans chapter 2.

We're going to finish chapter 2 this morning. I know that it's taking us a good while to get through this chapter, but there's a lot here and so we need to spend a good deal of time looking at it. We're going to look this morning at verses 25 down to the end, verse 29, and as you turn there in your Bibles, if you don't have a Bible, there's some scattered in the chairs.

You can grab those, but I want you guys to stand with me in honor of God's words we read together. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 2, beginning in verse 25, 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? 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.

[1 : 26] His praise is not from man, but from God. Father, help us to understand this passage this morning. Send your Spirit to open our eyes and to help us to see and feel and taste the goodness contained in this passage.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. You guys take a seat. If you guys are anything like me, then as we read that passage, and as I was preparing to preach this week, my first thought upon reading through this passage was, how many times can you say circumcision and uncircumcision in one paragraph?

I mean, how many times can you fit that in there? The answer is apparently ten times. Because ten times in these five verses, the Apostle Paul mentions circumcision and uncircumcision, which I'm assuming all of you understand what that means.

I won't take the time to explain what it means. But it reminds us, when we come to a passage like this, that the Bible is a very, very Jewish book.

It just is. Even the New Testament is a Jewish book. Of course, the Old Testament is Jewish. I mean, it's 39 of the 66 books of the Bible, and they're all written in Hebrew.

[2 : 45] It's certainly a very Jewish book. But the New Testament as well is a Jewish book. You can hardly find a passage, a chapter in the New Testament that does not quote or paraphrase or make direct reference to a passage from the Old Testament.

In fact, throughout the book of Romans, everywhere, the Apostle Paul is proving his case, is defending the points that he's making by appealing to the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, so that this book is a very, very Jewish book.

I mean, we gather together to worship a Jewish King and Jewish Messiah. We're reading a book that's written by a Jewish man who was an apostle of this Jewish Messiah.

And so, when we come to a passage like this, it just screams out to us, you need to understand the Jewish nature of the Bible. You need to understand the very Hebrew type background that this has.

And when you're dealing with something mentioned over and over like circumcision, one of the most helpful things that you can do is just to stop. Just to pause, rather than reading past it and just sort of blowing past it and trying to get sort of the general idea and then moving on, it's helpful to just pause, to stop and ask, what does all of this mean?

[4 : 03] How is all of this language connected to what God did among his people in the Old Testament? And how is this language here? How does this, the end of this chapter, help to reemphasize, to support the points that Paul's been making throughout this chapter?

Because if you'll recall, Paul has really been making two primary points in chapter 2. And we can see both of them, if you just look up a little bit earlier into verse 6, you can see both of them in that paragraph.

Point number one is, God will render to each person according to his works. That God is going to judge us fairly and equitably according to what we have done. And then the second point, which is proven by the first point, is found in verse 11, that God is a God who shows no partiality.

So how does all of this stuff about circumcision and uncircumcision, how does it help to prove and shore up Paul's case for the fact that God judges us fairly based upon what we do, based upon our works, and that in that judgment, God is impartial?

That is, he's not one who takes face. He's not one who regards merely the external things about us. How does this paragraph support all those sorts of things? And why does he appeal to the issue of circumcision to prove those points at the end of this chapter?

[5 : 21] I mean, why even bring all of this stuff into the discussion? Well, to understand that, we need to spend a little bit of our time this morning in the Old Testament. So we're going to hit a few passages in the Old Testament to help us to really get in the right sort of mindset to understand what the Apostle Paul is teaching us here.

So I want you to jump all the way back. Hold your place in Romans. But I want you to jump all the way back in your Bibles to the book of Genesis. Book of Genesis. So go all the way back to the first book.

And if you're on your iPad or your iPhone, you know, flip, you know, scroll through those things until you get all the way back to Genesis, all right? In Genesis chapter 15, God makes a covenant with Abraham.

Gives him promises and promises him the land, promises him numerous people, numerous descendants. That's Genesis chapter 15. But in Genesis chapter 17, God confirms the covenant that he made in chapter 15.

And he's going to give something in addition to the covenant of chapter 15. God's going to give Abraham what he calls a sign of the covenant. And that's where this whole business of circumcision even enters into the Bible and becomes a part of the discussion.

[6 : 31] So I want you to look in Genesis chapter 17, where God, again, is confirming his covenant with Abraham that he's already made with him. Verse 9 of Genesis 17 tells us that 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.

