

Romans

Dr. Charles "Buddy" Parrish
June 26, 2024
Romans 2:17-29



Vss. 17-24

- These final verses of what we call Ch. 2 of Paul's letter had to come as a crushing shock to the Jews in the church and to Jews everywhere. They had been taught all their lives that they enjoyed special treatment from God and a special place with God. Now here is Paul, someone who was not just any Jew but a Pharisee, saying that everything they had been taught all their lives was wrong. Yes, he had said that the Gentiles suppress the Truth of Christ by means of unrighteousness, but here he is saying that while the Jews had a much deeper and clearer understanding of God, they too had suppressed the Truth of Christ by their failure to live the life that God had shown them His people are to live.

- Verses 17-20 speak of the best aspects of being a Jew, the Jew God intended. But in vs. 21 Paul begins a series of rhetorical questions pointing up how Judaism teaches one thing but the people do the opposite. Lloyd John Ogilvie, former Chaplain of the US Senate and the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, CA, points out that here Paul outlines three dangers that confront God's people: 1) the danger of failing to live according to your knowledge of God and what you profess to believe 2) the danger of causing non-believers to be misled and confused by one's inconsistent behavior 3) the danger of God's name being despised because of this confusion (vs. 24 – Ezekiel 36:20ff).

- The question about robbing temples is interesting. It may refer to Malachi 3 where the prophet asks, "Will a man rob God?" by shorting the tithe. Or it may refer to something else. In Acts 19:37, the town clerk of Ephesus is defending Paul and his friends in the great amphitheater. The clerk declares that these men are not "robbers of temples". Evidently the Jews were not above wandering into the pagan temples and stealing from them since the gold and silver there were being thrown away and wasted in worship of a pagan deity. It seems Paul's point is that theft is theft, no matter how you justify it.

Vss. 25-29

- The singular symbol of a Jewish man's faith is his circumcision. But Paul argues that if you live a life transgressing the Law, you have in fact reversed your circumcision and are not a Jew. This had to strike like a thunderbolt to his Jewish audience. But yet Paul does not stop there. He goes on to say that should a Gentile wind up keeping the Law and live a life of righteousness, it is actually he who is truly circumcised and will stand as a judge over an unrighteous Jew. Here Paul is leaning back into Jeremiah 4:4: "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem...". Spurgeon once wrote a verse for a hymn that strikes at this:

"If now with eyes defiled and dim
We see the signs but see not Him
O, may His love the scales displace,
And bid us see Him face to face!"

- No, there is nothing outward that a person may show that makes them a Christian. Not a gold cross around the neck or a message on a t-shirt. Neither is there a mutilation of the body, be it a tattoo or circumcision. No, Paul says it is something much deeper – a circumcision of the heart. This is something no priest can do nor anything a person can do for themselves. No, this is a knife that only God Himself can wield. This is something done by God and for God, says Karl Barth. Living out a life of salvation is impossible for people, but with God all things are possible.
- This person's heart has been surgically touched by the Holy Spirit, not by men or by "the letter" and "his praise", his judgement, comes not from people, but from God and God alone. It is here, as Barth puts it, that a person can get up out of the mire of the world's wickedness and go out into the fresh air and love the undiscoverable God...and this can only happen with a circumcised heart, when one lives their whole life *in* Christ Jesus