



## The Epistle to the Romans

Lesson Number 7



# REAL CIRCUMCISION

<sup>2:25</sup> For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. <sup>26</sup> Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? <sup>27</sup> And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? <sup>28</sup> For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; <sup>29</sup> but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

(Romans 2:25-29<sup>NKJV</sup>)

## INTRODUCTION

### LESSON OUTLINE

- I. WHEN CIRCUMCISION IS UNPROFITABLE (2:25)
- II. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE POINT, NOT THE SIGN (2:26)
- III. EXTERNAL REQUIREMENTS DO NOT EXCLUDE THE NEED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS (2:27)
- IV. JUDGE NOT ACCORDING TO APPEARANCE (2:28)
- V. REAL IDENTITY (2:29)

The matter of receiving a righteousness from God, or being justified, is the most critical concern in Scripture. Nothing is more important than this. If God does not recognize us as righteous, there is no chance of being saved, for *“the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God”* (1 Cor 1:9).

The Spirit has already declared *“the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”* (Rom 1:18). There is no possibility of this not taking place. The Divine nature will eventually break forth in consuming fury against everyone and everything contradictory to it. It is only *“the longsuffering”* and *“goodness of God”* that keeps this from occurring now. However, these marvelous qualities will not continue toward those who are ungodly—those who lack the righteousness of God.

### RIGHTEOUSNESS IS ESSENTIAL

To further confirm this reality, the Spirit confronts those who imagine they can develop a righteousness on their own. *“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away”* (Isa 64:6). If some protest, saying

this only applied to the Jews, and not to everyone, all doubt is decimated by this word. *“The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Psa 14:2-3; 53:2-3; Rom 3:10). Although men argue over this fact, it is actually beyond debate. This is a Divine assessment, and must be addressed if men are to be saved.

Even though the salvation of God is being accomplished with the extensive involvement the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, men are tempted to think little is required of them. Satan has succeeded in deluded them into believing God will graciously overlook their situation. Too, they also are convinced a minimal amount of input is required of them. To further complicate the matter, the absolute necessity of a total change in the

character of the individual is seriously doubted among many wearing the name of Christ.

The Law confirmed God cannot be

*"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith" (Heb 11:39).*

**THE MINISTRY OF CONDEMNATION**

**The Law confirmed God cannot be served seasonally, or in activities that are adjunct to life itself. This is precisely how the Israelites worshiped and served the Lord. This was not the heart and soul of their life, but an addition to it.**

served seasonally, or in activities that are adjunct to life itself. This is precisely how the Israelites worshiped and served the Lord. This was not the heart and soul of their life, but an addition to it. Furthermore, it was a burdensome one to them. They saw no correlation between serving the Lord and life itself. That is why they said, *"You have said, 'It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the LORD of hosts?'"*NASB (Mal 3:14).

While we may be tempted to chide the Israelites for their inconsistency, care must be taken NOT to miss the point being made by the Holy Spirit. It is simply this: men without the righteousness of God cannot live acceptably to God, because they are fundamentally unlike Him. The only change that can be made is through faith, which accounts for the unusual men and women prior to Jesus. Their superiority was not due to more hearty effort, or the greater discipline of their mind on their part. It was their faith that made them unique. As it is written,

The law was a ministry of condemnation. Yet, those under it tended to view it as the means to their justification. The third chapter of Second Corinthians provides a vivid picture of the Law and its relationship to our natural condition. Although *"glorious,"* it was *"the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones"* (v. 7). It produced death, not life. For this reason, it was called *"the ministration of condemnation"* (v. 9), because it revealed the alienated condition of men.

Furthermore, the Law has no transforming power. It could not change the human condition, but only identify it. Concerning the forbidden tree, the Lord told Adam, *"in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"* (Gen 2:17). Indeed, *"by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"* (Rom 5:12). A chasm was thus created between man and God that was too vast to be bridged by human effort—any human effort, regardless of size or longevity. Only God is able to resolve this problem!

The Law was delivered to confirm this was the case. It was not given to remedy the situation, but to clarify, and even compound, it. Thus it is written, *"Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound"* (Rom 5:20). And again, *"But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful"* <sup>NKJV</sup> (Rom 7:13). The nature of sin was not changed, or increased by the Law. Rather, its wickedness became more apparent.

If man could recover from sin on his own, the ministry of the Law would not have been necessary. Sin, in such a case, would not have been *"exceedingly sinful,"* but merely a human weakness.

It is one of the ironies of humanity that in spite of this pointed ministry of the Law, those who choose it as a means to reach God become self-confident. They think nothing of putting their trust in their own abilities. It is no wonder Paul wrote, *"For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me"* (Rom 7:11).

Because of these circumstances, the Spirit drives the point home of our need for a righteousness from God. He is going to reason with our hearts, showing there is no possible way to remain honest and avoid the conclusion that our own righteousness, under any and every circumstance, is unacceptable to God. In order to do this, HE will focus on the highest and most notable mark of the Old Covenant - circumcision.

**WHEN CIRCUMCISION IS PROFITABLE**

***"2:25 For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision."***

It is tragic that so very little is known of *"circumcision"* within the modern church. It was a most significant ordinance, acquainting men with tokens of a Divine covenant. In its various forms, the word *"circumcise"* is mentioned no

less than fifty-three times in Scripture (Gen 17:11,12,13,14,23,24,25,26,27; 21:4; 34:15,21,22,24; Ex 4:26; 12:44,48; Lev 12:3; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Josh 5:2,3,4,5,7,8; 7:22,23; Jer 4:4; 9:25; Lk 1:59; 2:21; John 7:22; Acts 7:8; 10:45; 11:2; 15:1,5,24; 21:21; Rom 2:25,26,27,28,29; 3:1,30; 4:9,10,11,12; 15:8; 1 Cor 7:18,19; Gal 2:3,7,8,9,12; 5:2,3,6,11; 6:12,13; Eph 2:11; Phil 3:3,5; Col 2:11; 3:11; 4:11; Tit 1:10).

**ASSOCIATED WITH ABRAHAM**

Circumcision is first mentioned in relation to Abraham. When Abram was ninety-nine years of age, after Ishmael was born, the Lord appeared to him. At that time, the Lord said, *"And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly"* (Gen 17:2). This was in keeping with the Lord's promise to Abraham approximately three years earlier, and prior to the conception of Ishmael. *"On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: 'To*

your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates; the Kenites, the Kenezites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites” (Gen 15:18-21). The only covenant made with men prior to this was made with Noah (Gen 6:18; 9:9-17). The covenant with Abraham, however, differed significantly from that with Noah. That covenant established safety for Noah and his family during the flood. It also assured the world would never again be destroyed with a flood.

The covenant with Abraham, however, was one of blessing. At the time God made this covenant, he changed Abram’s name to Abraham. “No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations” (17:5). Having promised the land of Canaan to Abraham for “an everlasting possession,” the Lord said, “This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you” (17:10-11). The requirement applied to every male offspring of Abraham, of all generations, and to any foreigner among them as well (v 12).

The requirement was exacting, with no leniency at all. The covenant of God would be ratified in the flesh of Abraham’s progeny. “He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant” (v. 13-14).

The covenant was further defined as being through Isaac’s lineage, and not that of Ishmael. When Abraham suggested that the covenant might be fulfilled through Ishmael, the Lord said, “No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son,

and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him . . . But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year” (17:19,21).

In faith, Abraham obeyed the voice of the Lord. “Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him” (Gen 21:4). Stephen referred to this occasion in his eloquent defense of the faith. “Then He gave him **the covenant of circumcision**; and so Abraham begot Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day” (Acts 7:8).

**JUDAISTIC TROUBLERS**

The early church was troubled with legalistic judaizers. There were those who insisted that circumcision was still incumbent upon all in covenant with God—even those in Jesus Christ. On one occasion “certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). To the unspiritual mind, it all seemed to make sense. After all, Jesus had given no indication that circumcision would be abrogated. The few words He said about it did not seem to indicate the ordinance would ever end (John 7:22-23).

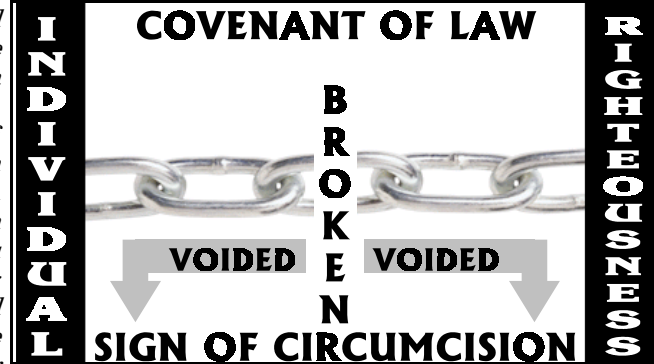
These law-binders could point to chapter and verse to confirm their insistence that all males be circumcised. There was no question about the wording of these texts. “He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh **for an everlasting covenant**” (Gen 17:11).