So God gives circumcision to Abraham, commands Abraham not only to be circumcised, but to pass this down as something that's done throughout the generations of his descendants as a sign of the covenant that he made with Abraham back in chapter 15.

This is a continual reminder to the people of God that God has made a covenant. He has made promises to their father, Abraham.

In fact, God takes the sign pretty seriously. Look down in verse 14. He says, Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people.

[7 : 45] He has broken my covenant. So this is a serious issue. This is not just some sort of random thing that the Jews could do or not do as long as they remember the truth behind it.

This is a serious issue that God says, you will do this. Your children will do this. Their children will do this. Their children will do this. And all the way down through their generations, they will do this so that they are continually reminded of the covenant that I have made with Abraham, with you.

And if they refuse to do this or they cease to do this, I will consider them to have forgotten my covenant and therefore to have broken the covenant that I made with Abraham.

So this is crucial. This is important. This forms sort of in the mind of the Jewish people. This is formative of their identity.

It's how they see themselves. In fact, they referred to non-Jewish people. They referred to Gentiles simply oftentimes as the uncircumcised. Do you guys remember the story of David and Goliath, of course, when Goliath is out taunting the Israelite army and then David comes on the scene.

[8 : 51] But do you remember what David says? David asks a question. And the question that he asks is, who is this uncircumcised Philistine who dares defy the armies of the Lord?

That's how David thinks of Goliath. He doesn't think of him as a giant. He doesn't think of him as a frightening warrior. He's just some uncircumcised Philistine. This is the dividing point between the people of God and everyone else.

This sign of the covenant that God had made with Abraham. But if we leap to the assumption that it's all about simply the physical sign, that that's the only thing that matters, that that's of utmost importance, then I think we missed the point entirely.

Because after all, as Paul will point out in Romans chapter 4, God gave the covenant of circumcision in Genesis chapter 17. He made the covenant in Genesis chapter 15, where there are only promises and no commands.

And then in chapter 12, God gave his original promises to Abraham. So circumcision comes after the promises. Circumcision even comes after God declares Abraham righteous by faith.

[10:02] So that we cannot, because of the importance given to the physical sign, we cannot simply assume, well, that's all that matters. Because it's not all that matters. And in fact, in the law, in the Torah, there is a recognition that there is more at play, there is more at stake than simply the physical right of circumcision here.

Turn over to Deuteronomy chapter 10. And we're going to look at three more passages in the Old Testament before we get back to Romans. Turn over to Deuteronomy chapter 10. After Moses receives the Ten Commandments from God for the second time after having broken them, he receives the second set of tablets.

And God says this in verse 12. He tells Moses, And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? But to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good.

Behold, he says, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heavens of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the Lord set His heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day.

Therefore, circumcise the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn, for the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who is not partial and takes no bribe.

[11:36] God has chosen Abraham and Abraham's descendants. He requires you to love him. Therefore, because of that, therefore, circumcise your hearts.

What matters ultimately is not merely the physical right of circumcision, not even under the old covenant. What matters ultimately is that their hearts be changed and transformed so that they can obey the command to love the Lord their God.

That's why. I want you to love me. Therefore, you need to have your hearts circumcised. Why? Because if something doesn't happen internally, no matter what you might do externally, outwardly, no matter what you might do, you will not be able to love me.

You will not be able to keep my commandments if your heart remains uncircumcised no matter what happens on the outside. And then we see the same kind of thing mentioned at the end of Deuteronomy.

Turn over to Deuteronomy chapter 30 towards the end. In Deuteronomy chapters 28 and 29, after having given to Moses and to Israel all of the law, not just the Ten Commandments, but all of the law, God then begins in chapter 28 to list various blessings and curses that will come upon the nation.

[13:00] If they obey, then blessing. If they disobey, then curses will come upon them. And the assumption is made in almost a prophetic sort of way that ultimately the nation of Israel, the descendants of Abraham, will disobey the commandments that God has given through Moses.

That's the assumption that's made. Yes, there are blessings held out for obedience, but ultimately they will disobey. And because they will disobey, they will receive the curses, chief among which is that they will be expelled out of the land.

And that does happen later on in their history. But look here in chapter 30, verse 1. He says, When all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you.

So, pause right there. Here's the assumption being made. The assumption made is that there will be a time when the Lord has driven you out among all the nations. That's the curse for disobedience.

So God, even though He has given Israel the law, God knows with certainty that Israel will disobey the law. And so when that happens, you'll be scattered among the nations.

