

You Can't Ride Someone Else's Coat Tails

Romans 2:17-29

May 25th, 2008

Scripture

“But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth-- you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.”

A few years ago we had a popular president. At the same time, there were some people in Kentucky from the same political party that were running for election in Kentucky. They were relative underdogs, they were new

comers. They did not have a political name and all forecasters could not believe it was possible for these people to be elected to state office. When the election coverage was over, those unknown candidates were elected to office in Kentucky. It stunned the journalists. All they could say was the reason that these people won was because they rode the President's coat tails. Have you ever heard that statement? Politically, it is used often. When someone is popular and is esteemed highly in the eyes of the public, many times people who are of lesser notoriety are also elected, if they are of the same party and ride that person's coat tails. How would you like to be elected knowing that was the only way you got in?

That is what I see when I look at this passage. I see a group of people called Jews, who were literally trying to ride someone else's coat tails into Heaven. They are trying to ride father Abraham's coat tails. Riding someone else's coat tails may work politically, but it will not work spiritually. In John 8, some of the Jews that Jesus encountered were starting to believe that He could be the Messiah. So He told them:

"If you abide in My word, you shall be My disciples, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."

The Jews heard that and responded, *hey, do you know who you are talking to? We are Abraham's kids! What do you mean if we follow You, You will set us free? We have never been enslaved to anyone!* Do any of you find that statement kind of strange? Did they not start as a nation in slavery to the Egyptians? God's sign to Abraham was that his descendants would be slaves to another nation for 400 plus years! This is the same group of people that because of their sin against the Law of Moses, God brought the Assyrians down and wiped out the northern ten tribes. This is the same group of people who continued to sin afterwards, so God brought down the Babylonians and wiped out the rest of the southern kingdom. This is the very group of people who, even though they have political freedom, at that very moment were under the hands of the Romans, and they could only do what the Romans allow them to do. How dare they say they had always

been free! How quickly we forget our past. How can we sometimes be so misled to think that everything is ok when in reality things are not ok? Jesus was not dealing with political freedom here. To help explain, He said, *whoever of you who commits sin is a slave of sin*. Their reply was, *hey, Abraham is our father, and you are implying that we are sinners?* Paul deals with the same subject here in Romans.

The Purpose of the Law

- **The Need of a Savior**

If you are wondering why Paul hits the theme over and over that both Gentiles and Jews have not lived up to the light of revelation they have been given and so are condemned as sinners, it is because he wants to preach the gospel. He knows that at the moment a person believes in Jesus they are brought into a right relationship with God and their whole life changes. He knows that no one will accept Christ until they realize they need Him. No one will realize they need Christ until they realize they are a sinner. More people are not being saved because we are not first telling them why they need to be saved. They need to be saved because they are sinners. It is one thing to sit down with a person and give them the gospel presentation. It is another thing to build a relationship with a person for a long period of time and begin to teach that person they are, by their own sin, separated from God. This is why the Church has gone to easy believism. It is why there are so many people sitting in church rows that never do any kind of spiritual things. We have led people to believe in Jesus intellectually, but have no concept of what it means to crown Him Lord and Savior of their life. There is no teaching that salvation is repentance from sin. There is no concept that man's sin nature separates him from a God who is holy. By birth of a nature to sin, we stand in need of a Savior. We have told the world they are ok, and they have believed us, so now they do not need our God. And that is what the Jew thought, except he thought he was ok because he was kin to Abraham. He had physical circumcision, which means he had been born correctly to the right

family, and he had the Law. So he had the right information and knowledge. They agreed when Paul said the Gentiles need to be saved, but now he is saying the Jew needs to be saved too, but they do not get it. As long as a person thinks they are ok, they will never come to Christ. Man is in need of a salvation that only God can give.