The Galatians confronted false teachers who “compelled” them “to be circumcised” (Gal 6:12). These teachers, besides having corrupt hearts, did not know the nature of the new covenant.

Four hundred and fifty years after Abraham, Moses spoke of the necessity of a higher form of circumcision. “Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer” (Deut 10:16). Realizing they were incapable of doing this, he also foretold of the time when God would accomplish the circumcision of the heart. “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6). A “better covenant,” “established upon better promises” was needed if men were to become truly righteous (Heb 8:6).

**WHY SAY THESE THINGS?**

I have taken the time to briefly review the background of circumcision because of the general ignorance concerning it. Also, considerable will be made of circumcision in this book. It



You may recall that Joseph and Mary also honored this covenant, circumcising Jesus when He was eight days old. “And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb” (Lk 2:21). That took place about 2,000 years after the circumcision of Isaac.

**A SIGN AND SEAL OF THE COVENANT**

In delineating the truth of justification by faith, Paul brings up Abrahamic circumcision. Because we will cover it extensively in the fourth chapter, it will suffice to only mention it here. In Genesis, the Lord said circumcision was the covenant of God “in your flesh.” Referring to the same truth, Paul wrote, “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised” (Rom 4:11). That sign was the proof of the covenant. It was known to the possessor, but was hidden from the view of others.

therefore behooves us to have a working knowledge of it. Briefly stated, it was an external sign of a Divine covenant.

### A BREAKER OF THE LAW

The Spirit now confronts the legalist with an arresting consideration. *“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision”* (2:25). Those who imagined that possessing the sign and the seal was all there was to it were simply wrong. Conforming to outward requirements was never intended to be a basis of confidence before God—not even in Abraham. **It is never right to put faith in “the sign and the seal” rather than in the God of the covenant.**

Even under the First Covenant, circumcision brought no personal advantage apart from obedience to the law. *“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law.”* Remember, the subject of discussion is being righteous before God. Under the Law, Divine acceptance was granted upon the basis of DOING, not being circumcised. Thus it was written, *“For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who DOES those things shall live by them’”* (Rom 10:5). Note, righteousness is here equated with life. This is spiritual life, or being recognized by, and in fellowship, with the Lord.

### Righteousness and the Law

Righteousness, or spiritual life, was not promised because men were circumcised, but ONLY if they did precisely what the Law said. Hear it again from the words of Moses. *“Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man DO, he shall live in them: I am the LORD”* (Lev 18:5). Permit me to call Nehemiah to the witness stand. *“ . . . yet they dealt proudly, and hearkened not unto thy commandments, but sinned against thy judgments, (which if a man DO, he shall live in them)”* (Neh 9:29). Hear Ezekiel the prophet affirm the same thing. *“And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which if a man DO, he shall even live in them”* (Ezek 20:11). Hear the Lord Jesus

Himself as He spoke to a man inquiring what he should DO to inherit eternal life. After telling him to keep the commandments, Jesus *“said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this DO, and thou shalt live”* (Lk 10:28). Again, the Spirit says to the Galatians, who were retrogressing to Law for justification, *“And the law is not of faith: but, The man that DOETH them shall live in them”* (Gal 3:12).

### Circumcision Did not Negate the Requirement for Perfect Obedience

Circumcision did not take the place of DOING to obtain life, or righteousness. Remember, the Old Covenant offered righteousness strictly upon the basis of perfect compliance with its demands. Under it circumcision was a sign that the

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individual was within that covenant. If, however, that Law was broken, circumcision was invalidated.

The books of Moses are filled with the names of those who were severely punished, and even died, because they broke the law. Their circumcision was not sufficient to exempt them from Divine judgment. Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-3), Korah and his cohorts (Num 16:19-32), and over 600,000 who refused to obey, and thus fell in the wilderness (Num 14:26-34). Who can forget Saul being stripped of his kingship (1 Sam 16:1,14), or Samson losing his strength (Judges 16:20). All of these people were circumcised, but it was of no avail when they became obstinate and disobeyed the Lord.

When it came to the matter of righteousness (which is the subject of discussion), the Jew’s disobedience invalidated their circumcision.

Inclusion in the Old Covenant, which was confirmed by circumcision, required complete obedience to the Law. Where this did not occur, no confidence could be placed in circumcision. Life and acceptance were not offered **because** the people had been circumcised. Rather, they were circumcised because they were chosen and blessed by God. To boast, therefore, in the *“sign and the seal”* brought no glory to God.

### WHY BRING THIS UP?

This is not a mere discourse on circumcision. The Spirit is addressing the Jews who thought themselves worthy to judge others simply because they were a chosen people. They trusted in their possession of the Law, and boasted in the ordained seal of circumcision.

To state it more succinctly, they were trusting in what they had been given, rather than in the Giver. The Spirit is taking this boast away from them. He is confirming that our acceptance is strictly based upon faith, and that it alone can appropriate the righteousness of God.

### WHEN ORDAINED SIGNS ARE NEGATED

The Jews were not the last persons to rely on signs for confidence. Many still imagine they can take the place of faith, which alone can appropriate the righteousness of God (Rom 3:22,26; 4:5; Phil 3:9). It is vital to understand the principle proclaimed in this text.

There is extensive teaching on this matter in the Apostolic writings. Yet, it is generally ignored by the masses, in favor of some external and visible evidence of imagined Divine approval.

### Not of Works

When it comes to the appropriation of righteousness, the cause is not human achievement. Strict adherence to the Law, for example, will NEVER result in justification. *“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin”* (Rom 3:20). The *“deeds”* demanded by the Law had to be perfect, with not the slightest deviation from the Divine requirement.

The appropriation of grace is absolutely essential. Yet, works cannot take hold of grace. Only faith can seize the grace of God. *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **Not of works, lest any man should boast**”* (Eph 2:8-9).

The salvation and calling of God were not induced by our works, but by His own determined objective. They were driven by His grace, not our accomplishments. *“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, **not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began**”* (2 Tim, 1:9).

Our experience of the kindness and tender love of God was not His response to our own works. Salvation came through MERCY, not recognition of our attainments. *“But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, **not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit**”*<sup>NKJV</sup> (Tit 3:4-5).

Men will remonstrate at this declaration, saying we are not saved by faith alone, but by works (James 2:24). But James is not speaking of obtaining justification, or righteousness, but of confirming its presence. Faith works, and consistently so—but it is never the result of work. When we become *“partakers of the Divine nature”* (2 Pet 1:4), that nature works within us *“both to will and to do”* (Phil 2:13). But it is not conferred upon us because of our works. Men are not righteous because they live for God, but live for God because they are righteous.

Allow me to be even more simplistic. Men are not born again because they are good, but are good because they are born again—and only good men can do good works. To put it in the words of our blessed Lord, *“Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit”* (Matt 12:33).

The reason for this arrangement should be obvious. A religion that places

confidence in human achievement or benefits conferred by God Himself, has no need for Christ. In such a case, there is really no need for an Intercessor in heaven, or a powerful Holy Spirit within. The point in all such religion is what men can and ought to do, NOT what the Lord has done.

The Old Covenant was precisely that kind of covenant. It relied upon the people, promising life to those who DID what the Law demanded. Such a covenant was *“weak through the flesh”* (Rom 8:3), not bringing righteousness to men. The New Covenant is certainly not another covenant of the same order. It is a

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different kind of covenant, with a superior foundation and better promises.

**Trusting in Evidences**

There is a proneness in men to base their faith on evidence, rather than in the Living God. In some circles, this is even thought to be commendable. But it is not. You may recall that Thomas once said, *“Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.”* Eight days later, when Jesus again appeared to His disciples, Thomas was also present. Confronted with the evidence of a real risen Savior, Thomas cried out, *“My Lord and my God.”* Jesus then pronounced a blessing—**BUT NOT UPON THOMAS.** *“Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: BLESSED are they that have NOT seen, and YET HAVE BELIEVED”* (John 20:25-29).

Lest we miss the point, circumcision was the evidence—the sign of the covenant. It could not gain access to God for those who had transgressed the covenant. Disobedience reduced the circumcised person to the same condemnation leveled

against the Gentiles.

