

PROLOGUE TO PRISON

Paul's Epistle to the ROMANS

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- 1954 -

Cowman Publishing Company, Inc. California

Chapter Five -

Who is a Real Jew?

"Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Romans 2:17-29).

Paul states explicitly in this passage that he is writing to the Jew, anticipating his reaction to the condemnation of the non-Jew in Chapter One, which he knows will meet with hearty approval from the Jew, who at the same time will exclude himself from the broad implications of the indictment. Hence Paul is driving home the fact of Jewish inclusion; he stands in the same need of salvation by grace through faith as the non-Jew; the way of salvation for the Jew is no different from that for any other man. This leads to a very interesting development; namely, that historic Judaism is not in opposition to Christian faith.

On the contrary, it is bound to it, each being indispensable to the other. We think of the Bible as one book comprising Old and New Testaments, and it is. Likewise the doctrine of the Old Testament and of the New are one faith, not two mutually exclusive religions but the faith of our

LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST. You will find this harmony developing more in detail and depth as we progress. *This means therefore, that a Jew does not repudiate his history and heritage when he embraces faith in JESUS CHRIST. Contrarily he fulfills his destiny, and conversely it means also that the Gentile when he embraces faith in JESUS CHRIST becomes in a very real sense a true Jew, a member of spiritual Israel.*

In Ephesians Paul declares that JESUS CHRIST has eliminated the cleavage between Jew and Gentile, has made them both one; and the Church is no longer Jew or Gentile but one body in CHRIST. Incidentally, when one approaches a modern Jew with this in mind, it not only makes it interesting and challenging to talk with him about CHRIST, but it makes one far more effective in his witness inasmuch as the average Jew has the idea that to accept Christianity constitutes a radical repudiation of his heritage. When he can be shown that it is only as he receives CHRIST that he enters into this heritage which is rightfully his, another light is cast upon his own attitude toward the Gospel.

In Romans 2:17-29 Paul answers the question who is a real Jew, thereby dispossessing Jew and Gentile of the caricature so commonly held between both. He begins in the first four verses, 17-20, by itemizing those things in which the Jew boasts. "**Behold, thou art called a Jew,**" he writes; and one senses the edge of his words as the argument unfolds. Let it not be forgotten that the author is a "**Hebrew of the Hebrews**," not a bigoted Gentile, but a Jew who loved his own; one who surpassed his contemporaries in religious zeal, who could boast more than any other of his religious achievements.

In what does the Jewish faith boast? The Jew relies on the law. Not that he keeps it, as Paul reveals later, but simply that to him it was given. "I am a Jew! I am above the judgment of the Gentile. Obviously this condemnation (1:18-32) does not apply to me. I am a Jew! I have the law!" The modern counterpart is the man who says, "I am a Roman Catholic!" "I am a Presbyterian!" "I am a Methodist!" "I am a Baptist!"

He boasted of his relationship to GOD, says Paul. The Jew believed that GOD had chosen him as a peculiar people and that, therefore, he was immune to judgment, his conduct notwithstanding. He boasted of knowing GOD's will. Of course he did, a fact which Paul amplifies subsequently. The Jews had the oracles of GOD, the law of GOD; the prophets were of Israel and with their message he was familiar. He knew what GOD wanted, but did he obey? He approved what is excellent, Paul says.

Now this is another aspect of the tendency to criticize in others what one despises in himself, a very subtle rationalization whereby approval of excellence is made to imply practice. The very approval becomes a facade behind which is hid one's failure to comply. Paul boasted that he was instructed in the law. From childhood a Jewish boy was schooled in the Old Covenant; so Paul reasons, you boast because you are instructed in the law, believing that the law is the embodiment of all knowledge. You boast that you are a guide to the blind (JESUS referred to them as "**blind leaders of the blind**"). You boast that you are a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, teacher of children. Paul's words drip with sarcasm for their sheer egoism. You are a superior people!

GOD has endowed them with all these advantages. Why? In order that they might strut? In order

that they might parade their superiority? In order that they might separate themselves from all others? This is precisely what they had done. The Jewish attitude to all non-Jews was one of cold-contempt. Tacitus said of the Jews, "Among themselves their honesty is inflexible, their compassion quick to move; but to all other persons they show the hatred of antagonism."