Verse 17 says, *"If you call yourself a Jew."* Paul will teach something that is overlooked today in many churches, and in our eschatology. In verse 28 and 29, Paul believed it was possible to think you were a Jew when in reality you were not a Jew. The Jew thought he was a Jew because he experienced circumcision and he was keeping the Law. That was all external things, things he was doing. But Paul says the real Jew is the one who has experienced both an outward circumcision of the flesh, and an inward circumcision that has been accomplished by the Spirit of God. Paul is saying that not all Jews are Jews. In Romans 11 the Bible says that one day all of Israel will be saved. But it does not teach that at the second coming of Jesus every person who is physically descended from Abraham will be saved. You see, Paul also says that not all of Israel is Israel. This means that at the second coming of Christ, all of true Israel will be saved, but not everyone who descends from Abraham is true Israel. There is one plan of salvation for Gentile and Jew alike, and that is faith in Jesus Christ. Paul knew that some were basing their identity on something that was false. Since they had a false identity, they had a false security. They are not really who they believe they are. True security comes from having a true identity from God that is based on a saving relationship with Jesus, and nothing else.

Paul says, *"If you call yourself a Jew and..."* Here is how you know if you just call yourself a Jew but you really are not; you *"...rely on the law and boast in God and know His will and approve what is excellent."* That sounds really good! I am convinced if these folks moved into our community we would try to sign them up as members. I am convinced we would give them a Sunday school class after a short period of time. These sound like really good people, but let's not overlook this; not all people of

faith are Christians. Not all people of faith are real Jews. The key is the object of your faith. The Jew has faith. A work's based church has faith, but they have faith in the wrong object. They have faith in themselves instead of faith in God. A partial faith in me, and in God, will not cut it. The Jew relied on the Law.

This word, "*rely*", means "to lean against, to rest." If I lean on something, I have shifted my weight. When I lean on something, I trust that what I am leaning on will hold itself, as well as me, up. There is a transfer of trust, the exercising of faith. I made a commitment. The false Jew put his weight on the Law. He believed that by trusting in the Law he could earn a right relationship with God. He believed by doing the Law he could be justified in the sight of God. This is a false security based on a false identity. God never intended for Israel to take the Law and use it as a means of justification.

Several years ago someone told me that people in the Old Testament were saved by keeping the Law, not grace. That is wrong folks. There has never been, nor will there ever be, a Jew or anyone saved by keeping the Law. There has always been one plan of salvation and that is by God's grace through faith. Do you understand that? The problem with the Jew was that he had a false security because he had a misuse of the Law. He actually thought God gave the Law so he could keep it and get into heaven. No...let's think about this logically for a moment.

The giving of Law was in the book of Exodus. It opens with the children of Israel in Egypt, and it gets bad. Slavery will become harsh. God gets them out of Egypt and they are headed to Canaan. They will pass through the wilderness first so God can teach them His ways. They learned the ways of the Egyptian for 400 years. It only takes God one day to get them out of Egypt, but it will take him over 40 years to get Egypt out of Israel. They stopped when they came to Mount Sinai. They are now a free people; they are no longer slaves. The mountain quakes and God gives Moses the Law so they would know how to live as a redeemed people when they get to

Canaan. They would no longer act like Egyptians, they would act like Israelites. God wanted them to act like Israelites because the Canaanites did not have a clue about God. Israel knew about God because they had seen God do ten miraculous things in Egypt. He has told them before what would happen, and it happened exactly like He said it would. He brought them through the Red Sea so they would know they were following God. They know there is a God. Now they get the Law, and it says the God you are following is not like you, He is holy. It is not His responsibility to become like you; it is your responsibility to become like Him. Your behavior as a follower should reflect the God you are following. He gave them the Law so when they got to Canaan their actions would reveal the God they were following. This is important because there were Canaanites in Canaan, Jebusites, Perizzites, and all kind of "ites" in the land! They are pagan and they do not know God. God will reveal Himself to them by taking Israel out of Egypt, and when they get to Canaan they will follow the Law and act like a redeemed people. God will be glorified and everyone will bow down and worship God! It did not happen...

Right off the bat Israel started trusting in the Law and they took their eye off the giver of the Law and onto themselves. They became guides to the blind, instructors, teachers, and a light to the dark. But the things they taught were not the things they lived. It will be sad if some of you teach someone something that you do not live out. It would be so sad to teach kids about purity, and then fall into the very sin you told the kids not to do. So Israel got into the land and blasphemed God. The Canaanites decided if that was what God was like, they did not need Him.