[14:16] And while you're scattered among the nations, you'll call upon Me. You will remember. Now move down to verse 6.

For the promise that God makes to His people as they live scattered among the nations under His curse. Verse 6, And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live.

You see the order in which things happen here? First, God must circumcise the heart. That is, He must fundamentally change who you are on the inside.

He must circumcise the heart. And then as a consequence of that, you respond in love toward God. And as a consequence of your love toward God, you receive life.

God is fully aware that the people of Israel are unable to obey all of the laws that He's given to them. He's aware of that. He knows that. He tells them that. But then He gives them hope that there will be a day in which He Himself makes them able to obey His law.

[15:40] You see, the problem that we have is not that there's something wrong or ineffectual with God's law. It's not that God's law is somehow too difficult.

It's not that God's law is somehow lacking. It's that God's law was never designed to be able to change our hearts. The law was never designed to actually give us life.

You have to have life first in order to be able to obey God's commands. And that's exactly what God promises here. After you've failed, after you've been driven away from the land, after you've received the curses for your disobedience, I promise there's going to be a day in which I come and circumcise your hearts and then you will love Me and then you will have life.

It would be a long time from the day that God gave these promises to the people of Israel at Mount Sinai to the day when God would fulfill these promises that He gave at Mount Sinai.

In fact, you fast forward several centuries to the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 9, in fact. And you're centuries later.

[16:52] You've gone at this point when you move from Deuteronomy all the way to Jeremiah. You've moved past the whole portion of Israel's history in which Israel was a nation in the land.

All of those stories that we know about David and David's descendants, about Solomon or about Saul before David, all of those things happened between Deuteronomy chapter 30 and now the book of Jeremiah.

And what Jeremiah is facing is the reality of the curses that God said would come upon the people. Jeremiah is looking at destruction and death in the land.

He's looking at the fact that the northern portion of Israel has been decimated by Assyria and in fact, technically doesn't even exist anymore. They're so scared.

And now the southern portion of the kingdom known as Judah, from which we get the term Jew, the southern portion of the kingdom now is under threat from Babylon and is soon to be destroyed itself.

[17:54] The covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28 and 29 have fallen and continue to fall. And Jeremiah is alive for that. And as he witnesses it, he recalls to mind the promises of Deuteronomy chapter 30.

Look at chapter 9, verse 23. God, speaking through Jeremiah, says, Thus says the Lord, let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.

For in these things I delight, declares the Lord. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh.

Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert, who cut the corners of their hair.

For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart. So God now lumps together, through the prophet Jeremiah, He lumps His people, Israel, together with Egypt, and Edom, all of these uncircumcised nations, and He says that Judah and Israel belong among those nations because they are uncircumcised in heart.

[19:31] That's why the covenant curses are coming upon them, because they lack the heart to obey. And then, similar language is found if you turn over to Jeremiah chapter 32, where, behold,

the days are coming of chapter 9 is repeated in verse 31.

In chapter 9, behold, the days are coming were about judgment because of their uncircumcision of heart. But now, behold, the days are coming are about the promise of Deuteronomy chapter 30. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.

So now I'm going to do something different, something different than I did through Moses and at Mount Sinai. I made a covenant with you there and you broke it. And because you broke it, you are now lumped in with the uncircumcised.

But now I'm going to do something different. Verse 33, This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I'll put my law within them.

[20 : 50] I'll write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they shall be my people and no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. This is the fulfillment of the promise of Deuteronomy 30. God's going to do some sort of work in their heart.

No longer are they simply giving an external written law and said, Obey this. Now God comes and He does something to change their hearts, to change who they are, which will result in obedience. Sounds a lot like Deuteronomy 30. The New Covenant. Which, as we turn to the New Testament, is applied both by Jesus and the writer of the book of Hebrews to us.

To those living in this age who have trusted in Christ. The New Covenant of Jeremiah chapter 32 is fulfilled now in this age.

[21 : 55] And the time when God would circumcise the heart of His people is now. And all of Israel's history was a combination of failure to obey the law and hope that there would be a day when God would transform their hearts so that they could obey the law.

That's Israel's history in a nutshell. Here's the law. Obey the law. You cannot obey it. The curses will come upon you. But don't worry. There's coming a day when I will cause you to obey the law. I will give you a new heart or an uncircumcised heart. Or as Ezekiel says, He will put His Spirit within us. The great hope of Israel is that God would someday do something inside of them.