**TRUSTING IN ORDINANCES**

Just as the Jews, under the First Covenant, were prone to trust in ordinances, particularly circumcision, so those in Christ are tempted to trust in the ordinances delivered to them. The Jews, you may recall, made an idol out of the brazen serpent, burning incense to it (2 Kings 18:4). The brazen serpent was given by God, and was the means through which healing was brought to disobedient Israelites. Yet, it was never intended to take the place of God. So it is with blessed ordinances that have been given through Christ to us. They are from God, and are not to be despised or rejected. Yet, they are not intended to take the place of the Lord, or become the objects of confidence.

**Baptism Into Christ**

Our baptism into Christ is one of the great occasions of life. It is the point at which we are identified with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6:3-6). This is the one thing Peter *“commanded”* the household of Cornelius to do (Acts 10:48). There is never a question about the necessity or benefits of baptism in Scripture. Like Jewish circumcision, it is, of itself, always viewed in a favorable manner.

However, our baptism is neither the objective or foundation of our faith. As indispensable as it is, it cannot make up for a lack of faith. The commandment is, *“He that **believes** and is baptized shall be saved”* (Mark 16:16). Unless it is coupled with faith, baptism brings no advantage whatsoever to the individual.

Let it be clear, God does not, nor do we, recognize any individual who refuses to be baptized. If the Pharisees were judged for not submitting to John’s baptism (Lk 7:30), what can be said of those who do not submit to one ordained by Jesus? But woe be to the person who trusts in his baptism rather than in the Christ into whom he was baptized! Baptism is the means, not the objective, even as with all other acts of obedience. It is not to be despised, nor is it to be vaunted to the most prominent place.

**Partaking of the Lord’s Supper**

Here is another ordinance put into place by the Lord Jesus Himself. Like baptism, it relates to His vicarious death, and is to be held in the highest regard. Jesus said, *“Do this in remembrance of me”* (Lk 22:19). *“ALL”* of His disciples are to partake of it (Matt 26:27). His disciples are to examine themselves and *“eat of that bread, and drink of that cup”* (1 Cor 11:28). This is not, therefore, an ordinance to be trifled with, as though it were inconsequential.

The Corinthian’s failure to properly partake of this supper led to the visitation of Divine judgment upon them (1 Cor 11:27-31).

But let no person imagine that eating at the Lord’s Table exempts one from the necessity of having the righteousness of God. There is no magic in this table which allows corruption to remain in the hearts of those partaking of it. A church that faithfully partakes of this table is not necessarily commended of God, as seen in the case of Corinth. Nor, indeed, is it to be treated as though it could be forgotten or approached with casualness. Participation in it, however, is not to be the source of our confidence.

#### Assembling Together

Early in the history of the church, people began to develop a *“manner”* of forsaking the assembling of the saints. Thus the admonition is given, *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”* (Heb 10:25). Assemblies should increase, and the exhortations to not forsake them, *“so much more,”* as we see the day approaching. *“The day”* has been viewed in a variety of ways, and all of them have some merit. Among them is the day our Lord returns, the time of judgment upon Jerusalem, the day of judgment, and the first day of the week itself. However you may choose to view it, gathering together is not to be despised.

However, if men rely upon the attendance of the assembly to take the place of personal righteousness, they have sinned, just as surely as those who relied upon circumcision. There is nothing about the assembly of the righteous that

compensates for a lack of faith, or a failure to appropriate the righteousness of God.

None of this diminishes the importance of these ordinances—any more than our text lessened the place of circumcision under the Old Covenant. Under the Law, it was not possible to have

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a more significant seal in the flesh than circumcision. It was so vital that those accepted by God were called *“the circumcision,”* and those who were not were called *“the uncircumcision”* (Rom 3:30; 4:9; 15:8; Eph 2:11).

But when it comes to the matter of ultimate Divine acceptance, *“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God”* (1 Cor 7:19). At some point, the individual must be brought into harmony with the Law of God, not being at variance with it. As it is written, *“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”* (Rom 8:3-4). This occurs when men are given the righteousness of God. We will now see that this is directly related to being born again, or receiving a new nature. The argument is weighty, showing that a person’s nature, or character, is the real point with God.

That takes precedence over the *“sign”* of the covenant, although it does not obviate the *“sign”* or *“seal”* of any given covenant. The possession of

righteousness is the fundamental thing. Without it, nothing else is of value.

#### WHEN THE SIGN IS VOIDED

Because of the strength of this text, I must reaffirm it. For the Jew, when God’s law was broken, circumcision lost its significance. To state it another way, when men do not have the righteousness of God, it makes no difference what ordained *“seal”* they possess, they are NOT accepted by God.

#### Does This Not Produce Hopelessness?

The sophist will object that this removes hope from all people. How can we account for the acceptance of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and David? The Spirit shouts back to us that they were accepted because of their *“FAITH.”* In fact, that is the point of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The word *“circumcision”* is not mentioned a single time in that text, even though most of those cited were Jews.

Apart from faith, all is hopeless. That is the point of our text, for faith alone can appropriate the righteousness of God. That is why Paul pressed *“to be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is FROM GOD BY FAITH”* (Phil 3:9).

Some object, saying *“works”* are part of salvation. Indeed, they are—but not the foundational part. They are not what supports the tree, nor are they the primary evidence of Divine grace. Works—valid works—are the fruit, and not the root. They are **what** we are recreated for, **not why** we were recreated. As it is written, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”* (Eph 2:10)! They are the evidence of righteousness, and not the cause of it. The one who *“does righteousness”* IS righteous (1 John 3:7). In the case of holy works, righteousness is the cause, not the effect. Further more, the means through which righteousness is conferred is faith. This sharply contrasts with the Law, which conferred righteousness upon the basis of doing.

## RIGHTEOUSNESS IS THE POINT, NOT THE SIGN

***“<sup>26</sup> Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision?”***

In this verse, the Spirit tears down two walls that have plagued the church. **The first is sectarianism.** This has led people to trust in positions, creeds, and ordinances, removing their faith from God. As a result, they have sat in judgment upon other people who have not subscribed to their traditions. **The second is self confidence.** This leads the individual to rely upon surface evidences, while lacking the real righteousness of God. Remember, the Spirit is establishing our need for the righteousness of God. This is a righteousness that can only be experienced by faith. Therefore, it escapes the sectarian and the self confident.

### **CIRCUMCISION INFERIOR TO THE LAW ITSELF**

Under the First Covenant, or the Law, the Law itself was the point, not its attending ordinances. Do not imagine this means the ordinances were inconsequential or of no significance. God forbid!

#### **The Example of Moses**

To confirm that the Spirit is not demeaning circumcision under the Law, but rather refusing to allow men to trust in it, let us consider Moses. There is a very brief account given of this great man of God that confirms the importance of circumcision. The Lord had just told Moses to go to obstinate Pharaoh and give him a most grievous message. *“So I said to you, ‘Let My son go, that he may serve Me’; but you have refused to let him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your first-born.”*<sup>NASB</sup> On the way, the Lord met Moses, and *“sought to kill him.”* The reason for this intent, we find, was that Moses had failed to circumcise the son he had through Zipporah, daughter of *“the priest of Midian.”* It appeared as though Moses was totally insensitive of the situation, but his wife was not. The record reads, *“Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and threw it at*

*Moses’ feet, and she said, ‘You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.’ So He let him alone. At that time she said, ‘You are a bridegroom of blood’-- because of the circumcision”* (Ex 4:24-26).

I give this example to remove any temptation to think of circumcision as optional among the Jews.

#### **Stipulations of the Law**

The Law also spoke clearly on this matter, making circumcision incumbent for every man child in any Jewish house, be he bond or free. *“And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it”* (Ex 12:48).

*that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised”* (Josh 5:2-7). The Lord’s response to their action is noteworthy. *“This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you”* (Josh 5:9). Circumcision was certainly not an optional or insignificant ordinance!

#### **The Law Was Superior**

Our text confirms the superiority of the Law to circumcision. *“If those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised?”*<sup>NIV</sup>

I understand this to be a hypothetical statement. The Spirit is reasoning with us, showing that the Law was superior to circumcision, and was the reason for its existence. Although circumcision was strictly required by the Law, keeping the Law had greater weight than being circumcised. A Gentile who kept the Law, even though uncircumcised, was far superior to the Jew who was circumcised, yet disobeyed the Law. That was a hard pill for the Judaizers to swallow!

