

Inward Circumcision

Harmony M.B.C., Dec. 9, 2012

Robert P. Myers

Rom. 2:29 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.

Paul spent some time in his writings explaining things about the Jews; about their selection by the Lord, about their being the offspring of Abraham the father of the faithful, etc. and he summarizes this lesson with these words found in our text.

The importance of physical circumcision to the Jew was about what it pictured. It was a practice that God commanded of Abraham as a sign to the world that his family stood in a special relationship to God. The practice was to be kept always by Jews as this evidence that they were distinct from all other races on the earth. As time went by, most of those people lost the spiritual meaning of the custom, and by the time Christ appeared in their midst they counted the physical practice as the complete fulfillment of what it was supposed to mean. They had lost sight of the goal of it, had lost the spiritual meaning hidden in the physical practice, and had lost touch with God about it.

Paul was educated in the system where this erroneous view was the teaching of the day. He probably thought about it the same way the rest of the religious Jewish leaders of the day did. But when the Lord saved him, he then understood exactly what it was and was not. This teaching here in Romans is Paul's explanation to believers about how NOT to mistake the traditional practice of circumcision to be something of importance by itself. It is from this teaching we are able to grasp the reality of the emptiness of external practice and the essentiality of an internal experience. We want to use that to think about how this fits with what we would call the Christian religion.

I. The similarities of the two religions

- First, The foundation of both religions in the original are established on truth; Jesus Christ is the centerpiece
- But, one of the religions is built on the message about keeping the law and statutes of God and the message about correctly practicing the religious observances of Israel
 - ▶ the very act of keeping the whole law of God, of observing His Jewish statutes, and practicing the religion of the tabernacle and animal sacrifices is all a potential sermon showcasing Jesus Christ
 - ▶ have you ever stopped to realize that if the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (**Gal. 3:24**) it must surely have been the same thing to the Jew?
- The other is built on believing the message of God and serving Him in Spirit and truth
 - ▶ The message of God is that He sent His Son as our substitute to fulfill the whole law for us; and faith in the one who did that work and accomplished that purpose of God is salvation
- I remind us again, both had Christ as their centerpiece
- But, with both, error by man will corrupt the religion itself
 - ▶ Jesus rebukes the scribes and pharisees in **Luke 11:39-43**, listing some of their errors

which corrupted their worship.

- **v. 39** - substitution of outwardly moral behavior for inward purity; and having the most wicked of inward attitudes (ravening = extortion; wickedness = depravity).
- **v. 40** - This is an opposite to the “ravening” of v. 39 - Failure to realize that God is Lord of both the external and the internal; and that He measures the external **BY THE INTERNAL** (all the good works in the world which do not come from a righteous heart will be so much filth with God)
- **v. 41** - Cheating God in tithes and offerings
- **v. 42** - Making a big deal out of little religious activities; ignoring and neglecting important religious exercises
- **v. 43** - practice religion for recognition or honor
- ▶ **Ecc. 7:29** Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but **they have sought out many inventions.**
- ▶ The very perversion of religion is what Paul was writing about in **Rom. 1:23** And **changed the glory of the uncorruptible God** into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

II. The danger of corruption of organized Christian religion is very similar to the danger that existed for corruption of the Jew’s religion

- In the Jew’s religion, they interpreted the physical act of circumcision as **THE ESSENTIAL** element necessary to claim to be God’s people
 - ▶ In **Acts 7:51** Stephen rebukes the Jews with this statement: “Ye stiffnecked and **uncircumcised in heart** and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers *did*, so *do ye.*”
- In organized Christianity, there are a number of “circumcision types” that are various actions by people which are viewed as **THE ESSENTIAL** element necessary to claim to be God’s people
 - ▶ Today we have baptism as one of those
 - ▶ Some religions hinge their entire validity on their doctrine of baptism for salvation
 - ▶ Good works as one
 - Illustrate using the man who kept referring back to wanting to do good for others every time I brought him to Calvary in my witnessing
 - ✓ **Titus 3:5** - “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy hath he saved us....”
 - ✓ **Eph. 2:8-9** - For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast.”
 - ▶ Having personal holiness is one (viewed as righteousness by people who set their own standards for uprightness)
 - ▶ Praying the sinner’s prayer as one
 - ▶ Being a member of some churches is one
- These are all synonymous with physical circumcision - they are human actions interpreted to be that which secures salvation
- Sometimes these are coupled with trusting Christ as part of the requirement for being the children of God
 - ▶ We need to understand that if a salvation doctrine teaches Jesus Christ plus anything, it is

the same error of the Jews who took actual physical circumcision as all that was necessary to secure acceptance with God

III. Our text makes clear what the difference between action and conversion is: “...he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and not in the letter...*”

- This teaching speaks of a kind of cutting off of the flesh within the heart
 - ▶ Paul writes of this very thing (**Col. 3:9**) “...ye have put off the old man with his deeds....”
 - ▶ Becoming a child of promise takes place in the heart
 - **Rom. 10:9** That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
 - **Rom. 10:10** For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
 - Philip’s instruction to the Ethiopian eunuch when asked about baptism/and the eunuch’s answer: **Acts 8:37** And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. NOTE: the eunuch’s question was about baptism, but both Philip’s answer and the eunuch’s profession were totally about Jesus Christ. Why? No one is a candidate for baptism who has not been changed by faith.
 - ▶ It also points to the fact that this kind of circumcision is spiritual (in the spirit), and not simply an act based on doctrine (“...not of the letter....”).
 - Illustrate: “turning over a new leaf” is no a spiritual metamorphosis
 - This spiritual experience is, on a spiritual plane, like the caterpillar changing to a butterfly
 - ✓ **2Co. 5:17** Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is a new creature*: old things are passed away; behold, **all things are become new**.
 - ✓ **Col. 3:10** “... (you) have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him....”
 - ✓ **Gal. 6:15** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but **a new creature**. (Here we meet again with the idea that some physical action, or works, doesn’t do anybody any good as far as spiritual change necessary to be “in Christ Jesus.”)
- One closing caution: Sometimes we Baptists make such a big deal out of the “new creature” thing that we leave people with the impression that IF a person has become a new creature, (old things passed away, all things become new) that there can’t possibly be any contradictory behavior in such a person. That is, such a person can’t possibly behave carnally anymore. Well, while we may convey this impression, we do not teach this. **We teach** that with the creation of the new creature in Christ, within the person, that the **old creature still has life**. We also teach that this **old creature still has depraved passions that fight against the new creature**, and that part of **our mission in life as true believers is to suppress this old creature** and not allow him to express himself in fleshly ways. This truly is **ground zero in our battle against the influence of the devil**.