

Romans Session 30

False Security 2 (2:17-20)

Romans 2:17-20 (NASB)

¹⁷ *But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God,*

¹⁸ *and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,*

¹⁹ *and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness,*

²⁰ *a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,*

Before Paul explains the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, he shatters the idea of false spiritual security that most Jews had in their;

Heritage (2:17a)

In their knowledge, (17b-24),

And in their ceremony (v-25-29)

Let's take them one at a time and see what is there;

THE FALSE SECURITY OF HERITAGE

Romans 2:17a (NASB)

¹⁷ *But if you bear the name "Jew"*

Israel took great pride in the name **Jew**.

In centuries past they had been referred to as Hebrews, so called because of the language they spoke.

They also had long been called Israelites, after the land God had promised and given to them according to His covenant with Abraham.

By the time of Christ, the most common name they had was that of **Jew**.

The Term was derived from *Judah*, the name of one of the twelve tribes as well as the name of the southern Kingdom after the division following Solomon's death.

But during and after the Babylonian captivity, it had come to refer to the whole race that descended from Abraham through Isaac.

This name represented both their racial and religious heritage, and in their own minds it denoted their distinctiveness from all other peoples of the world.

Despite the bondage and oppression they had suffered at the hands of Gentiles for hundreds of years, and were presently still suffering, they wore the name **Jew** as a badge of great honor and pride.

The name marked them off as unique and specially favored people of God.

The root meaning of *Judah*, and therefore of **Jew**, is "**praised**" and the Jews of Paul's day considered that to be a well-deserved title and description of themselves.

Jews had long since lost sight of the purpose of their unique divine calling, however, which was to be the channel through which, **"all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen 12:3)**

They had no desire to share their God-given truths and blessings with the rest of the world, much less be used by the Lord as the means through which He would draw all nations to Himself.

Jonah's reluctance to preach in Nineveh because he feared they would believe in God and be spared judgment typified the attitude of many Jews toward Gentiles. (*Jonah 4:2*)

Instead of viewing those divine truths and blessings as a trust from a gracious and forgiving God they viewed them as their right by merit.

They believed they were specially blessed not because of God's grace but because of their own goodness. They felt superior and proud.

Instead of boasting in their great God and in His gracious revelation of Himself to them, they boasted in their own supposed greatness for having received it.

John Murray observed that such an attitude;

"Demonstrates, how close lies the grossest vice to the highest privilege and how the best can be prostituted to the service of the worst"

The Minor Prophets repeatedly warned their fellow countrymen about arrogant boasting in their heritage as God's chosen people, which caused many of them to think they could sin with impunity.

As the heirs of God's promises to Abraham they believed they were automatically protected from judgment.

But Micah declared;

Micah 3:11-12 (NASB)

¹¹ Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, Her priests instruct for a price And her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD saying, "Is not the LORD in our midst? Calamity will not come upon us."

¹² Therefore, on account of you Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, And the mountain of the temple will become high places of a forest.

Pride in their being the chosen people of God name some Jews absolutely blind to reality, not only religiously but politically.

On one occasion when Jesus was teaching those Jews who had believed Him, He said;

John 8:31-32 (NASB)

³¹ So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;

³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

When some of the unbelieving Jewish leaders heard those words, they were greatly offended.

They were so self-deluded about their superiority and independence that they retorted:

John 8:33 (NASB)

33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free?'"

As the Lord explained, they completely missed His point. So He reiterates:

John 8:34 (NASB)

34 Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.

Even if Jesus had been speaking politically, as those leaders assumed, their response would have been ludicrous. For the past 100 years they had been brutally subjugated to Rome, and immediately before that to Greece. And during more than a thousand years before that they had been in periodic bondage to Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon.

The Jewish Leaders main confusion, however, was spiritual. Being Abraham's physical descendants did not make Jews his spiritual descendants.

John 8:39-44 (NASB)

39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus *said to them, "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.

40 "But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do.

41 "You are doing the deeds of your father." They said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God."

42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.

43 "Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.

44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.

He, Jesus, went on to say;

John 8:56 (NASB)

56 "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."

If the Jewish Leaders had been spiritual heirs of Abraham and true children of God, they would have joyously have received Jesus as their Messiah and King. Instead of receiving Him in faith, however, they sought to kill Him, reflecting the murderous character of Satan, their spiritual lord and father.

Infuriating the leaders still more, Jesus said;

John 8:58 (NASB)

58 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am."

The root meaning of Jehovah, or Yahweh, is **"I am"**

Jesus not only claimed to have existed before Abraham was born some 2,000 years earlier, but even applied the covenant name of God to Himself.

So because they rejected Jesus claims to messiah-ship, the Jews considered His words to be inconceivably blasphemous, and therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple (*John 8:59*)

Jesus utterly undermined the Jews' imagined security of racial and religious heritage.

John the Baptist had done the same thing.

While he was baptizing repentant Jews at the Jordan River, a group of Pharisees and Sadducees came to him for baptism.

But John scathingly rebuked them saying:

Matthew 3:7-9 (NASB)

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

⁸ "Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance;

⁹ and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.

In a similar way, countless people since the time of Christ have considered themselves safe from God's judgment simply because they have been born into a Christian family or have been baptized or belong to a church or have made a profession of faith.

Some people consider themselves Christians by default.

In European countries that have been thought of as Christian for centuries, many citizens who do not specifically belong to another religion consider themselves Christians simply by virtue of their national heritage.

Even some countries of the middle east, many citizens who are not Muslim think they are therefore Christian, simply because the other historically prominent religion in the country is the Eastern Orthodox brand of Christianity to which their ancestors adhered.

The Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli took the position that if a child of believers died while in infancy it was within the Christian covenant, in other words it was saved.

He did not believe however, that children of unbelievers were saved if they died in infancy.

With an illogic that was not typical of his thinking, the great puritan John Owen believed that infant salvation could be passed down two generations, from grandparents to grandchild, sometimes skipping the intervening generation.

One wonders how the in-between parents, being themselves children of believers, could escape being saved.

The Roman Catholic Church believes that infant baptism actually confers salvation.

As one catholic writer has said, "*The faith which the infant lacks is replaced by the faith of the church.*"

Some Protestant denominations, though denying that infant baptism in itself has power to save, nevertheless maintain that the ritual has direct spiritual benefit for the child.

Martin Luther for instance, believed that through his sacrament God miraculously grants saving faith to the infant, who itself is incapable of believing.

Others view infant baptism as a confirmation of the child's salvation by virtue of its being born into a Christian family and thereby into the New Covenant of Jesus Christ.

According to Scripture, however, a person who is raised in a Christian home and trained in a Christian environment is not saved by such a heritage valuable as it is.

Nor does baptism, or any other Christian rite in itself possess or bestow any spiritual benefit.

Apart from true faith held by the person receiving it, no ritual or ceremony has any spiritual value whatsoever. Baptism is not a sacrament and, without faith, it becomes a sacrilege.

Such ideas about covenant transferal of salvation and about the spiritual efficacy of baptism are merely extensions of the kind of thinking that caused the common Jewish belief in New Testament times that a person was saved simply by being a circumcised descendant of Abraham through the line of Isaac.

So we see that heritage can become if not careful a false security to some as to their wellbeing before the Lord. We have to be careful to expose such teachings and beliefs or many will find in the last day that their security is truly leading them down the wrong path and to destruction.