The point is that keeping the Law was the intent of making a covenant with Israel, not a mere fleshly distinction. They were brought into covenant with God in order that they might walk in His statutes and judgments. If, then, an uncircumcised Gentile was found walking in those judgments, the objective of God was being served in him, even though he did not have the sign and seal of the covenant in his flesh.

Let me emphasize that this is a spiritual form of reasoning. The Spirit is not suggesting that such a person exists, for he has already declared the Gentile world guilty of sin. He is showing us the Divine manner of thinking. God does NOT look on the outward appearance, but on the heart. As it is written, *“for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart”* (1 Sam 16:7). Faith reckons on God’s consideration, ignoring that of man.

**Remember, the Spirit is establishing our need for the righteousness of God. This is a righteousness that can only be experienced by faith. Therefore, it escapes the sectarian and the self confident.**

#### **Joshua Circumcises the Men**

To further show the importance of circumcision, Joshua addressed the matter when the children of Israel arrived at Jericho. BEFORE they took the city, there was something that had to be done. The record speaks for itself. *“At that time the LORD said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives, and circumcise again the children of Israel the second time. And Joshua made him sharp knives, and circumcised the children of Israel at the hill of the foreskins. And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise: All the people that came out of Egypt, that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way, after they came out of Egypt. Now all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people*

Let there be no mistake about this, God prefers, and will ONLY accept, the individual who is righteous. That is why the Gospel reveals *“the righteousness of God.”* There is no other way to be received by Him.

**The Example of Cornelius**

Although not a thorough example of our text, the Gentile Cornelius reveals the truth of it. He was not a Jew, but was a military man, *“a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment.”* It is said of this man, *“He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly”*<sup>NIV</sup> (Acts 10:1-2). The angel of the Lord appeared to him announcing, *“Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God”*<sup>NKJV</sup> (Acts 10:4). He then directed Cornelius to send for Simon Peter, who would tell him *“words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved”* (Acts 11:14).

How is it that God honored this man’s gifts and prayers? He was not a Jew—not among the covenanted people. Later, when with Cornelius, Peter confessed, *“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him”* (Acts 10:34-35). His acceptance did not obviate the need for Christ, or *“words”* instructing him in the matter of salvation. However, God did honor him by opening the door of salvation to him.

**My Own Experience**

For many years I have noticed that many, classed as “sectarians” by my brethren, have more godly traits than their critics. While in the grip of a sectarian manner of thought, I considered myself to have embraced the true New Testament way. It was not due to any unwavering faith I possessed, or a strong hope or full assurance. I had none of those things. I rested in a church pattern, a proceduralized approach to salvation, and the observance of God-ordained ordinances. The matters in which I rested were not wrong. In fact, they were right, and fully supported by the Word of God.

Yet, I was repeatedly confronted

with a most disconcerting circumstance. When my heart was hungry for the things of God, or I yearned for deep spiritual fellowship, I could not find it among my brethren. Their respect for and knowledge of the Word were seriously deficient. The full assurance of faith and a strong hope could hardly be found among them. The good things that were historically proclaimed among the people had nearly passed into oblivion.

I found myself attracted to people

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who had an obvious love for the truth, yet who lacked a fuller understanding of the Word. They seemed to have a heart for the things of God. They practiced things with which I was not comfortable, yet I was endeared to their spirit. They were more holy than the people with whom I was identified. They seemed more acquainted with the spirit of the Scripture, and were easier to instruct.

For many years this was a source of confusion to me. I felt I was doing wrong in extending the right hand of fellowship to those who were seriously wrong in some of their perceptions. But my heart and conscience would not let me forget the tenderness of their hearts, their love for the truth, and their fervency to serve the Lord. Some of these people opened new vistas of thought to me. Others were sources of great encouragement in the good fight of faith.

Since those struggles associated with my early years in Christ, I have found a great liberty in the belief of the truth. I still am not able to condone error, nor do I want to become able to do so. But I can acknowledge the superiority of an

individual who has an appetite for the truth, yet lacks knowledge of it, over a person who spouts pious platitudes about the truth, yet has no yearning for it.

**MAN’S PROPENSITY TO TRUST IN EXTERNALS**

There is a strong propensity in men to trust in external things. By its very nature *“flesh”* seeks to ignore *“the righteous requirements of the law,”* settling only for *“an appearance of wisdom”* (Col 2:23), or a *“form of godliness”* (2 Tim 3:5). This was the plight of the church in Laodicea who said, *“I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.”* Yet, in the Divine assessment, that church was *“wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked”* (Rev 3:17). They were not the last church who was not what they appeared to be.

The Word of God warns us about glorying in appearance—religious appearance. We read of those who *“boast in appearance and not in heart”* (2 Cor 5:12). The Galatians were warned of teachers who *“desire to make a fair show in the flesh”* (Gal 6:12). Jesus Himself commanded, *“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment”* (John 7:24).

When this view of values is brought into the church, great damage is done. If the Jews, who had ordained appearances, were forbidden to glory in them, what may be said of the fabricated appearances concocted by the Gentile church?

The things that commend men to God are not seen as commendable by the world—even the religious world. A single example will suffice. *“But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold,*



we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor 6:4-10).

That is a vivid description of righteousness, or spiritual life, and how it appears in the world. Let me remind you that righteousness is, in our text, being equated with spiritual life.

### THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW

"Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law . . ." More modern translations read "the righteous requirements of the law."<sup>NKJV, NASB, NRSV</sup> The idea is that the ordinances of the Law defined righteousness. Those living up to them were, therefore, righteous. It made no difference whether

they were Jew or Gentile.

The "righteousness of the law" is consistently contrasted with the righteousness that comes from faith. Again, it is written, "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them" (Rom 10:6). There is a slight difference in the meanings of Romans 2:26 and 10:5. In the first, "the requirements of the law" are depicted as the means through which men become righteous. In the latter, "righteousness" is the condition pronounced by the law upon the perfectly obedient person.

While the Law was a covenant made with Israel, it was indiscriminating in its offer. If "the man" who did what the Law

demanded was not a Jew, the promise still applied to him. If he did not, the condemnation of the law also applied.

The Jews, therefore, had no right to boast in their possession of the Law, or the sign and seal of circumcision. Neither the "words of the covenant" nor the "sign of the covenant" had altered their unrighteous state. They too stood in need of a righteousness from God. It is ever true, "the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate" (1 Tim 1:9). The boastful Jew was oblivious to this because of hardness of heart.

Alas, this is infinitely more than a history lesson! It unveils a human tendency that is to be mortified.

## EXTERNAL REQUIREMENTS DO NOT EXCLUDE THE NEED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

***"<sup>27</sup> And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?"***

With convincing relentlessness, the Holy Spirit continues to drive home to our hearts that external advantages are not spiritual ones. They do not bring the people closer to God, or give them the edge when judged by God. This particular line of reasoning is not suggesting that those with no revelation had actually measured up to Divine requirements. It is a hypothetical argument, looking at the matter as though the Jews were actually right in boasting of their superiority. The outcome of such thinking is devastating.

### HYPOTHETICAL REASONING

This kind of reasoning (hypothetical) concedes an assumption for the sake of argument. This form of reasoning tests the validity of a pattern of thought that is actually false. One such case is also found in the parable of the pounds. One recipient took what was given to him, and over which he was an appointed steward, and "put it away in a napkin," or handkerchief. When confronted by the master, he excused his slothfulness by saying he was afraid of the owner. "For I

feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow" (Lk 19:21-22). The owner soundly rebuked the man saying, "Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?" (Lk 19:22-23).

The "wicked servant" sought to justify his slothfulness by appealing to his

wicked servant's assessment of the Master was right, he should have worked harder than the others.

Here is a fulfillment of Christ's solemn warning. "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matt 7:1). In regard to our text, the Spirit is showing that people judged to be inferior by those holding only external benefits may very well be involved in the judgment their critics.

**Those not favored with unusual benefits, yet whose faith and works exceeded their peers, will have a part in judging those who had special favors, yet lived no better than others.**

totally wrong perception of the master. The master was NOT "austere" or harsh. Neither, indeed, did he reap where he had not sown. In fact, he had sown a "pound" to this very servant. However, judgment was meted out just as though what the man said was the truth, i.e., "Out of your own mouth I will judge you." If the

Those not favored with unusual benefits, yet whose faith and works exceeded their peers, will have a part in judging those who had special favors, yet lived no better than others. This consideration is worthy of some exploration. The Scriptures do have considerable to say about this condition.

**JUDGED BY PEOPLE WITH INFERIOR BENEFITS**

There are several instances in Scripture where the subject of our text is confirmed.

