

Title: Presumptuous Pride
Scripture: Romans 2:17-29
Series: God's Saving Grace

1. Introduction:

- a. Someday, a vast multitude will unbelievably stand before the Great White Throne Judgment of God, shocked to be judged because they thought of themselves as being saved.
 - i. Jesus warned us about this reality in **Matthew 7:22-23** On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' (23) And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'
- b. It is difficult to imagine that what seems to be earnest, sincerely religious people will be lost, but this and other scriptures tell us so. This situation is even more heartbreaking because some within this group will come from orthodox Christian churches like ours.
- c. Why? Because they have been lulled by a false religious security that has prevented them from getting to the heart of salvation's matter.
- d. Our passage today is the cure to this type of self-deception. In our passage, Paul warns religious people, perhaps, like you and me, to guard themselves against false confidence.
- e. Today, therefore, I address myself to you, the church member and the regular attender. I want to confront

you with the two most important questions that could ever be asked.

- i. Are you saved?
- ii. On what basis are you saved?

2. Verses 17-20 - Danger number one: knowledge of the truth

- But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God (18) and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; (19) and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, (20) an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—

- a. We start where we left off in our last sermon. The Jews were a privileged people. This, of course, was the great danger. Paul correctly describes this sense of privilege when he states, **“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.”** In these first two verses, the Apostle notes that the privileged are in danger of committing six errors. Each error grows from the false belief that ‘what I know’ instead of ‘who I know’ is what saves me.

- i. First, they were called Jews, which means “praise to Jehovah.”
 1. The thought was, “Because I am a **Jew**, I am better than the irreligious heathen.”
 2. The danger is a feeling of superiority because of religious privilege (knowledge), indicative of a deceived heart. This

damnable attitude was best exemplified in the parable told by our Lord in **Luke 18:11**. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

- ii. Second, they **relied upon** the possession of the **law** to give them a unique standing before God.
 - 1. To them, possession of the Law meant that they were saved. The mere possession of the law gave them a sense of security and superiority, and they believed that by means of a dedicated and continued effort to obey that law, they could earn salvation on their own.
 - 2. We, too, possess the entire canon of scripture and can make the mistake of thinking that mere Bible possession saves us.
- iii. Third, they **bragged** about their relationship with God. They weren't **boasting** that God had saved them, but because they thought they were God's favorites, the true people of God.
 - 1. As if attaining a close relationship with God was achieved by human means.
 - a. But our boasting should not be in human effort. We read in **2 Corinthians 10:17** “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

- iv. Fourth, they prided themselves on **knowing his revealed will**, derived from the Ten Commandments.
 - 1. But they forgot what **James 4:17** So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.
- v. Fifth, they **knew the essential things**. They prided themselves on making superior moral judgments and living superior moral lives.
- vi. Six, they were **instructed from the law**. The law was a light to their feet.
 - 1. They received instruction from the Rabbis.
- vii. These six things were wonderful privileges. But as wonderful as they were, they had a dulling effect on the Jews. They looked very good when they compared their privilege (their knowledge) with the theological ignorance of the Gentiles.
 - 1. However, these privileges were meant to bring them to repentance and not false pride.
 - a. **Romans 2:4** Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?
 - b. **The Preach The Word Commentary** - Like the rest of the scriptures, this passage cuts both ways. The sword that pierced the heart of the religious Jew also pierces ours. It is easy to imagine that we're okay because we know so much more about the Bible than the average person on the street, especially in this day of biblical illiteracy. Ultimately, it can become very

natural to imagine, as we look at the dark world around us, that we automatically belong to the family of God. May God open our eyes as often as they need to be opened.

- c. This delusion arising from privilege leads to the deadly pride of arrogant presumption. Paul addresses this pride when he states, **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.**
 - i. Beloved, pride, and presumption make a person unbearable. That is what it did with the Jews. The Jews considered themselves **guides, lights, instructors, and teachers.** They looked down with condemnation and scorn on the filthy sinners. The privilege that should have produced saints produced arrogant, loveless, and self-centered hypocrites!
 1. Beloved, again, we say that the sword cuts both ways.
 2. Whenever a person who says they follow Christ feels superior to others, he should be alarmed because such an attitude is not a sign of God's grace or redemption. To have great spiritual privilege (knowledge) and give into self-righteous arrogance indicates that one's soul has not genuinely tasted the gift of grace nor understands the depravity of one's own nature.

3. This type of attitude often demonstrates an unsaved heart.

3. Verses 21-23 - Accusation number one: The self-justified (relying on their privilege of knowledge) are lawbreakers - you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? (22) You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? (23) You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.

a. It is in this passage Paul gives us the cure for self-righteous thinking.

i. Many Jewish teachers and leaders were guilty of the same offenses they accused the gentiles of committing. It was common knowledge that the orthodox Pharisees and other religious leaders often carved out loopholes by which they could ignore God's commands.

