

Romans Session 35

The Advantage of being Jewish Part 2

Romans 3:1-2 (NASB)

¹ *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?*

² *Great in every respect. First of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.*

To remind ourselves that Paul was aware of what the objections would be that would come from the Jews reading the first part of his letter here. They were three fold. They believed that he was teaching against God's chosen people, they believed he was teaching against God's promises to his people, and they believed that he was preaching against God's purity.

So now he takes them on and speaks to each of these objections. And we will take them one by one as well and see what Paul has to say about them.

First, the Objection that Paul attacked God's People.

Read again verses one and two:

Paul's accusers continually charged him with teaching that the Lord's calling of Israel to be His special people was meaningless.

If that were so, the apostle blasphemed the very character and integrity of God.

Now Paul knew that the question would be that if our Jewish heritage and our knowing and teaching the Mosaic Law, and our following Jewish rituals such as circumcision do not make a Jew righteous before God, then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?

Paul knew that many scriptures would come to their minds.

Just before God presented Israel with the Ten Commandments, He told them, *"you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6).*

Moses wrote of Israel, *"Behold, to the lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples" (Deut 10:14-15)*

In the same book Moses wrote:, *"You are a holy people to the Lord your God; and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut. 14:2)*

The Psalmist exulted: *"The Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession" (Psalm 135:4)*

Through Isaiah, the Lord declared of Israel, *"The people whom I have formed for Myself, will declare My praise" (Isaiah 43:21)*

Because of these and countless other Old Testament passages that testify to Israel's unique calling and blessing, many Jews concluded that in itself, being Jewish made them acceptable to God.

But as Paul has pointed out, being physical descendants of Abraham did not qualify them as his spiritual descendants.

If they did not have the mark of God's Spirit within their hearts, the outward mark of circumcision in their flesh was worthless (**Rom 2:17-29**)

Now, nevertheless, Paul continues on and says, the advantage of being Jewish was **great in every respect**.

Although it did not bring salvation, it bestowed many privileges that Gentiles did not have.

Later in the letter, Paul tells his readers, doubtlessly with tears in his eyes as he wrote,

"For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom 9:3-5)

The Jews as a people had been adopted by God as His children, with whom he had made several exclusive covenants. He had given them His Holy Law and promised that through their lineage the Savior of the world would come.

The Jewish people were indeed special in God's eyes.

They were blessed;

Protected,

And delivered as no other nation on earth.

But most Jews paid little attention to the negative side of God's revelation to them.

Amos 3:2 (NASB)

² "You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

With great privilege comes great responsibility.

In the parables of the wedding feast, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a feast given by a king to celebrate his son's marriage.

Several times he sent messengers to the invited guests telling them that the feast was ready, but each time they ignored the invitation.

Some of them even beat and killed the messengers.

The enraged King sent his soldiers to destroy the murderers and set their cities on fire.

Then the King sent other messengers to invite everyone in the kingdom to the feast regardless of rank or wealth

(Matt.22:1-9)

That parable pictures Israel as the first and most privileged guests who were invited to celebrate the coming of God's Son to redeem the world.

But when most of the Jews rejected Christ as the Messiah, God opened the door to Gentiles, those whom the king's messengers found along the highways and in the streets.

It appears that the guests who attended the wedding feast was the Church, people in general who acknowledge Christ as God's Son and received him as Lord and Savior.

Through Isaiah, the Lord lamented of Israel, ***"What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? (Isaiah 5:4)***

The answer of course is that there was nothing more that God could have done for His people. He had bestowed on them every conceivable blessing and advantage.

Becoming even more specific regarding their benefits, Paul said to his hypothetical Jewish objectors, **“You were entrusted with the oracles of God”**

His point was, they were entrusted with the very words of the one and only true God, referring to the entire Old Testament, God’s revelation of Himself and of His will. This was a great privilege. It was also a great responsibility.

The poet William Cowper wrote,

They, and they alone, amongst all mankind,
Received the transcript of the Eternal Mind.
Were trusted with His own engraven laws,
And constituted guardians of His cause.
Theirs were the prophets, theirs the priestly call,
And theirs, by birth, the Savior of us all.

Tragically, however, Jews had focused much attention on their privileges but little on their responsibilities.

During one period of their history they misplaced and lost the written record of God’s law.

Only when a copy of it was found by Hilkiah the high priest during the restoration of the Temple did Judah begin again; to honor the Lord’s commandments and observe His ceremonies for a brief time under the godly King Josiah.

(2Chron.34:14-33)

For many centuries before the time of Paul, beginning during the Babylonian Captivity, the Jews reverence for her man made rabbinical traditions and interpretations had come to far outweigh her reverence for God’s written Word.

The religious leaders of Jesus day prided themselves as being experts in the Scriptures. But when the Sadducees tried to maneuver Jesus into a corner by asking a hypothetical question about marriage in heaven, He rebuked them by saying,

Mark 12:24 (NASB)

²⁴ Jesus said to them, "Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God?"

To a crowd of unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem the Lord declared,

John 5:39 (NASB)

³⁹ "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me;

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man died and went to hell.

From there he cried out to Abraham to send a special messenger to tell his brothers the way of salvation.

But Abraham replied,

Luke 16:29 (NASB)

²⁹ "But Abraham *said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.'

In other words the Old Testament contained all the truth that any Jew or any Gentile, for that matter needed to be saved.

Jews who truly believed the Scriptures. Recognized Jesus as the Son of God, because He is the focus of the Old Testament as well as the New.

But most Jews preferred to follow the traditions of the rabbi's and the elders rather than the sacred writings which are able to give the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus

2 Timothy 3:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ *and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

That same attitude has characterized much of Christianity throughout its history.

The teachings and standards of the denomination or of an exclusive group or sect have frequently overshadowed and often completely contradicted, God's own revelation in the Bible.

Belonging to a Christian Church is much like it was to be a Jew under the Old Covenant.

Outward identity with those who claim to be God's people, even when they are genuine believers is in itself of no benefit to an unbeliever.

But such a person does have a great advantage above other unbelievers if in a church he is exposed to the sound teaching of God's Word.

If he does not take advantage of that privilege however, he makes his guilt and condemnation worse than if he had never heard the gospel.

Hebrews 10:26-27 (NASB)

²⁶ *For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,*

²⁷ *but a terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.*

Hebrews 4:2-3 (NASB)

² *For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.*

³ *For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.*