**Nineveh**

Nineveh was an unusually wicked city, yet repented when told destruction was on the way. The message to which these people were exposed was straightforward: *“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown”* (Jonah 3:4). There is no record of a summons to repentance, or a single word of hope that was held out. The message delivered to them by the word of the Lord would be considered by some to be a negative one.

The response of the people of Nineveh is one of the great occasions of history. *“So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them”* (Jonah 3:5). A decree came from the king that was honored by the entire city. *“Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?”* (John 3:7-9). There have been few such occurrences in history, and none so significant as the repentance of Nineveh itself. It was not a Jewish city, and had no resident prophet or law from God.

Of this city, Jesus said, *“The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here”* (Matt 12:41). They did not have the Law, yet turned from their wicked ways. Thus, as our text proclaims, Jesus declared they would rise up with the generation that heard Jesus, and soundly condemn it. And why so? Because they received less, yet did more! They repented at the declaration of a curse. What will be done to those who have not repented at the hearing of the Gospel of Christ, God’s power unto salvation?

**Queen of Sheba**

There is another remarkable incident in Scripture that serves to open this text to us. It is that of the Queen of Sheba, from the southern tip of Arabia. It is written, *“Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with hard questions”*<sup>NKJV</sup> She came to Jerusalem *“with a very great caravan--with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones--she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind.”*<sup>NIV</sup> She was not disappointed, for *“Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing so difficult for the king that he could not explain it to her.”*<sup>NKJV</sup>

The response of the Queen is one of the most articulate and perceptive

**They did not have the Law, yet turned from their wicked ways. Thus, as our text proclaims, Jesus declared they would rise up with the generation that heard Jesus, and soundly condemn it. And why so? Because they received less, yet did more! They repented at the declaration of a curse.**

responses ever uttered by a Gentile. *“It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. However I did not believe the words until I came and saw with my own eyes; and indeed the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity exceed the fame of which I heard. Happy are your men and happy are these your servants, who stand continually before you and hear your wisdom! Blessed be the LORD your God, who delighted in you, setting you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD has loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness”*<sup>NKJV</sup> (1 Kgs 10:1-7). A matchless response, indeed!

Jesus spoke of this Queen, who came from a great distance to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Like the men of Nineveh, she also would play a prominent role in the

day of judgment. *“The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here”* (Matt 12:42).

And what is the wisdom of Solomon to compare with that of Christ, *“in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”* (Col 2:3). She will verily stand up and condemn those blessed with far more than she had, yet who did comparatively nothing with it.

**Some Others**

There are others worthy of mention, concerning which time allows but a few remarks. **Rahab** the harlot, Gentile occupant of Jericho, believed the report concerning the Jews and their God, and hid the spies. She was blessed by being spared and found her place in the very genealogy of Jesus (Josh 2:1-2; 6:23-25; Matt 1:5).

**Ruth**, of the Moabites, who were forbidden to enter into the congregation of the Lord (Deut 23:3), chose the people of God over her own. The result, she became one of the great women of Scripture, was the grandmother of David, and was also in Christ’s genealogy (Ruth 4:13-17; Matt 1:5).

There was also the **Syrophenician Woman**, a Greek, who besought Jesus to cast a demon out of her daughter. Even though the Lord appeared to ignore her, and even discourage her by saying it was not proper to give the children’s bread to dogs, yet she pressed in for the blessing. *“Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs.”* To my knowledge, she is the only one to whom, these words were said. *“For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter”* (Mark 7:26-29).

There was also a **Centurion** who besought Jesus to come and heal his dear servant, who was at the point of death. When Jesus said *“I will come and heal him,”* the centurion’s faith rose up. *“Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers*

under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." And what will be the response of our Lord to this Gentile? Here is the only recorded occasion where Jesus marveled at someone's faith. "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so

be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour" (Matt 8:5-13).

In all of these cases, those with fewer benefits excelled those who had received much more. They proved to be better stewards of the less, that others were of the more. But their excellence was not the end of the matter. As our text says, "And will not he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, **will he not judge you** who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor of the Law?"<sup>NASB</sup> Those who have received much, yet done little with it, will face those who did much with less.

Every person needs a righteousness from God. There is no theological persuasion that pushes one beyond this need. There is no Divine ordinance that removes this necessity. From the first to the last of our lives, the righteousness of God is needed. Those who have sensed this, seeking to please the Lord, and yet were ignorant of the Word that so states this need, will judge those who, with Bible in hand, go about to establish their own righteousness.

I cannot emphasize the importance of this text too much. We are living in a day, and among a people, where this is scarcely proclaimed or known.

## JUDGE NOT ACCORDING TO APPEARANCE

**<sup>28</sup> For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh.**" Here the Spirit comes to grips with the real nature of human identity with God. It is not in the flesh, but in the [human] spirit. He is going to take the ultimate external evidence and show that it is not sufficient proof of Divine acceptance. In Christ, the religion of the flesh has been exchanged for the religion of the spirit.

This text is not saying there are no longer "Jews," or that such an external distinction no longer exists. The absurdity of such a postulate is seen throughout this book. He is speaking to Jews. Paul carried a great burden for these people, his kinsmen according to the flesh (9:1-3). He categorically states God has not cast away His people Israel (11:1). The Spirit affirms there is yet a remnant among them, according to the election of grace (11:5). Only "some of the branches" were broken off, leaving the tree and the root still, in tact (11:17-21). His covenant to take away their sins is still in place (11:26-27). They are still "beloved for the father's (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) sake (11:28). The prospect of them receiving mercy remains (11:31).

### THE OUTWARD JEW

What IS being affirmed here is that God's acceptance of the individual has

never been based upon the flesh, or external matters. Faith has ALWAYS been the criterion by which Divine acceptance was realized. Those approved by God were **always** people of faith (Heb 11:2,6,39). At this point, we must resist the temptation to launch out upon the sea of speculation, seeking to determine who was saved and who was lost under the Old Covenant. That is not the purpose of this text, and it must not be ours.

**The point here is that earthly lineage does not equate to spiritual lineage. Even though men could trace their roots back to Abraham himself, that did not make them true children of Abraham.**

In the Divine economy, there was a race within a race—**true** Jews within the Jewish people. This will be developed at length in the eleventh chapter. The point here is that earthly lineage does not equate to spiritual lineage. Even though men could trace their roots back to Abraham himself, that did not make them true children of Abraham. Appearance is not the vehicle of Divine intent. It is too small to contain heavenly abundance.

### The Example of Ishmael

Take the example of Ishmael. Abraham was his father, and he was circumcised (Gen 17:23). Yet, he was not a child of promise, or a true Jew. It is written, "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh (Ishmael) persecuted him that was born after the Spirit (Isaac), even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free" (Gal 4:28-31). The promise of God came through Isaac, not Ishmael, though both were offsprings of Abraham (Gen 21:12; Rom 9:7; Heb 11:18).

### The Example of Esau

Here is a case even more pronounced than that of Ishmael. Ishmael did have a different mother than Isaac, although they had the same father. But notice the case with Esau. He and his brother were twins, with the same mother and the same father. Both could trace their family roots back to Abraham, but both were not true children of Abraham, or real Jews. As it is written, "And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to

*election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)* It was said unto her, *The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated*" (Rom 9:10-13). In this case, Jacob was a Jew within the Jews, and Esau was not.

Remember, the ONLY nation God has ever recognized as a whole is the one He created. Yet, even within that nation, only those who believed were His.

The real Jew is the one whose inner man is in fellowship with God, who is living by faith and walking in the Spirit. It is the person who is in Christ, who sprang from that nation, yet became the progenitor of a new race.

### CIRCUMCISION IN THE FLESH

As Valuable as circumcision in the flesh may appear, it is no longer the mark of distinction with God. It was a type of real circumcision, but was not itself the

When the Spirit declares the ultimate fleshly people, and the ultimate external mark, did not make people accepted with God, He denounces all fleshly distinctions.

Satan has been aggressive to distort the understanding of men on this point. It further appears that he has been unusually successful in his efforts. Countless professing Christians trust in their religious heritage just as the Jews trusted in theirs. From Catholic to Protestant men boast of their religious roots, thinking that is what makes them acceptable to God. They hold to the correct doctrines like Ephesus, but they are not holding to the Lord of glory by faith. This is not to be construed to mean that doctrine is inconsequential, or that no good things can be found in religious heritage. It IS to be understood, however, that our faith and confidence are not to be placed in these things. Such misplaced trust will cost men their souls.