Not simply outside of them. And now Paul comes in Romans chapter 2 to talk about that work that God promised He would do within His people.

But now remember the context here. The whole point of this paragraph and the whole point of bringing up circumcision and uncircumcision is to prove two points. Number one, that God judges us according to what we actually do, not by outward appearance.

[23 : 14] And then number two, that that judgment by God proves that God is an impartial God. Now let's see how circumcision relates to all that. Okay? Verse 25. Paul says, For circumcision is indeed of value if you obey the law.

But if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. You see how much that sounds like the Old Testament? You see how much it sounds like it? That in Jeremiah, God through the prophet Jeremiah lumps Israel and Judah in with the uncircumcised nations.

Their circumcision has become uncircumcision. Why? Because they did not obey the law. Because they broke the covenant that God made with them through Moses at Mount Sinai.

And that's what Paul is saying here. You may be circumcised. That is, you might be a Jew. But if you disobey the law, your Jewishness is counted as non-Jewishness.

And your circumcision is counted as uncircumcision. This is what he's been arguing throughout this whole chapter. That what matters ultimately is not your national background or your ethnic descent.

[24 : 33] What matters ultimately is do you obey or do you not? And the problem of humanity is that universally we all have disobeyed.

It's not just Israel. It's the Gentiles too who have the law of God written upon our hearts. And we too have broken that law. We are all regarded as lawbreakers and therefore we are all regarded as the uncircumcised or as the un-Jewish.

Jew and Gentile alike now lump together into the category of uncircumcised Gentile. How about that? That's a turn of events. You see, everything that Paul says here would have been shocking for a first century Jew because their whole identity was wrapped up in their identity as a Jew and as

those who are circumcised.

That's their entire identity. In fact, for most Jews in that world, if a Gentile wanted to convert to the religion of the Jews, Judaism, if a Gentile wanted to convert, conversion wasn't final and wasn't finished until all the men of the household were circumcised.

This is an important thing in their mindsets. And now Paul comes along and says, listen, if you don't obey all the law, then your circumcision is regarded and counted by God as uncircumcision.

[26 : 01] You are no different from the rest of them. So now we're seeing again this point being made that God judges us ultimately based upon whether or not we actually obey the law, not based upon whether we have the law, not based upon whether our parents had the law, not based upon whether or not we were circumcised as a baby, not based upon any of those other things.

God's judgment is rendered according to what we do, not what we look like or where we come from. That's the point that he continues to make. And then he goes on, verse 26, So if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded or counted 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. What matters here, Paul says, is not whether or not you've actually received the physical sign.

Those days are in the past and even in those days, physical circumcision was not enough. The outward sign was never enough. You needed a circumcised heart.

And now we're in the days of the circumcised heart when the sign is no longer needed. And you either obey the law or you disobey the law.

[27 : 22] Your Jewishness on Judgment Day is no advantage for you. Your possession of the law on Judgment Day is no advantage for you.

Your circumcised household on Judgment Day is no advantage for you, he says. Now that all sounds strange and foreign to us, I think.

But I think that today we, like the Jews of Paul's day, I think we have just as many sort of external, outward markers of what we regard as being Christian.

Of what we regard as marking a person off as a Christian. And none of them are necessary to actually following Christ.

We have all of these things that are sort of crude. We have this sort of evangelical subculture in which we have all of these expectations, all of these things that we say and do and participate in and know about.

[28 : 26] Imagine if you walked into an average sort of Christian small group evangelical Bible study in somebody's house and you had no church background at all. I mean, you knew zero about Christianity or what it meant to follow Christ.

All you had was your Bible. And you've read through the Bible and you know some biblical language, but that's about it.

And you come into that Bible study and all of a sudden you hear a conversation going on from two people about one person says, you know, I just didn't do a good time with my quiet time this week. I mean, I had like two quiet times and the rest of the week no quiet time.

And then another person comes in and says, oh, I spent an hour in my prayer closet the other day. A full hour in my prayer closet. And then two other people over here talking about their favorite Christian worship bands.

This person really likes Hillsong. This person over here, no, I don't really like that. I kind of like this kind of music done by the Gettys. And you're walking into this and you're thinking, what's a quiet time?

[29 : 28] What are they talking? Where's this prayer closet? I mean, is it like, you have a closet in your house? I mean, is there a sign on the door that says prayer here in your closet? Is that what that is?

