

Romans 2:17-29

“Seeking Superficial Security”

The desire to have a sense and an assurance of security is basic to human nature, people long for economic security, job security, national security, home, health and even “social security.” When you were born you were tagged with a social security #, but history and experience have proven over and over again that regardless of how powerful your military maybe *nationally*, how large your bank account maybe, or how extensive the set up on your home security system maybe *personally*, nothing can guarantee you absolute security.

When they bother to think about it most people like to hope in some form of *eternal* security. If they claim not to believe in God they hope they’ll just vaporize into nothingness, some form of unconscious state of non-existent blackness. Or perhaps they’ll be reincarnated in an endless chain of lifecycles each one getting better than the one previous.

But that mindset is in many ways a façade, it’s a denial of the obvious, we’ve spent the last couple of weeks demonstrating, and developing the fact that every individual knows intuitively and instinctively that there is a God, creation *around* them bearing witness, their conscience *with in* them bearing witness. and Because God has placed in the heart of all men everywhere a basic ability to discern right from wrong, and all men everywhere has at some point violated that standard that exists even with in their own heart and mind, there lies with in man this nagging and gnawing sense that one day God will judge him *for* that and hold him accountable *to* that.

Here’s the deal, they’re right, the bible says, “...*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,*” Heb 9:27 But for the vast majority of people that instinctive understanding isn’t enough to drive them to their knees in repentance. Because all though the light came into the world, men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil, so rather than turning to God in repentance, man hopes that he can somehow avoid and escape that judgment. But they’re in a quandary because everything that’s with in them is seeking for security, but spiritually they know they’re radically *insecure*, and somehow they need to reconcile themselves to the fact that though they know they *deserve* judgment, “...there’s got to be a way I can *avoid* that judgment.”

So people devise all sorts of self deceiving philosophies so that they might have some sort of false sense of security regarding their sinful state before God and the impending judgment that they’re due apart from reconciling to Him through Jesus Christ Be it the fact that they’re basically good people and God wouldn’t condemn good people to hell, that they’re good works out weigh their bad one’s when thrown in the balance so overall God will recognize that and allow that to suffice. Other’s think that a God of love could never allow anyone to go to hell so that ultimately even the most rank of sinners will go to Heaven because God’s to loving to let them go to hell. and Those particular mindsets are so common that they gain reassurance *in* them by the vast majority of people that subscribe *to* them.

Now when you come along and shed light on that false sense of security, you're cruel and insensitive, but the fact is you've done them a great favor. It's no crueler to warn people in their deception than it is to warn a family who's asleep at night that their house is on fire, or that a bridge they're preparing to cross might collapse underneath them. When you're commended for showing people how to remain safe and free from death in this life, how much more are you to be commended when you warn the unsaved regarding their lostness and eternal condemnation apart from the salvation that's found only in Jesus Christ?

Jesus was constantly stripping the hypocritical, legalistic false securities of the Judaism of His day. Exposing the fallacy believing that my good works, or religious works will somehow commend me to God, the sermon on the Mt is really an extended series of warnings regarding a false sense of spiritual security. and As we approach our text today, Paul the apostle is in much the same mode. He's spoken to both the obviously immoral, and the moral, showing the destitution and depravity of both before a Holy and righteous God. Now he turns to the religious community, those who would say, "What, I go to church, I own a bible, I've been baptized, of course I'm ok with God." and What he's doing is unraveling and undermining every position of man that we might be left totally hopeless before God, because when a man reaches the bottom, the only way he can look, is up. He's confining all under sin that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to all who believe. You have to see yourself as a sinner before you're prepared to receive a Saviour, and so before he explains the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, he shatters this notion of false spiritual security that most Jews had in their heritage. Basically he's demonstrating that Jew or Gentile isn't the issue, sinner in need of a Savior is the issue.

Vs17-20

Back in vs 17 we see where Paul turns his attention to the Jew, in case of any ambiguity or uncertainty with respect to his readers who maybe saying, "Yeah those immoral Gentiles deserve God's judgment, even the *moral* Gentiles deserve God's judgment, just because they're *Gentiles*." Paul puts a stop to that rationale and turns to the Jew, God's chosen people, those who had the privilege of being stewards of the law of God, whom God had revealed Himself to like no other nation or people in history.

Because of that fact, *because* they were Jews, *because* God had entrusted to them the law, *because* they knew God's word, God's will and God's ways through the law there was a real sense of, "God has so favored us as a nation, and as a people that He somehow has exempted us, or because He loves us this way, He surely wouldn't judge us with the same standard as everyone else." and In to a certain extent they were right, just not in the way that they'd perceived it, far from being exempt from judgment, Paul is saying that these things just make for a greater judgment. It's the "To whom much is given, much is required," principle.