**When the Spirit declares the ultimate fleshly people, and the ultimate external mark, did not make people accepted with God, He denounces all fleshly distinctions.**

real circumcision. It belonged to the order of flesh and blood, which cannot enter into the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50). The flesh is the weakest part of our constitution, and therefore cannot be the place of spiritual identity. As one has said, "The true mark of distinction is not in the weak body, soon to be laid in the grave."<sup>Joseph Beet</sup>

### WHY IS THIS POINT MADE

The Spirit is making this point because of the proneness of men to trust in the flesh and external manifestations. This tendency did not end with the Jews, but continues in the Gentile church. The Spirit does not take up every instance or possibility of men trusting in the flesh, but goes to the ultimate fleshly distinction—the Jewish people and the sign of circumcision. Just as the Law was the ultimate moral code, so Jewish distinctions were the ultimate in fleshly glory. They stand for all glory in flesh.

Still others find their confidence in experiences in the flesh. These cover such things as viewing baptism as a mere outward sign, with no regard to its accompanying inner birth. Again, the sophist will see this as a denigration of baptism—but this is not at all the case. The value of our baptism is directly related to our faith. It is, after all, the one who "believes and is baptized" that will be saved (Mk 16:16).

An additional corruption of faith is found in those who place great confidence in evidences that accompany the reception of the Holy Spirit. They equate external evidences with the Spirit Himself, imagining they could never be fabricated or falsified. They trust in them, and vaunt them above faith and even Christ Himself. This is not to be taken as a rejection of all external evidences. Rather, our faith is not to lie in such things. If the ultimate

sign in the flesh, circumcision, did not prove a person was of God, you may rest assured no fleshly sensation or experience can do so.

### THE FLESH IS NOT THE REALM OF CONFIRMATION

The flesh, because of its rejection by God, is not, and cannot be, the area of Divine confirmation. If flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of God, and He has rejected all fleshly distinctions, how is it that men imagine great spiritual confirmations are made in the flesh? If "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:8), why would God place the sign of Divine acceptance there? Would that not pull people back into the flesh from which grace delivered them?

Jesus said, "The flesh profits nothing" (John 6:63). But this is not true if that is the place where Divine acceptance is confirmed. Paul confessed, "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom 7:18). Again, this could not be true if the superior blessings of God were realized in and confirmed by fleshly experiences.

I am careful to say that this is not a diatribe against all experiences in the body. That such things do exist, and that many of them are legitimate, cannot be denied. But they are NOT what makes us the children of God, nor are the proof that we are the sons of God. They are tangential, and are not to be placed in the same category as faith. Experience are the tributary, not the river.

Men tend to treat experiences in extreme manners. Either they make them primary, or assign no value to them at all. Both approaches are wrong. It is never right to exalt something that occurs in the body. Neither, indeed, is it appropriate to lead people to believe there are no outward benefits in salvation.

The Gospel helps us to place the exclamation point after the promises, and receive the benefits with which God loads us "daily" (Psa 68:19). However, grace will not allow us to trust in the benefits, or rely upon them to identify our acceptance with God. Honest hearts know such things can be removed from us. They are not guaranteed to us during our brief tenure in this world.

## REAL IDENTITY

***“<sup>29</sup> . . . but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”***

Here is one of the most definitive texts of scripture. It lays the axe to the root of the tree of flesh, and unveils the true nature of life in Christ. Remember, this is a delineation of the need for, and characteristics of, the righteousness of God. It is a view of salvation, being in Christ, or being born again. This text will confirm that the essential change made in men is **within**. The character is changed, motives transformed, and everything becomes new. This is a view of the “*new creation*” (2 Cor 5:17).

The distinction that is now proclaimed is not found in nature, or the natural state of men. It cannot be traced back to Adam, or a state experienced in natural birth. The Spirit has already confirmed that both Jew and Gentile stand in need of a righteousness from God. Neither of them are righteous by nature, and both are sinners by choice.

It is axiomatic that inward change can only be initiated by God. Under the old covenant, the Lord issues a challenge. The purpose of this challenge was to confirm men can only be changed by God. *“Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked . . . Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem . . . O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved . . . Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”* (Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4,14; Ezek 18:31). How succinctly God stated the case through Jeremiah. *“Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil”* (Jer 13:23).

Men may philosophize about the

freedom of the human will, and the inherent ability of men to better themselves. Such thoughts are all vain and pointless. If man was able to extricate himself from sin and create a new heart for himself, there would have been no need for Christ Jesus.

God placed man in His creation, and endowed him with His own nature. The creation continually testifies of the eternal power and Divinity of God. Man’s conscience prodded him, excusing and accusing him. A precise and holy law was given to him, defining sin, and providing remarkable incentives to be holy. But sin dominated the race anyway, and did so consistently and without a solitary exception, saving for the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. **Moral and essential change must come from God, or it will not come.**

**It is axiomatic that inward change can only be initiated by God. Under the old covenant, the Lord issues a challenge. The purpose of this challenge was to confirm men can only be changed by God.**

This principle is stated in Scripture. *“Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain”* (Psa 127:1). The new birth is totally the work of the Lord. We are “*begotten*” by God (1 Pet 1:3; James 1:18). The birth is accomplished **“not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”** (John 1:13). This does not mean men are not involved, but it is not in a causative or initiatory way. Their role is ancillary, not central.

Man can only change the outer man, and even then, he is severely limited. *“Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?”* (Matt 6:27). There is a challenger for the “worker.”

### INWARD IDENTITY

True identity is found within, not in the flesh, bloodline, or lineage. For this reason, God does not look upon the appearance, but “*on the heart*” (1 Sam 16:7). He alone “*knows the hearts of all the children of men*” (1 Kgs 8:39). When the Jews affirmed “*We are Abraham’s descendants,*” Jesus acknowledged they were that in the flesh. *“I know that you are Abraham’s descendants.”* Yet, when they rejoined “*Abraham is our faith,*” Jesus replied, *“If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this”*<sup>NASB</sup> (John 8:33-40). They were NOT Jews inwardly.

When the Scriptures say “*inwardly,*” they speak of the spiritual part of man, where the Divine imagery is found. This is the “*hidden man of the heart*” (1 Pet 3:4), or the “*inward parts*” (Psa 51:6; Jer 31:33). If the individual is not identified with the Lord in that section, there is no saving identity at all.

To put it another way, if men are estranged from God in their thoughts, they are altogether estranged from Him. Even though they may honor Him with their “*lips,*” if their heart is “*far from Him,*” all of their worship is vain, and their religion pointless. When Jesus walked among men, He said of that generation, *“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”* (Matt 15:8-9). They were not Jews inwardly.

### Why Does He Use the Word “Jew?”

Why does the Spirit refer to a true “*Jew?*” why not a Christian? That would seem more appropriate to many, some of which hold disdain for the word “*Jew.*” It is because He is contrasting appearance with reality, and the Jew is the only fleshly appearance God has ever honored. No other fleshly lineage as ever been held forth as superior. Even a physical people

chosen and ordained by God hold no eternal advantage if they are not inwardly the people of God.

### God's View Is the Only View

This is the Lord's assessment of the situation, and no other view is valid. It makes little difference how illustrious the historical heritage may be, if the individual is not reconciled to God and being conformed to the image of His Son, all claims to godliness are only pretentious.

The religious climate of our day should confirm to your heart what a serious matter is being unveiled in this text. It is exceedingly difficult to find a people possessing a preference for God and a living hope. Sectarian walls have been erected that have obscured the "Sun of righteousness" (Mal 4:2), constraining people to trust in their denominational names and doctrines like the Israelites did in the name "Jew," and in their possession of the Law of God.

But if God will not allow men to trust in a distinction He made, you may be sure He will condemn trust in distinctions He has not made.

Our association with God is "inwardly." Our thoughts, meditations, preferences, hates, and loves are the context in which Divine fellowship is realized. When God is not "in all their thoughts," it is because men are wicked, walk in pride, and seek not after God (Psa 10:4). Men are "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them" (Eph 4:18).

Many of us have lamented over the lack of spiritual appetite in our generation. Churches are known for their concessions to the flesh. While the business, entertainment, and athletic world's increase their demands upon the time of people, the church is reducing its demands. Brevity and shallowness are in vogue more than ever, and entertainment and sundry distractions have filled the church-calendars. Vast bodies of people are quite content to spend less time hearing the Word of God than they in eating breakfast or lunch.

Is it all innocent, and no matter of concern? Indeed, it is not. It evidences that we are living in a time when the church will accept people who are not Jews "inwardly." However, God does not accept such people as His, and the time they spend in simulated worship is vain and pointless. Unless they acquire a spiritual appetite, there is not a shred of hope held out to them in the Word of God.