We are experiencing that in the Church today. I can read verse 17 to say: *If you call yourself a Christian (instead of Jew)*. Did you know that not all who name the name of Christ are Christians? The Bible teaches that many will say on the Day of Judgment, *Lord did we not do this and that in Your name?* He will look at them and say, *Get out of here; I do not know who you are*. The most important question is not do you know God, it is does God know you? If God does not know you, all of this is in vain. In the

Church, we try to build a relationship with a person and try to talk to them about God, and they inevitably point someone out say, "If he is a Christian and he can do what he is doing and still go to heaven, I do not need to be saved." We are blaspheming the name of Christ. The truth is that the restaurants, schools, and places of recreation are building a concept of God, not based on the Bible, but based on our life. We have to understand there are some who call themselves Christians who are not. Just as there are some who call themselves Jews who are not Jews. They are putting their weight on the wrong thing! Salvation is not just being rescued from the wrath of God; it is being rescued from the power of sin so that at the moment of salvation you, through God, begin to live a changed life. God lives through you. That changed life points people to the redeemer and reveals to the world who He is. God can take a person living for their own glory, thinking they are ok, and suddenly have an inner change and He can begin to work through them. The world can see there is something going on in our life and it is called salvation. If the world is not seeing that in our life, we need to examine ourselves and see if we just call ourselves Christians.

- **Reveals God's Holiness**

There was another intention of the Law that is not fully revealed until the New Testament. The Apostle Paul makes it plain. The Law was also given so that man would understand that God is holy. Man would then come to understand that he is unholy and in need of spiritual salvation.

- **Reveals Man's Sinfulness**

Later we will see Romans teaching that the knowledge of the Law brings knowledge of sin. Without Law there is no knowledge of sin.

- **To Increase Sin**

The Law was given to increase sin. Paul said he was ok until the commandment said you could not covet, and then it slew him and he died. He realized he needed Christ. God has given us the Law so that when we try to live by it, it will make us more sinful. There is a misunderstanding in the worldview that if we put more law on people they will behave better. It is not true. Now if they are a two year old, yes, clamp down on the law. But when you put someone under Law, their flesh wants to do the very thing you told them not to do. That was the purpose of the Law of Moses. If you have believed the Law of Moses makes people better, you have been misled. Its intention is to first get you to admit that you are a sinner and in need of salvation. Some of you think you are ok. So God says to come under the Law, and it will make you want to do things you never thought about doing.

It is kind of like driving down the road and you see the speed limit is 55, you do not want to drive that speed anymore; you want to drive 65. You then get on the interstate and the speed limit is 70, and you are not happy driving 65 anymore; you want to drive 80. This is not in your spirit; this is in your flesh. Have you ever been minding your own business and someone told you could not do something and all of a sudden, it is swirling around in your head and you are trying to find an opportunity to do it now? You had never thought about doing it before, but now you want to because the law said you cannot do it! This is why I have never been a big proponent and jumped on the political bandwagon about the Ten Commandments being taken off the walls of our schools and courthouses. I know that sounds un-Christian. If you see it as a symbol that America is turning from God and you want to keep us right with God, I do not have a problem with that. But that is not why people want it. They really think if we take the Law out of our classrooms, our kids will turn out to be bad kids. Somehow having the Law on the wall will make them better kids. Where in the world did you get that? It is absolute foolishness. If you want to put the Ten Commandments on the walls so that our kids will become

more sinful and realize they are sinners and in need of salvation, and you will let me come in and tell them the true plan of salvation, I am all for it! When are we going to understand that our courts and school systems are not Christian? We have Christians in those places, but the only Christian identity in America is the Church! I am not knocking our schools. I am just asking if we understand why God gave the Law. He did not give the Law to make a man better. If the Law could make a man better, then he does not need Christ. We need the Law to drive a man to his knees to realize that before a holy God, he is a sinner and he is separated from God and he needs salvation! We do not need people comparing themselves to me or to you. We need people comparing themselves to God. As long as you look at me, you will think you are ok. But one day, you will find out you are not.

