



Leveling the Playing Field

Romans 2:17-29 | Jan 26, 2020

Have you ever met someone who thinks the rules don't apply to them? Maybe they're ignorant to the rules. Or, and this is more likely, maybe they think they're actually above the law. In our scripture reading for today, we see Paul addressing the Jews and calling them out for thinking that they are above God's judgment. Why would they think that? Because they are God's chosen people and their ancestor Moses had received God's Law. Not only that, they bore the physical mark of circumcision: the sign of the covenant promise that God gave to their ancestor Abraham. They thought they had a special relationship with God that would excuse them from any judgment and therefore place them above other peoples and nations.

The purpose of this portion of Romans is for Paul to help the Jews realize that their lives are actually not more important than others. He doesn't deny their special relationship with God. But that relationship was supposed to draw others to God. Instead, they are dishonoring God and *"God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."* (Romans 2:24).

Paul's desire is to point out to the Jews it's not the external trappings of life that make you a part of God's chosen people. What makes you a true Jew (verses 28-29) is the inward circumcision and transformation of your heart, a transformation that can only happen through Jesus.

Discussion Guide

1. Are there areas of your life where you think you're above the rules? Places where you think you've earned special favor and are free to do whatever you want? Why do you think this way? If you can't think of a space like this in your life, do you know anyone like this? What's it like to be around them?
2. Read Romans 2:17-24 and look specifically at Romans 2:24. Based on what you read, how does the Jews' behavior blaspheme God's name? In what ways do Christians blaspheme the name of God today among non-believers?
3. Read verses 25-27. Circumcision here can represent any outward signs or religious activities that we think will save us. What are some religious activities that Christians perform today hoping that they will help us earn favor with God (i.e. baptism, praying)? Are the things you listed good or bad things? Why do we think those things will save us?
4. There is another danger that can happen when we realize that "outward circumcisions" won't save us. That danger is that we can stop engaging in helpful Christian practices altogether. What does a healthy balance look like?
5. Read verses 28-29. How would you describe a "circumcision of the heart"? What is the evidence that this has happened in someone's life? Would you describe *your* heart as circumcised? Why or why not? If not, would you be willing to let the Spirit transform your heart?