### A CHANGE OF HEART

"... and circumcision is that of the heart..." The heart is the inmost part of man, just as the body is the outmost part. It is here, in the heart, where the essential

**The heart is the inmost part of man, just as the body is the outmost part. It is here, in the heart, where the essential change must be made.**

change must be made. The prophets spoke of a time when men would receive a "new heart." "A new heart also will I give you... and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26). This is something for which David longed, yet it was not available for his generation. "Create in me a clean heart, O God" (Psa 51:10). A "clean heart" is a "new heart"—a special creation of God. Like other saints prior to the enthronement of Jesus, David was "not made perfect without us" (Heb 11:40).

### The Stony Heart Removed

Note, there is a two fold action fulfilled in this promise. First, the stony heart is removed, and second a heart of flesh is given. Thus, obstinance and rebellion are removed, and submission and sensitivity are granted in their place. The removal of the stony heart commences when the Lord opens the heart so men can give heed, or respond, to

the Word of God (Acts 16:14).

Where stony hearts remain, a most serious condition exists. Its presence negates any profession of identity with Christ. While we must take care not to be quick to judge men in this matter, we must not allow ourselves to excuse hard hearts that will not yield to the word of the Lord. Again, unless that condition is corrected, there is no hope for the person.

### Dominated by Sin

The picture presented here is that of a heart that has been overgrown with sin. That mass of sin is called "the body of the sins of the flesh," or "the body of the flesh" (Col 2:11). It is a condition that renders the heart insensitive and calloused to God. Stephen described the state as being "uncircumcised in heart and ears" (Acts 7:51). Speaking through Moses, God charged that generation with having "uncircumcised hearts" (Lev 26:41). Jeremiah spoke of those who were "circumcised with the uncircumcised" (Jer 9:25). That is, although they were circumcised in the flesh, their hearts remained unchanged. Ezekiel spoke of those who were "uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh" (Ezek 44:7,9).

This is a state that finds the individual dominated by sin. It is the ONLY alternative to being received in Christ Jesus. Without this circumcision of heart, profession counts for nothing, works are but filthy rags to be discarded, and the individual is an enemy of God. It is when the sinful nature rules the whole person, shutting out the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, and riveting the person hopelessly to a condemned world. It is appropriately described as being "being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh," or sinful nature<sup>NIV</sup> (Col 2:13).

Let there be no ambiguity on this matter, as though there were any hope at all for the person enslaved to sin and dominated by the flesh. Before coming into Christ, we were "the servants of sin" (Rom 6:16). Also, in that state, we possessed no righteousness at all, much less the righteousness of God. As it is

written, *“For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness”* (Rom 6:20). Men live in sin because they are enslaved to it. As Jesus said, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin”* (John 8:34).

In order to be saved, or receive a righteousness from God, the flesh must be cut away from the heart. This brings sensitivity to God and a love for the truth, which is the secret to overcoming sin. This procedure is what constitutes a *“new heart.”* It is a Divine operation in which the *“flesh,”* or sinful nature, is separated from our essential persons.

**Performed by Christ**

This marvelous work is accomplished by Jesus Christ, and is associated with our baptism into Him. It is called *“the circumcision of Christ.”* Baptism itself is not the circumcision, but the occasion during which it is performed. Colossians 2:11-12 declares this truth with great beauty and power. *“In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working (operation<sup>KJV</sup>) of God, who raised Him from the dead.”*

In separating *“the body of the sins of the flesh,”* Christ removes its power and dominion over us. This results in the remission of sins, or the removal of personal guilt. It also clarifies our vision of, and sensitivity to, the Lord, produces a great love for His Word, and brings righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17).

In this circumcision, the mass of sin, or the principle of sin, is not obliterated, but separated from the part of us that is born again. The sixth chapter of Romans states it this way. *“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be*

*slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin”* (Rom 6:5-7).

Let me emphasize that *“done away with,”* or *“destroyed,”*<sup>KJV</sup> does not mean the principle of sin is no longer existent, but that it is no longer part of our real persons. That is why we are exhorted, *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof”* (Rom 6:12). It has been cut away from us, yet remains in our earthen vessels. The seventh chapter of Romans will deal with the fierce war between the

**The new heart has a love for the truth and a hatred for sin. It longs for the courts of the Lord, and admits to being a stranger in the world. Unless these conditions exist, the person has not been born again, and is under the control of sin.**

new heart and the circumcised flesh.

The new heart has a love for the truth and a hatred for sin. It longs for the courts of the Lord, and admits to being a stranger in the world. Unless these conditions exist, the person has not been born again, and is under the control of sin. In saying this, I do not mean to oversimplify the situation. There are numbers of God’s people who, because of faulty teaching, are not aware of the circumcision of the heart, or a new heart. They therefore interpret their struggle with sin as evidence they are not of God. However, when this truth is taught in power, those whom God has received in Christ will recognize the truth of the matter. They will see that their longing for purity and discontent with failures are evidence of a new heart. They are Jews indeed, and have received *“the circumcision of Christ.”*

**A CHANGE OF SPIRIT**

*“... and circumcision is ... in the spirit, and not in the letter ...”* The expression *“in the spirit”* is both objective and subjective. Subjectively, or from the

standpoint of experience, it refers to the human spirit, or the expressive of man. Objectively, or from the view of its Source, it is the Holy Spirit who actually accomplishes the change. This is involved in being *“born of the Spirit,”* as Jesus said, *“... that which is born of the Spirit is spirit ... so is every one that is born of the Spirit”* (John 3:6,8).

Those circumcised in their spirit have a new disposition. It is described in second Corinthians in this way. *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new”* (5:17). In this marvelous new creation the objective of God is realized. *“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:23-24).

Those with new hearts and spirits worship God out of a sense of preference, and not because of the demands of the Law. Thus those in Christ are described in this manner. *“For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh”* (Phil 3:3). Because of the atoning death of our Lord Jesus, God is able to fulfill His promise, *“I will put a new spirit within you ... a new spirit will I put within you”* (Ezek 11:19; 36:26).

**Not In The Letter**

*“... and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.”*<sup>NASB</sup> The *“letter”* is the written Word **without** a corresponding writing in the heart. It involves directing basically wayward people with rules and regulations. Until the Word of God is found within the heart of man, it remains in the *“letter,”* and is powerless for the individual.

A religion of the *“letter”* not only does not contribute to spiritual life, it actually kills those attempting to serve God in that manner. The Old Covenant was a word of the letter, alienating its constituents from God because they had

no heart for the law. In a marvelous explanation of this circumstance, the Spirit says, “. . . *who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious . . . For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory*” (2 Cor 3:6-9).

When a good and holy Law comes from God, it condemns all whose nature is in conflict with that Law. Thus it becomes a letter that kills, a ministry of death, and a ministry of condemnation. The Law does not permit a person to try and be better, for all such efforts are vain. The heart and spirit of fallen men are so corrupt they cannot be salvaged. A new heart and a new spirit must be given. In Christ Jesus, praise the Lord, that is precisely what takes place.

This is an aspect of spiritual life that is not commonly known. The ignorance of this fact has spawned all sorts of erroneous doctrines and views. Legion is the name of those imagining their fundamental disagreement with God will be overlooked by Him. It will not. That is why He has provided such a full and glorious salvation. Because it was necessary for Him to remain just, as well as be the Justifier of the believer, He had to provide a way that would allow “the gift of righteousness” (Rom 5:17) to be given to men. Upon the basis of Christ’s vicarious offering, God could remove the heart of stone and grant a malleable heart of flesh to those believing on His Son. He could justly give them a new heart and a new spirit, thereby making their nature harmonious with His own. What a marvelous transaction!

**THE NATURE OF THE NEW COVENANT**

We cannot fail to mention the nature of the New Covenant, and how significantly it differs from the Old one. In the New Covenant, truth is internalized, becoming a part of the believer himself. The Spirit refers to this process in Jeremiah, and confirms it to be the

covenant now being administered by Jesus in the book of Hebrews. “***I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts . . . I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts . . . I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them***” (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10; 10:16).

Try as you may, you cannot trace these incredible accomplishments to men. They are a Divine work, and are therefore effective to accomplish His purpose. Faith enables us to be the recipient of this grand work, but the doing of it belongs to the Lord. As it is written, “*Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls*”<sup>NKJV</sup> (James 1:21). Let it be clear that the Word of God is not able to save the soul as long as it is not engrafted, or implanted in the inward man. But when it is joined to the human spirit, it obtains such a Divine power as is necessary to be loosed from

**When a good and holy Law comes from God, it condemns all whose nature is in conflict with that Law. Thus it becomes a letter that kills, a ministry of death, and a ministry of condemnation. The Law does not permit a person to try and be better, for all such efforts are vain.**

the dominion of sin, and receive the righteousness of God by faith.