A False Identity Leads to a False Sense of Security

We want the world to see their need of Christ. We do not want the world to think that on their own they can get rehabilitated. We are trying to rehabilitate people, and rehabilitated people will split hell wide open. They will be sober and they will have all of the answers, but they will spend eternity separated from God forever and ever. Until man sees he is lost and in need of Jesus, he will never be saved. God help those churches who are trying to take sin and the judgment of sin out of the gospel to appeal to those who believe that is repulsive. If there is no sin, then there is no need of Christ. If there is no need of Christ, then let's just go do something else. But there is a need of Christ and the gospel because men are lost. But they do not know it, so they have a false sense of security because they have a false sense of identity.

- **Trusting in a Symbol**

There was a misuse of the Law, but secondly, there was a misunderstanding of circumcision. The Jew began to trust in the fact that he had been circumcised and everything was ok between him and God. Your physical birth does not mean everything is ok between you and God. Abraham is an example of this. He got saved when he looked into the stars

and God said his kids would number as many, and he said, "Amen, let it be so." The moment he agreed with God and responded positively by faith, leaned on God's Word being true, he was brought into a right relationship with God. He was not circumcised until later. He was circumcised because it would be a covenant seal of the covenant of righteousness by faith that God had made with Abraham. Circumcision was a sign or symbol that said the way a man is made right with God is through faith in God's plan for you. But the Jew began to trust in circumcision instead of the God of the covenant. When you start looking at the symbol instead of God, you start looking at you and what you have done, and start believing in what you are doing that is good. The next thing you know, you think you are ok and you get a false sense of security because you build your identity on what you are doing instead of what God has done. That is dangerous. The Jew thought he would judge the Gentile on the Day of Judgment. Paul said that circumcision has value if you keep the whole Law. If you ever break the Law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So on the Day of Judgment, as a Jew, you will stand before God as an uncircumcised Gentile. And, the uncircumcised Gentile who keeps the Law will stand on the Day of Judgment, and his keeping the Law will be looked on as circumcision in God's eyes, and the Gentile will judge you. Wow, that will bring you to your knees! That guy you have been looking down on; God just may use him to judge you. He will not be judged by the light you have been given, he will be judged by the light he has been given.

That is happening today. Some people who call themselves Christians are trusting in a symbol. They trust in the symbol of baptism. Please be careful here. You know I have a high view of baptism, and it has cost us dearly with some of the brothers in the community. But while it is a beautiful symbol, there is no salvation benefit of baptism to a person who is trusting in the symbol and not the Christ who died on the cross. It scares me to death when I hear young people say they want to be baptized after they see someone else being baptized. Parents think their kids are ready to be saved and lead them in a few words, and then want to baptize them. The

kid might not understand being lost, or the work of Christ, he just wants to have the symbol of baptism. That is the same thing that happened to some of us. We want the symbol, and our faith is in the symbol. We want to be a part of the Church, read our Bible, pray, tithe, work, and teach. The next thing you know, our faith is not in the God of the covenant, it is in what we are doing. You can go through the outward motions, but if you have not experienced that inner true circumcision of the heart, you are not a Christian.

Spiritual Circumcision

Many scholars want to believe that in verses 28 and 29, this is talking about a Christian. I do not believe it is. Yes, a Christian must experience the true spiritual circumcision of the heart that is administered by the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, we learn that to be a true Jew you had to experience both a physical and spiritual circumcisions. Moses told the children of Israel to circumcise their heart, and the flesh, and a circumcision would be administered by God. Jeremiah talked about God circumcising the heart. The reality is that what you are doing in your outwardness must be flowing out of what is going on in your inwardness. If you merely have the outward formality, you are not a Christian, any more than a Jew is a Jew. Now you understand why Jesus told Nicodemus he had to be born again. He had it together in the flesh, but that was not enough. Jesus did not criticize him for being born of the flesh. He said flesh is flesh. But he lacked an inner working of the Holy Spirit, he lacked a spiritual birth. To be a Jew, you had to have a correct physical birth and a correct spiritual birth. So not all Jews are Jews, and the Day of Judgment will separate them. And, not all Christians are Christians, and the Day of Judgment will separate them too. You do not trust in what you do to earn a right relationship with God, but what you do reveals whether or not you have really trusted in Christ. Do not go through life just calling yourself a Christian. Turn from sin and trust only in the blood of Jesus to bring you into a right relationship with Him.