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Romans

For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” as it is written. Romans 2:24

We often make our mental associations of things unseen by the things which we see. If we buy a car, a Ford perhaps, and it is a lemon then our perception of Ford the company will be negative. If our friends buy Fords too and they are all lemons, the name of Ford will be found in low esteem among those looking for a car.

The term for "blasphemed" is found in Romans 3:8 and is translated as "slandorously reported." Later, in Romans 14:16, it is translated as to "be spoken of as evil." When you buy a dud car, your inclination is to tell others not to buy one from "that crummy company." Or you may say something even worse. The people of Israel were selected by God as His special people and thus their actions reflect directly on other's perception of Him. Isaiah speaks of this perception -

Now therefore, what have I here,” says the Lord,
“That My people are taken away for nothing?
Those who rule over them
Make them wail,” says the Lord,
“And My name is blasphemed continually every day. Isaiah 52:5

The gentile world at large railed against Israel because of their conduct and, by default, they railed against the God of Israel. However, Israel's disobedience

actually demonstrates God's greatness and His mercy even more. In Ezekiel 32, God explains why He was willing to restore Israel, even after a second instance of disobedience and the crucifixion of His Son. This restoration occurred, exactly as the Bible predicted, in the last century - first in 1948 with the land and then in 1967 with the city of Jerusalem -

“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went.” Ezekiel 36:22

God demonstrated mercy to Israel while showing the nations His holiness. His word is vindicated in and through His disobedient people.

An important point to consider here is that since Israel's exile and the establishment of the church, it is we who bear the name of God - in the name of Jesus. When our actions contain inappropriate conduct, the name of God is blasphemed among the unsaved. Who in their right mind would want the title "Christian" when they see people living unholy, disrespectful lives? Our actions have consequences.

Life application: Do you have a Christian symbol on your car? If so, do people see someone who is acting properly on the road? What about those you work with. If they know you are a Christian, then are your daily actions calling them to ask more about your faith, or are they making a mockery of the name of Jesus? As you go through your day, consider how the things you do affect others' perception about the Lord.

Lord, please be with me and guide me in my daily walk. Keep my thoughts on You and help me to never stray from right living. May my life be a testimony to Your greatness and may others seek You out because of me. This I pray to Your honor and glory. Amen.

For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Romans 2:25

Paul turns to the ancient rite of circumcision to justify the comments he has previously made. "For" tells us that what was stated leads to this conclusion. "For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law." The rite of circumcision was given to Abraham in Genesis 17. However, he was declared righteous by God in Genesis 15 many years earlier. The rite was a sign of the declaration, not the other way around. Therefore, if one keeps the law (which was later instituted through Moses, a member of the promised line who received the rite), then the circumcision has profit. If not, then it is entirely without merit.

In order to understand this, think of a person who was not of the covenant people. If he was circumcised, perhaps to be a spy against Israel, what good would his circumcision do in regards to the law? Nothing; it would mean nothing. The circumcision needs to be accompanied by a belief that what the law is proclaiming is also worth living out.

Paul then gives a validation of this by turning the premise around - "But if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision." If the law was given and circumcision is a sign attached to those who have received it, implying that it is binding upon them, then when the law is broken, the sign means nothing. Suppose you are the citizen of a nation and you are given an oath as a sign of that citizenship - "I promise to defend the constitution of..." As a validation of that, you are given a uniform with stripes and a flag of your nation on it. If you ship off to war and become a traitor, the uniform means nothing. "Your allegiance has become non-allegiance."

An outward sign must be accompanied by an inward compass or the sign means nothing. This is true within a family, within a work environment, or in any other group or organizational context. Without this inward conviction, the outward sign

has no point or purpose. Moses realized this when he spoke to the nation after their 38 years of desert wanderings in Deuteronomy 10:16 -

"Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer."

In the very next sentence, verse 10:17, Moses says that the Lord "shows no partiality nor takes a bribe." "No partiality" is tied directly to "circumcision of the heart." It is an internal conviction, not an outward sign, which demonstrates a person is in right standing with the law. This is especially true because Paul (in fact the entire Old Testament as well) shows that none can meet the demands of the law perfectly. Therefore, all are guilty before the law and the sign of circumcision is of no value unless accompanied by faith in what the law provides when the law is broken - mercy and forgiveness through conviction and repentance (such as the Day of Atonement ritual).

The importance of "uncircumcision" is of such weight and moment to Paul that he will use the term 19 times in his letters. Only one other time is it used in the New Testament - in the book of Acts. Understanding this connection between the inward change and the rite clearly shows us that baptism is not a New Testament equivalent of circumcision. Infant baptism carries with it the same inherent flaw as what Paul speaks of. To understand the fault of tying infant baptism in with circumcision, you may wish to take time and watch this sermon where I discuss the issue in detail - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uv9KPCo1XQ&list=UU41M8ZcIBLvEH_O3O6qMUAq&index=26

Life application: If you are relying on an external sign, rite, or affiliation in order to please God, you have made an error in your thinking. The holiness of God demands that all who enter His promised heaven must be perfect in all ways. Nothing can be added to an imperfect being to make him perfect. Instead, there must be a complete change in the person - moving from unrighteousness to righteousness. This can only come about by faith in what God can do, not man; this can only come about through Jesus. Fix your eyes on Jesus today.

Heavenly Father, may You continue to remind me that the external things of my life - my denomination, my church attendance, my giving, and my title of "Christian" can only have meaning if my heart is directed to You. And then Lord, give me the willing desire to pursue You and thus prove that the externals really reflect what is inside me. Amen.

Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? Romans 2:26

Another question which is actually an affirmative statement now comes from Paul. A man who hasn't been circumcised and yet keeps the law will be considered as one who was circumcised. As previously noted, Abraham believed God and was counted as righteous in Genesis 15. His circumcision, the sign of the covenant, didn't come until many years later in Genesis 17. The sign in no way added to his state of righteousness.

Paul is teaching through his words that God's approval of man does not in any way depend on the external appearance of the individual, but rather on the condition of one's heart and their actions which are aligned with a right heart condition. He finishes this verse with "will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision."

The term "be counted" is the Greek word *logisthesetai* (from the verb *logizomai*) which means to "consider" or to "reckon." This verb is used in Romans 4:3 where Paul quotes the account of Abraham from Genesis 15 - "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" God imputed righteousness to Abraham because of his faith. There were no deeds attached to the faith, but simply an acceptance of what God had said was true.

The word is also used in Luke 22:37 when Jesus was counted, or reckoned, as a transgressor even though He had done no wrong -

"For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.'"

The idea of imputed righteousness permeates both testaments of the Bible and is realized in the work of Jesus. He was circumcised and He also met the strict demands of the law perfectly. Now, by faith in Him and in His actions we too can be counted righteous by mere faith, just as Abraham was. Our "uncircumcision" is counted as "circumcision" because He was circumcised as a Jew. Also, we can now meet the righteous demands of the law through Him as well. His work can be "counted as" accomplished for us.

Life application: As you read the Old Testament, particularly the 613 commandments of the law given through Moses, reflect on the precepts that you have failed to meet - there will be a lot. Then realize that meeting these perfectly is the standard God demands. But don't forget that despite your failure to meet them, Jesus prevailed. If you accept His work, it will be imputed to you. And the suffering He felt at the cross... that was your punishment being transferred to Him. Apply this to your life by demonstrating a grateful heart to the Lord.