**PRAISE FROM GOD**

“ . . . *whose praise is not from men but from God.*” The word “*whose*” refers to the true Jew, whose heart and spirit have been circumcised by the Lord. Such will receive “*praise from God.*” God will honor those who have availed themselves of His grace, believed the record He has given of His Son, and received His righteousness.

Here again is a facet of redemptive

truth that is not commonly known—at least not to any measurable degree. Religion that is nothing more than a “*form of godliness*” that “*denies the power thereof*” (2 Tim 3:5), knows nothing of receiving praise from God. It rather covets the praise of men, and is willing to make significant concessions to get it. If anyone is tempted to think in this manner, it is good to remember this word from the Apostle Paul. “*For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ*”<sup>NKJV</sup> (Gal 1:10).

**Honor from God**

Those who seek honor from men cannot believe in Christ. Such a quest depletes the soul, blinds the eyes, and hardens the heart. That is why Jesus said, “*How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?*” (John 5:44). In sharp contrast with those benighted souls, Jesus said of Himself, “*I do not receive honor from men*” (John 5:41). That was not His objective, and He did not alter a single word or work in order to receive such passing admiration. However, what will be the portion of those who fervently sought for the honor only God can give? How will they appear in the great day of judgment. There is no need for conjecture on this matter. The Lord has spoken. “*To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life*” (Rom 2:7).

**Loving the Praise of Men**

While Jesus walked among us, His presence was so powerful “*many*” of the “*chief rulers*” believed on Him. Notwithstanding, they had too high of a regard for the religious dignities of their day, and therefore did not confess Christ publicly. The comment of the Spirit on this occasion is arresting. It interprets similar incidents that arise in our day, when people are exposed to more truth than they are willing to admit. “. . . *among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*” (John 12:42-43).



To be sure, those Pharisees will be held accountable for hindering others. As Jesus said to them, *“for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in”*<sup>2NKJV</sup> (Matt 23:13). But those who chose to be applauded by men rather than God will not be excused either. In my judgment, there is too much of this *“spirit of fear”* in the churches.

**The Father Will Honor Those Who Serve Jesus**

Jesus promised that those who served Him would be honored by the Father Himself. Herein is a glorious promise, and it needs to be heard

God as an incentive for endurance and faithfulness. He knows that the opposition and unappreciation of men tend to wear upon the soul, causing discouragement. Further, Satan uses such occasions to tempt us to compromise, quit, or even deny the Lord. For this reason, a strong exhortation is issued to all who are laboring in the vineyard of the Lord. *“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God”*<sup>2NKJV</sup> (1 Cor 4:5).

Lord as He cries out to that nation, *“You only have I known of all the families of the earth”* (Amos 3:2). They were *“a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth”* (Deut 7:6). Yet, that status could not effect a change within them.

Of those very people it is written, *“Therefore the wrath of the LORD was kindled against His people, So that He abhorred His own inheritance. And He gave them into the hand of the Gentiles, And those who hated them ruled over them. Their enemies also oppressed them, And they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times He delivered them; But they rebelled in their counsel, And were brought low for their iniquity”* (Psa 106:40-43).

**Thus all needs are met in the “new creation.” The needs of men are addressed, as well as those of God. Men needed a new nature so they could please the Lord. God needed man to be new so He could bless him.**

Righteousness could not be brought to men by external benefits, special fleshly status, and a unique covenantal *“sign”* in the flesh. If flesh could ever offer an advantage, it would have done so for those people. But it did not! *“The flesh profiteth nothing,”* even when blessed, pampered, and exalted above other flesh.

frequently by those fighting the good fight of faith. *“If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor”* (John 12:26). How the hearts of those in Christ yearn for the *“Well done”* of their Father! And it will surely come to pass.

**ALL NEEDS ARE MET IN THE NEW CREATION**

Thus all needs are met in the *“new creation.”* The needs of men are addressed, as well as those of God. Men needed a new nature so they could please the Lord. God needed man to be new so He could bless him. The blessing could NOT come through Adam. It had to come through Christ and a new creation.

Let it stand as it is written: *“For with the heart one believes unto righteousness”* (Rom 10:10). And why is this so? Because Jesus has satisfied God in His death, and is pleasing Him in His intercession (Isa 53:11-12). He has made it right and holy for God to confer His own righteousness upon the person who believes the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). Indeed, we do have *“so great salvation”* (Heb 2:3). See to it that you do not *“neglect it,”* or be pulled into the broken cistern of trusting in the flesh. *“Have faith in God!”* (Mark 11:22). Make it your aim to appropriate the righteousness of God, and to do so at any cost! You will not regret it.

If it were not important for us to know of the praise of God, Jesus would not have spoken so clearly of it. He Himself was motivated by the joy held out to Him, the extent of which we are incapable of knowing. As it is written, *“who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Heb 12:2).

None of these needs could be met by the Law, or any other external means. Even when God chose a people, blessed them with unparalleled benefits, and provided them with marvelous incentives, yet they remained obstinate and disobedient. Never before nor since that ancient nation has there been a fleshly people so blessed of the Lord. Hear the

**Hold Out for the Praise of God**

The Spirit holds out the praise of

**CONCLUSION**

The passage we have considered is a foundational one. It introduces us to the nature of man, God, and the salvation He has provided. It has confirmed that there are no external advantages that can make men righteous—even God-conferred ones. Further, fleshly distinctions cannot compensate for the lack of God’s

righteousness. The apex of such notabilities was found in Israel, and still they remained fundamentally sinful and in need of a righteousness from God.

There is another thing to be seen here that is of special significance. Abraham, the father of those who believe

(Rom :1,12; James 2:21), was the *“friend of God”* (James 2:23). He towered above others, and remains a giant among men until this day. Yet, he could not pass righteousness to his posterity. Although a whole nation was blessed because of him, yet that very nation still stood in need of a Savior, and a righteousness from God.

If this is the case with Abraham, whom God identified as “*the father of us all*,” what can be said of the “church fathers,” or “restoration fathers,” or some other cluster of godly men? How is it that anyone would think their religious heritage made them acceptable before God, or gave them the edge over other peoples? The same may be said of religious movements, of groups of churches claiming some sort of uniqueness before God.

I come from a background that placed a significant emphasis on recent religious history, and particular movements that had embraced some facet or facets of the truth. In such an environment, little, if any, emphasis was ever placed on a righteousness from God. Correct procedures, patterns, and external observance seemed to lull people into spiritual sleep. It is not that the people were particularly sinful. Many of them were commendable in many ways.

However, it is the nature of an outward emphasis to produce a spiritually lethargic people. It did in Israel, and it still does.

There is no advantage in precision—God-ordained precision—if men are still at variance with God in their hearts. If men do not have the righteousness of God, revealed through the Gospel, it makes no difference what else they may have.

There looms on the horizon of time a coming day, when the secrets of men will be judged by Jesus Christ (Rom 2:16). At that time, we will see clearly that those who sought first the kingdom of God AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS will have the advantage over all others. There will be people whose candlestick was removed, even though they held to all of the right doctrines, and opposed the ones that were wrong (Rev 2:4). There will also be those who have done “*many wonderful works*,” prophesying in Christ’s name, and even

casting out demons. Yet, Jesus will say to them that He “*never knew*” them, commanding them to depart from His presence (Matt 7:22).

It is imperative that professed believers take seriously the appropriation of the “*righteousness of God*.” This is not something that is achieved automatically. It comes “*by faith*” – it is a righteousness “*which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith*” (Phil 3:9). The believer must fight to maintain his faith (1 Tim 6:12). Faith must be nourished, fed, and bolstered by the Word of God (1 Tim 4:6; Jude 20; Col 2:7). If this is not done, righteousness will not stay with us. That is precisely why the Galatians were warned, “*You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith*” (Gal 5:4-5). That price is too great to pay!

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 4/21/2000. Continuing in our studies on Romans, we will cover 3:1-8: **GOD’S JUDGMENT IS JUST.**” The flesh considers God’s judgment harsh and unwarranted. It imagines that the expending of human effort commends man, even though nothing is really accomplished by it. The Law, however, does not simply demand effort. It call for absolute perfection. Again, the Spirit will establish a need for a righteousness from God. Our meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God.

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