What's going on? And what is this? What is a Hillsong? Who are the Gettys? What is all of this? What are they talking about? What's, I mean, it would be just overwhelmingly confusing.

And yet, so often, these are the kinds of things that we begin to think of as that's what Christians are like, or in particular, that's what evangelical Christians are like.

Those are the kinds of things we know about. Those are the kinds of things we do. Those are the kinds of things that we talk about. But at the end of the day, doing those things and knowing those

things will not benefit you on judgment day.

It will not matter what kind of worship music or bands or musicians you have preferred on judgment day. That will not matter. Whether or not you have a place that you call your prayer closet that you go to regularly will not help you on judgment day.

[30 : 32] None of those things will count for anything on judgment day. As much as the Jew relied on his circumcision and his Jewish identity, sometimes we rely upon all of these outward things that mark us as American evangelical Christians and none of those things will matter on judgment day.

They just don't count. And I think that's the Apostle Paul's main point here. His main point is to say to us, stop judging or marking your Christianity by merely outward descriptors of who you are.

It needs to be something internal. Any obedience that you render to God needs to be born out of a heart that loves God and not out of a mere sense of duty to do certain things and check off a list of things.

How many times do we champion certain moral characteristics, certain courses of life that we ought to take, we champion those without ever giving a thought to why we would do or not do those things?

How often do we think of praising those who render outward obedience without ever sitting down to talk to them and to discover whether or not they actually love Jesus and the things that they're doing?

[32 : 00] Because discipleship, which we're all about as a church, our mission is to glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ. And discipleship is not merely trying to get people to conform to the outward standards that you have fixed in your mind as this is what a Christian looks like and lives like.

Discipleship is fundamentally about helping a person to be transformed continually on the inside. That's what discipleship is really about. But so often our goal is just to get people to look a certain way and talk a certain way and act a certain way and go to the right things and like the right things and avoid the wrong things.

That's not discipleship. That's not Christianity. Christianity is a heart issue and that's what the Apostle Paul is trying to tell us here. He's trying to tell us that it doesn't matter what you've done on the outside.

What matters is whether or not you have been circumcised in the heart. That's what matters. And secondly, that those who have been circumcised in the heart are automatically transformed on the outside.

So what counts is not merely the outward expressions of our faith, but those who have been circumcised of heart will have and produce outward expressions of the faith.

[33 : 20] Look at the end of our passage here. Verse 28, For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward or physical.

we could say no one is a Christian who is merely one outwardly and being a Christian is not merely about church attendance and quiet times.

We could say it that way. Verse 29, But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the Spirit, not by the letter.

A Jew is one inwardly, circumcision is a matter of the heart by the Spirit. You see how this actually plays itself out?

It's that God breaks into our lives, dead in sin though we may be, and by His grace, He transforms our hearts. He makes us alive.

[34 : 22] He puts a new heart within us. And we respond in faith, and therefore, the Spirit of God comes to live within us. We as followers of Christ are not people who have checked off the right boxes.

We are people who have had our hearts transformed and we have been filled by the Spirit. And what's the result of that? What happens when our hearts are circumcised and the Spirit comes to live within us?

The Apostle Paul says in Galatians chapter 5 verse 6, he says, very similarly, he says, for neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

It's not circumcision that matters. It's not uncircumcision that matters. It's not outward appearances that matter. It's not whether or not you can trace your ethnic lineage back to Abraham.

What matters is whether or not you are of the faith of Abraham and therefore a spiritual child of Abraham and therefore your faith begins to produce good works through love.

[35 : 43] That's authentic, genuine Christianity. A heart transformed by God, filled with God's Spirit, trusting in Jesus and therefore doing acts of love.

That's what it looks like. That's what it means to be a Jew inwardly and not merely outwardly. So what does all this have to do? All this talk of circumcision and uncircumcision and inward Jews and outward Jews, how can we think practically day to day?

How should this affect the way that we think about things? Well, I think that we can at least say two things in regards to how we think about Jewishness and Israel itself.

I think that understanding that for Paul and for the New Testament what matters is not one's physical descent from Abraham but one's spiritual attachment to Abraham through the same kind of faith as Abraham.

I think understanding that transforms the way that we think about Jewish people in two ways.

Number one, we no longer look at say the current nation of Israel and assume that because they are descendants of Abraham, automatically everything that they do should be defended and everything that they do should be deemed right.