Notice that as you go down this list of “qualifications” that Paul puts out here that the religious man might rely on, that they all depend on an outward observation, none of them point to an inward transformation. But these are all things that the Jew thought made for their justification before God. 1st of all, “I’m a Jew” a descendant of Ab (the friend of God) one of God’s covenanted people, as if you could be under the covering of God’s salvation by simply being a Jew. Being a Jew was in their estimation, an automatic application of fire insurance, “God wouldn’t condemn me, I’m apart of the chosen race, He’s Israel’s God.” Ps 135:4 “*For the LORD has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His special treasure.*” “So you see God wouldn’t condemn His own special treasure!” and So by virtue of being a Jew, there was an automatic exemption status in their minds as far as the condemnation of God was concerned. But Paul will point out here that’s it’s not about ethnicity, you can’t claim salvation on the basis ethnic heritage. “My granddad was a preacher, my dad was an elder in the church, I live in America, of course I’m a Christian.” But the word of God takes issue with that mentality, you’re not a Christian just because you were born into a family of Christians, or you’ve gone to church your whole life, or because you have 47 bibles lying around in your house. Or as Paul says here, “You rest on the law, and make your boast in God.”

There in vs 18 as he speaks of knowing God’s will, it’s another reference to having the written word, God’s revelation of His standards for mankind given to them, “*He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation; And as for His judgments, they have not known them.*” Ps 147:19-20 and Because they have the law and have been instructed out of the law, they’re able to make a more “godly” assessment of a given situation. and Because of that (He says here) you’re confident that you’re a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, which in reality that’s what God desired of them, that’s what He wanted them to be, a light to the nations around them. Showing them they way, and sharing with them the way to everlasting life, repentance towards God and faith towards Jesus Christ

That’s what Jesus wants from you, He said that you’re the light of the world. God never blesses us strictly for ourselves, but it’s always to be beneficial to those around us. So that if God has blessed you with everlasting life, its because He wants to use you to bless others by showing *them* and sharing with *them* the same truths that led *you* to Christ. So God not only has your spiritual benefit in mind, but the benefit of others as well.

But the case Paul is making here is that all these things that they thought made for their *commendation* before God, and the assurance of their *salvation*, really only made for a greater *condemnation*. Because (remember the context from last week) it’s not the hearers or in this case the “knowers” of the law that are justified in God’s sight, but rather the doers.

It's neat that you've been blessed this way, and that you know all that, but what are you doing with it, how do you measure up? Because an honest assessment would drive you to your knees in repentance being brought face-to-face with your own depravity, but in the deception of your own heart, you think you've got this thing licked! and That you're God's gift to the world, you set upon your pedestal instructing others in what they should and shouldn't do having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. and That word "Form" there in vs 20 is important, it speaks of an "appearance" he's pointing to smoke and mirrors. It's a religious hypocrisy; remember when Jesus spoke of the Pharisees and said, *"The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers."* Matt 23:2-4 In other words they know all the right things to say, and from the casual observers appearance they seem very pious, but the fact is that they themselves don't abide by the very standards that they impose upon others, they're blind leaders of the blind, far from being a guide *to* the blind, they themselves *are* blind. How many people think that because they know what the bible says, that that makes them ok with God, knowing God's word doesn't make you right with God, are you a doer, are you obedient to God's word?

Vs 21-24

You see what he's saying is that, "When it comes right down to it, your preaching is pretty good, it's your practice that I'm concerned with." He says, "You who teach another, aren't you teaching yourself, aren't you listening to your own instruction?" We just read where Jesus accused the Pharisees of this very thing, they said, but they didn't do. You're preaching that a man shouldn't steal, are you stealing? Remember twice throughout the course of Jesus' ministry He came into the Temple and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers saying, *"It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"* Matt 21:13 You'd teach other's not to steal, but you're ripping the people of God off everyday right here in the Temple by selling them "Acceptable sacrifices" at an exorbitant rate. In the book of Micah the Lord accused Israel saying, *"Her heads judge for a bribe, Her priests teach for pay, And her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD, and say, 'Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us.'"* Mic 3:11

That sort of sums up Paul's whole position, they thought that because they were the Lord's "Chosen people" that that granted them general amnesty from judgment rather than understanding the fact that that privilege came with a greater accountability *to* the Lord, which means a fiercer judgment *from* the Lord.