1. **Mark 7:9-13** And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! (10) For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' (11) But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban"' (that is, given to God)— (12) then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, (13) thus making void the

word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

ii. So in just a few sentences, Paul does away with the false security that the religious derived from knowing the truth. They were not okay; their lives did not measure up to the truth (knowledge) they possessed.

b. So Paul finishes his cross-examination with a burst of accusation. He says in **Romans 2:23** You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law.

i. “If you present yourself as someone who relies on God and his law, and even teaches others the meaning of this law and impresses upon them that they should live in harmony with it, how is it that you do not practice what you preach?”

ii. Beloved, do not gloss over the seriousness of the charge. Paul calls these Jewish religious leaders law-breakers. A worst insult could not be hurled at these men.

1. The point of the matter is simple. No man can be justified by their works, religiosity, or privilege. We are all law-breakers and need Jesus Christ.

4. Verse 24 - Accusation number two: The self-justified are a stumbling block to others - For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

a. Paul then brings a second accusation against the religious. **The name of God is blaspheming among the Gentiles because of you.** Not only did the Jews

not measure up to their privilege, but they disgraced it! The sacred name of God that none of these religious Jews would ever speak with his lips was, because of them, blasphemed by the Gentiles with whom they associated.

- b. We have all, unfortunately, heard the name of God blasphemed by unbelievers because of the immoral actions of those who claim to be believers.
 - i. Beloved, neither God nor this world are impressed by our claims of orthodoxy. What impresses God and the world is an orthodoxy that flows from the new life and grace-led action.
5. Verses 25-27 - Danger number two: Affiliation with the Truth - For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. (26) So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? (27) Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.
- a. There is another danger, a twin to the danger of thinking we are acceptable to God because we have the truth, and that danger is thinking we are right before the Lord because we are affiliated with His truth or church. The religious Jews supposed they were secure because they were part of God's chosen people through circumcision. They believed circumcision somehow secured salvation.

- b. In the Old Testament, the rite of circumcision was a beautiful thing. It was originally given to Abraham as a public demonstration or testimony of his commitment to God. However, circumcision did not and would not justify a man before God.
 - i. Here, Paul argues that circumcision, unaccompanied by obedience to God, is useless. Beloved, the same is true regarding the water of baptism and the bread and wine in holy communion. As signs and seals, these things have value, but only when accompanied by faith demonstrated through obedience to God.
- c. Paul argues that circumcision was of great value as a sign of first having put one's faith in the God who saves. However, if its meaning was disregarded, it was as meaningless as a wedding ring on an adulterous finger.
 - i. Paul's argument, therefore, was devastating! Circumcision of the flesh was null and void without true repentance (as if it never happened). One of the greatest insults in Judaism was to be called uncircumcised, which is Paul's charge. Religious rites and ceremonies do not save us.
 1. The Jew would say, "Because I am circumcised, I am saved!" In applying this to ourselves, we must substitute the word circumcision for any of the following: Church membership, baptism, baptist, reformed baptist, presbyterian, and so on.
 - ii. Many people use their religious affiliation as proof of salvation. If asked, " Are you a believer?"

" The answer could be, "Of course. I've been a God's Grace Reformed Church member for the past ten years."

1. It is not 'affiliation with Jesus or His church' but instead 'surrendering to Jesus and His Lordship' that saves us.

d. Accusation Number three: Those who trust in affiliation will be judged more severely. Paul argues that he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn those who, provided with the written code and circumcision, are transgressors of the law.

- i. **Matthew 12:41-42** The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. (42) The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

6. Verses 28-29 - True Salvation is in Faith in Christ - For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. (29) 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. Beloved, God is never fooled. We can have confidence in this truth, religious people will ultimately be lost.

- b. Paul's opponents among the Jews were building their hope for eternity on the mere fact that they were Jews and, therefore, as they thought, God's chosen people.
- i. This reminds us of the days of John the Baptist when these same religious people were similarly resting their case on the similar circumstance that they were Abraham's seed (affiliation). We read in **Matthew 3:9-12** And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. (10) Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (11) "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (12) His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."
- c. In finishing the chapter, Paul distinguishes between
- i. Physical circumcision, the cutting of the foreskin, and
 - ii. Circumcision that concerns the heart: the removal (in principle) from that heart of whatever is evil; heart renewal
 1. That this was what God intended is seen in **Deuteronomy 10:16** Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.

2. **Deuteronomy 30:6** And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.
 3. Only when one puts his faith in God could one then say that the outward act meant something. All our affiliations, ceremonies, and customs do not matter in the least if our hearts have not first been circumcised in faith.
- d. Today, we must each consider the question, where does our confidence lie? Does it rest on our knowledge of God's word or religious affiliation? If so, we are dead men because true salvation is a matter of the heart finding refuge in the completed work of Jesus Christ.
- i. **Romans 10:9-10** because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (10) For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.
 - ii. We must look unto Jesus. **Colossians 2:9-14** For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, (10) and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. (11) In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, (12) having been buried with him in baptism, in which you

were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (13) And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, (14) by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

7. Benediction

- a. **Acts 4:12** And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Public Reading of Scripture Colossians 2:9-14