[37 : 04] That automatically every nation in the world, if it wants to be on God's good side, needs to be on Israel's good side. Why? They are still apart from circumcision of the heart under the covenant curses.

Are they not? Even to this day. So why would we assume that? I think personally that there are good political and moral reasons to be supportive of the nation of Israel.

I mean, I really do. I think that there are really good reasons to do that. But what I would not do is point back to the promises made to Abraham and then immediately leap to the conclusion of, see, we should be supporters of Israel because God made promises to Abraham.

Yes, He did make promises to Abraham. Promises that are fulfilled toward all those who are Jews inwardly, not outwardly.

This changes the way that we assess current events and world affairs. It really does. At the end of the day, we still may come to some of the same practical conclusions in regards to how we think about the nation of Israel.

[38 : 21] Because as Americans, they're an ally. They're a democracy. There are, as I said, good political and moral reasons, I think, for supporting Israel most of the time. But we are not automatically obligated as Christians to support them no matter what they might do.

Because who are the children of Abraham? Abraham? not the people of physical descent merely, but those who are Jews inwardly.

Those who have been circumcised in heart. Those upon whom the Spirit of God has written His law in their hearts. I think it changes the way that we think about current events.

But I think far more important than any of that, far, far more important than any of that. It changes the way that we perceive the individual Jewish person as we encounter them. Because we don't merely think of them as, oh, you're a Jewish person, you're part of the chosen people, so you're okay on Judgment Day.

We don't think with that kind of a mindset. We think the way that the Apostle Paul thinks. Apart from faith in Jesus, Jew and Gentile both, because of their law breaking, will receive wrath.

[39 : 39] through faith in Jesus, Jew and Gentile both will have righteousness credited to them and will avoid the wrath that they deserve. Turn over to Romans chapter 10.

In Romans 9, 10, and 11, when we eventually get there in a few years, we will delve into these issues in much more depth.

But in Romans chapter 10, Paul expresses his feelings about his Jewish kinsmen. Verse 1, he says, Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them, who?

The Jewish people, is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

Paul's great desire and his great prayer for the Jewish people was what? That they might be saved, which implies that they're not saved.

[40 : 44] That they don't have any sense of eternal security. They have no leg up on us on judgment day, simply because they are a physical descendant of Abraham. What matters and what counts is obedience or disobedience.

And since we've all rendered disobedience, there's only one avenue left. faith in Jesus is the only way for Jew or Gentile to be made right with God.

Which means that our passion and our desire regarding the Jewish people have got to go beyond political statements. We have got to have a passion and a desire for Jews to believe in Jesus and for them to be saved.

We don't go hands off with them and not preach the gospel to them because it might offend them and they're Jewish and we want to be careful around them. We preach the gospel full force head on because unless they believe in Jesus Christ they have no hope.

It matters how you think about Jewishness because it affects who you preach the gospel to. But I think more is going on here than merely how we think about the Jewish people.

[41 : 57] I think that this affects the way that we think about ourselves. Because we will either repeat the mistakes of the Jews of Paul and Jesus' day and begin to think that Christianity is about outward external things like quiet times and prayer closets and listening to Christian music rather than secular music or doing whatever it might be.

We will begin to think that Christianity is about all of those things rather than about the changed heart. And we want to be careful that we don't repeat the mistakes that they made.

And so we want to hear what Paul has to say when he says, what matters is whether or not you are a Jew internally. What matters is whether or not you have a circumcised heart because what that says to us is what matters ultimately is not your church attendance or your memorizing of the Bible or your participation in the evangelical subculture and all the church camps and disciple nows and whatever you went to as a kid or you participated in as an adult.

What matters is none of those things. What matters ultimately is your heart. And you believe in him and you love him or you don't.

And that makes all the difference in the world. Christianity begins in the heart and then moves outward. But if it begins outwardly, it's not Christianity.

[43 : 38] It must begin in the heart. And if it begins there, the outward things will happen. You will gravitate toward a body of believers and you will eventually begin to be a really connected part of the church because that's what people who have new hearts do.

You will begin to obey Christ in your everyday life. You will begin to treat others differently and be loving and kind to other people. You will begin to see the Spirit work things like patience and kindness and goodness into your heart and life.

But you don't start with those things. You start with a new heart. And if we forget that, we run the danger of becoming Christian Pharisees as lost as they were and ultimately as hopeless as they were.

What counts and what matters is the inward work of God in our hearts. Let's pray. |