Malachi spoke of people steal from God all the time in the tithe, because they think that all the money they have is their money, it's not your money, it's God's. and He'll take responsibility for 10 % of it, and you'll be held accountable for the other 90. But when you don't even give God His 10%, you're ripping Him off, those aren't my words. "*Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.*" Mal 3:8-9 "Wait" you protest, that's OT, that's law, we're under grace, we're in the NT." You're right, we're under grace, but the bible says we're not to use the grace of God as a cloak for vice, to cover our own self-centered motives. and The fact is, tithing was in effect well before the law was ever written, you find Ab way back in Genesis practicing the tithe. and Jesus in Luke 11:42 said that tithing was something that ought to be done. So in reality you find the principle of the tithe pre-law, during law, and post law. People like to quickly jump to 2 Cor 9:7, "Let each one gives as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity for God loves a cheerful giver."

That's true, but the key word there is "giver" the tithe isn't ours to give, it belongs to the Lord already. Research that context you'll find the tithe isn't even in view, he's referencing an offering, a generous gift, and an offering is that which goes above and beyond the tithe, once you've given a tithe, then you're prepared to "give" to God of your own resources. But up until then you're only giving to God what's His anyway. Now having said all that, if you don't want to give to God His tithe, than don't, it's not a salvational issue. But you need to know what the bible says, "Well I can't afford to." I disagree, I say you can't afford not to, but God knows your heart, and I realize that for many even that is a step of faith, hey step out, pray towards it, and watch God honor it. Isn't interesting how much we want God to give of Himself to us, yet how little we want to give of ourselves to God? You'd tell others not to steal, do you steal? Be it in ripping off the public in business, taking from the factory because "they don't pay you enough anyway," or from God Himself in not giving Him what's truly His?

You who say, "Don't commit adultery, do you commit adultery?" Now the Jew sought to get around this principle in Jesus' day by issuing his wife a certificate of divorce, and then he thought he was free, had circumvented the law in that respect. But Jesus said that to marry someone who was divorced for reasons other than sexual immorality was to commit adultery. Then He took it a step farther and said, "If you even look on someone else with lust in your heart than you've committed adultery in your heart." and What's God always looking to? Your heart. The bible also teaches us that we commit adultery spiritually when we place other priorities in our lives above the Lord, He's to be our 1st love, yet when we abandon Him and place other things or other people, or other pursuits *before* Him we've committed spiritual adultery *on* Him.

“You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” Again whether he has in mind robbing the temple in the form of the tithe, or I read somewhere that in that day some renegade Jews would raid pagan temples taking the idols thinking they were doing God a service, but the end never justifies the means. The bottom line here is that of a double standard, minimizing the sin in my life, magnifying the sin in yours, trying to get the speck out of your eye, but I can’t see the forest for the tree in my eye, or as Paul puts it here in vs 23-24. (read)

Knowing the law is great, but if you break the law, knowing the law does you no good, if anything it heaps upon you further condemnation, because you knew it, you just didn’t do it. and All your witness results in is blasphemy on the part of the unbelieving community. Or to put it in plain English, if you claim Christianity, yet you’re all the time engaging on a worldly level with those around you, they think that both you and your God are a joke. Why *would they* serve God if *you’re* the reflection of what that means, and your lifestyle really isn’t any different than theirs outside of your double standard lip service? (You might reference Is 52:5, Ezek 36:20-23, 1 Timothy 6:1 and Titus 2:5 regarding that)

Vs25

Circumcision was another outward aspect of legalism that the Jew banked on, it was the sign of the covenant given to Ab, that kings would come from him, that he would be the father of many nations and that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed (a reference to the fact that Messiah Himself would be a descendant of Ab). The sign of that covenant was to be circumcision, a cutting away of the flesh, a recognition that the sin nature was passed on from generation to generation and needed to be dealt with cut away and utterly severed from the life of the one dedicated and consecrated to God.

But somewhere down the line the Jew began to see the rite of circumcision as the heart of the covenant, the *center* of the covenant rather than the *sign* of the covenant. “Of course I’m saved, I’m included in the covenant, I’ve been circumcised.” But over and over again throughout the scriptures God sought to emphasize to them the fact that it was never about an outward *conforming*, but rather it was about an inward *transforming*. It was an outward *identification* or *illustration*, of the inward *transformation*. It was about a cutting away of the flesh life in the heart that was testified of outwardly through circumcision. In Deut 10:16 we read where the Lord told them, “*Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer.*” and Again, “*Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, You men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My fury come forth like fire, And burn so that no one can quench it, Because of the evil of your doings.*” Jer 4:4 Or to understand that another way, it doesn’t matter what sign you’ve taken upon yourself outwardly if there’s no substance to it inwardly, you may as well not be circumcised at all if you’re not bearing the fruit of what it speaks of. (More on that in a sec)