Juvenal declared that if a Jew was asked the way to any place he refused to give any information except to another Jew, and that if anyone was looking for a well from which to drink, he would not be led to it unless he had been circumcised. Here is a startling, incongruous fact that the very doctrine which ought to have produced the saint was so perverted that it produced an arrogant, loveless egotist. What kind of a belief is it that produces the superior person who holds in utter contempt all others as inferior?

Beware, lest we make the same mistake; for the fact is, and Paul's sword cuts both ways here, the Christian often becomes this kind of man. The very ones that ought to be loved for CHRIST's sake are treated with contempt, or at least with condescension; ignored and condemned, they are often abandoned by the Church that ought to be seeking them in the love of JESUS CHRIST! When we ought to be wooing men for CHRIST, we draw our self-righteous robes about us and walk on the other side of the road! We think of ourselves as superior to the one who does that which we consider wrong or fails to do that which we construe to be right. "I don't drink; obviously I am superior to the man who does!" Be careful, "**Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.**"

Beware, if there is that in you which makes you feel superior to another; for whatever else the grace of GOD does in a man, it produces humility - genuine, authentic, bonafide humility. The very man who wrote these words called himself the "chief" of sinners, "**less than the least of all saints,**" and so he states the tragic contradictions in the next verses, 21 through 24. "You teach others; do you teach yourself? You preach against stealing; do you steal? (There are many ways to steal.) You preach against adultery; do you commit it? You abhor idols; do you rob temples?"

The very fact that Paul addressed these questions to the Jew implied their guilt. The answer gave birth to the question! Such boasting increases judgment. Boasting in the law, you dishonor GOD by breaking it. Then he calls to witness against them Isaiah 52:5, "**Now therefore, what have I here, saith the Lord, that my people is taken away for nought? they that rule over them make them to howl, saith the Lord; and my name continually every day is blasphemed.**" The fact of Christian profession means that the name of GOD will be blasphemed because of inconsistencies.

It is possible that someone is alienated from JESUS CHRIST because you profess to be a Christian when your life is contradictory; one whom you are not only failing to lead to CHRIST but are driving from CHRIST by your pride, your arrogance, your lovelessness, your icy orthodoxy? This is what Paul is talking about. True religion is more than profession or position. Superior knowledge does not extenuate guilt; it aggravates guilt.

Finally, he closes the chapter by the discussion of the true Jew. First of all, and now Paul touches on the most important sign and symbol in the Old Testament, GOD sealed His promise to Abraham with circumcision, the promise, which he says in Galatians was fulfilled in CHRIST. Circumcision is uncircumcision if one does not keep the law, and conversely uncircumcision

becomes circumcision if one keeps the law. Furthermore, the uncircumcised Gentile who keeps the law condemns and judges the Jew who is circumcised and fails to keep it! This is rather startling, the possibility that some of the very people whom we are judging and condemning GOD will use to judge us! Paul concludes the real Jew to be he that is one inwardly, and real circumcision is not of the flesh; it is of the heart. Real circumcision is not external; it is inward.

The truth is plainly obvious. External position, profession, practice are worse than nothing if they do not represent a change in man's inward condition. Better not to make any profession at all. It becomes very plain in this passage of Scripture that professionalism in religion is wholly undesirable. It breeds the most detestable man, the most abhorrent personality - the self-righteous, self-centered, self-deceived superior stuffed shirt! JESUS illustrated such a man in Luke 18, a parable for some "**which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:**

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess."

"I," he had "I" trouble; he had cataracts on his ego!

There it is, like it or not; it bites deeply into orthodox Christianity because it was the very orthodoxy of the Jew which was his condemnation. Is orthodoxy enough? Does it make a difference whether one's life is Christ-like, whether there is love, warmth, humility, understanding, compassion, concern, sympathy? One's very orthodoxy may make him hard, cold, indifferent and intolerable! The higher one's knowledge, the greater his responsibility; the blacker this sin of irresponsibility, the deeper the condemnation - this orthodoxy without CHRIST. The Pharisees, remember, trusted in their own righteousness, trusted in themselves - and on the basis of their own supposed superiority - (and their religion devoid of CHRIST) - WERE CONVINCED THAT THEY WERE BETTER, and superior.

Heed the words of JESUS CHRIST, "**Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only.**" "**Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?**" "**Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.**"

The Word of GOD is "**quick, and powerful.**" It is a "**two-edged sword.**" It is a "**discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**" It exposes the secrets of man; "**dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow.**"

"He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

~ end of chapter 5 ~

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