Vs26-27

These are rhetorical questions meaning that the answer is obviously implied, what he's saying here is that to cling to these outward rituals that have no inward substance is superficial security, trying to patch open heart surgery with band aids, a bucket with buckshot blown through it, it's just not going to hold water before God. It'll be springing leaks everywhere because God is looking to what's going on in your heart. and You can conform outwardly and never change inwardly, but its impossible for you to be transformed inwardly with out being impacted and changed outwardly, and that's what God's looking for. So that if the man who was never circumcised was transformed inwardly and from that obeyed God's word outwardly, God would look upon him as though he was circumcised. But if the man who'd been circumcised outwardly never had a life changing encounter with the living God inwardly, then his exterior rituals were for nothing.

We talk about this from time and again but for you and me in NT America the issue is no longer circumcision it's baptism, or church membership or whatever. I don't care if you were baptized when you were 10 and have been a member of a church for as long as you can remember. Those outward rituals mean nothing to God if there's been no inward change in your heart due to your repentance towards God and faith towards Jesus Christ

If the outward identification, doesn't testify of an inward transformation, than it's pointless. But conversely the same is true that if you've never been baptized, (circumstances preventing it) yet your life testifies of a life changing encounter with Jesus Christ will not God count that as baptism? What is baptism, truly? Is it the removal of the filth from the flesh? No, but the answer of a pure conscience toward God having been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ Baptism represents the dying to self, identifying with the death of Jesus Christ as I go down into the water, and as I'm brought up it signifies my new life in Christ identifying with the resurrection life of Jesus Christ Now If I've never surrendered my heart to Christ, that ritual means nothing, and won't count for anything as far as a righteous standing before God. However if I've given my heart to Christ, been washed in the blood of Christ, than the baptism of my heart is a done deal, now when I am baptized it just serves as a symbol of the reality with in me.

It's like my wedding ring, whether I have it on, or not I'm still married, it's just a symbol that testifies of my commitment. However if I never had any intentions of being true to what it stands for, than why put it on in the 1st place, it means nothing.

Vs28-29

Circumcision/baptism is like a label on a can, if I read the words, “Chicken Noodle Soup” on a label, than I open the can and black olives come careening out, I’m going to be upset. What was the point of the label if it didn’t match the substance inside the can? The same is true as it pertains to baptism, or in their case circumcision, what’s the point marking the label “Baptized” if when the can is poured out it’s anything but cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ? It only serves its purpose when what’s happening outwardly matches accurately what’s happening inwardly. You’ve got to be born again, settle the issue with what’s on the inside of the can, then you place the appropriate label on the outside through baptism.

You can do a lot of things, go through all kinds of religious motions and receive all kinds of praise from man, but that’s superficial security at best. You’re looking for the praise that comes from God, that praise that says “Well done good and faithful servant” not because of your ritual of being baptized outwardly, but because you’ve been cleansed by the blood of Christ inwardly. Don’t buy the lie, or fall into the deceitful mentality of that superficial security that says, “I go to church, I have a bible, I know what God’s Word says, my family tree is littered with God fearing people, I was baptized, I’m a member of such and such church, I live in America where our motto is ‘In God we trust’ of course I’m ok with God.” None of those thing make you ok with God and far from commending you *to* God, they just might condemn you *before* God, place your faith not in what *you do*, but rather as we say so often, who *Christ is*, and what *He’s done*. Receive the circumcision, not in the letter, but of the heart, in the Spirit.

Prayer Points:

Jesus we know that the only eternal security there is, is found in abiding in You. Any and everything else is superficial at best and has no power to commend us unto God. Lord its ez for us to begin to teeter into that mentality that begins to rest on what we do, safeguard us from the snares of religious legalism and help us to simply cultivate and maintain that loving relationship with You. Not to lead lives of a double standard, not to give others a reason to blaspheme, but to the be the light You’ve called us to be.

If you’re here and you’re wrestling with the question of where you’re at eternally, or maybe there’s no question, you know you’re not right with Jesus Christ Let me encourage you not to let this moment pass you by with out surrendering your heart and your life to Him. Maybe you’ve been to church countless times, maybe this is the 1st time you’ve ever been, or you’re somewhere in between, maybe you thought you’ve been doing everything you’ve needed to, to be ok with God, but God is waking you up to the fact that it’s not about you, it’s about Jesus and let Him wash you in the wonder working power of His blood. Jesus wants to forgive your sin and cleanse your heart today, but He won’t force entry, you’ve got to let Him in, open your heart to Jesus, let Him in, let today be the day of salvation and He’ll make you brand new.