

Genesis 17:1-14

The Covenant of Circumcision

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ² Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.”

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, “As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. ¹⁰ This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

Romans 2:17-3:8

The Jews and the Law

¹⁷ Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; ¹⁸ if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; ¹⁹ if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— ²¹ you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law, do you dishonour God by breaking the law? ²⁴ As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

²⁵ Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. ²⁶ So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? ²⁷ The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

²⁸ A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹ No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God.

God’s Faithfulness

3 What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? ² Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.

³ What if some were unfaithful? Will their unfaithfulness nullify God's faithfulness? ⁴ Not at all! Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written:

"So that you may be proved right when you speak
and prevail when you judge."

⁵ But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) ⁶ Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world? ⁷ Someone might argue, "If my falsehood enhances God's truthfulness and so increases his glory, why am I still condemned as a sinner?" ⁸ Why not say—as some slanderously claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"? Their condemnation is just!

Sermon: Call Yourself a Christian?

Please have your Bibles opened at **Romans Chapter 2** – we're starting at **verse 17** and we're going through to **Chapter 3 verse 8**. We will also refer to our Old Testament reading from Genesis 17. There is an outline if you would like to take down some notes!

Let me **pray** first...

Intro

[Slide 1 – 2 weeks ago]

2 weeks ago, the Apostle Paul gave us some **really bad news about humanity** – humanity is full of **godlessness** and **wickedness** – and that humanity had **exchanged the truth about God for a lie** and were **prepared to worship ANYTHING but God** - and Paul said God's wrath was on them.

But **God didn't zap humanity** – what God did was – He demonstrated His wrath - by handing humanity over **to sinful desires; shameful lusts and a depraved minds** - and then **Paul listed 21 sins** - but we're not like that – are we?

(pause)

[Slide 2 – Last week]

Last week - Paul tackled those on the **moral high ground** who point the finger at everyone else **but don't look in the mirror and examine their own behaviour** **because they think they're ok** - but we're not like that – are we?

[Slide 3 – This week]

This week – in our passage from Romans 2:17-3:8 - **Paul tackles those who are self-confident Jews** – who boast in their knowledge of God's law.

As we look at these self-confident Jews – **maybe we're guilty of this same thing too...maybe we're self-confident Christians?**

Paul says the self-confident Jews **have two things in their possession**

1st – **God's Law** – that's chapter 2:17-24 - and

2nd – **Circumcision** – that's chapter 2:25-29

God's Law (Romans 2:17-24)

[Slide 4a God's Law – The Jews]

The 1st thing the Jews have in their possession is - **God's Law**

Look at v17

It's like Paul's saying:

You **call yourself a Jew**

In fact, you're **such a proud Jew** – you **rely on God's Law** and **you boast in God** – you're **very smug about it**

V18 – You even **know God's will** and **approve of it** because it's so superior to any **other nations gods!** And besides you've **been instructed in God's law** – you've **got insider knowledge!**

V19 – You even think you're a **guide** to those who are **blind** from God – and you think you **shine God's light** to those who are lost from God and are in the **dark**

V20 – You even **teach those fools who don't know God** – AND **you teach your kids** – **the commandments and God's truth**

What a stellar bunch of Jews - you **THINK** you are!

But **then comes the kicker** – in vv21-24

[Slide 4b-kicker]

You **don't practice what you preach!**

You preach – **don't steal** – BUT – **you steal**

You preach – **don't commit adultery** – BUT – you commit adultery – physical adultery by **cheating on your spouses** – and spiritual adultery by **cheating on God**

You say **you hate idols** – but **you go into pagan temples and take stuff** – and **mix your religion with pagan religion** (syncretism)

You **boast in God's law** – but **you** **break it all over the place**

(pause)

You see – mere possession of God's Law is not enough – these Jews need to commit to obeying God's Law too!

And as a result – Paul says - v24 – they are seen by the Gentiles (non-Jews) as hypocrites – they are such bad witnesses to God – they embarrass God – and Paul says – they blaspheme God's Holy name to the Gentiles.

But – we're not like that – are we?

(pause)

[Slide 5-God's Law-Toukley]

Well – let's suppose – we re-read vv17 to 24 – and replace "Jew" with a "Presbyterian Christian" worshipping here at Toukley.

It might go something like this

You call yourself a Christian

Yes, you're proud Presbyterian Christians and you're proud of your Scottish heritage

Your Presbyterian Church – has one of the best models for governing the church – you even have a CODE – which gives you all these rules to make sure you run all your meetings well and follow processes properly and always do the right thing!

And besides you Presbyterians are renowned for focusing on God's Word – not like those Pentecostals who get all tied up with the experience of the Holy Spirit – you're not like those happy clappies – and you even sing real hymns!

You guys - love God's Word – you memorize verses from the Bible – and can impress people with your knowledge of quoting chapter and verse

You even teach Christianity Explained and attend Bible Study groups!

You take great pride in **feeding the homeless and needy each week!**

You even go into schools and teach children Scripture

AND you have children's talks during your service – AND teach them the 10 commandments!

What a stellar bunch of Presbyterian Christians – YOU - think you are!

[Slide 5b – kicker]

But here comes the kicker – Paul says – You don't practice what you preach!

(pause)

In what ways do we fail to practice what we preach?

- We say God is number #1 – but we put everything else ahead of Him and God becomes our last resort – not our first thought
- We teach against having idols – but we bow down and worship – **money, possessions, sport and entertainment** – we even make ourselves an idol. Our favourite 3 people – **are me, myself and I** – **we're real "I" specialists!**
- We teach against blaspheming – but when we hurt ourselves – **we say OMG.**
We even let the commercialism of Easter and Christmas – **crowd out the true Biblical meaning of these occasions**
- We teach the Sabbath is to be holy to God and a rest day – **but we just squeeze God in on Sunday for an hour** – and we don't have one rest day – we go go go 24/7.

- Or we go too far with the Sabbath – and if someone comes looking for us to help them on Sunday – we say '***No sorry, I can't help – it's Sunday, it's the Lord's Day!***'
- We teach our children to honour their mum and dad – but we don't go and visit our mum or dad in Aged Care – or we speak badly about our parents in front of our children and grandchildren
- We teach against murder – but as Jesus says – **we murder people in our hearts** (Matthew 5:21-22)– and we think angry thoughts of people – or - we secretly hope they fail – and it's okay - because - they don't know we think that – **but God knows!**
- We teach that marriage should be a faithful exclusive relationship – but we lust in our hearts for someone who is not our husband or wife – or we look at porn – but it's okay – no one knows – **but God knows!**
- We teach against stealing – but we take stationery or kitchen supplies from work – after all there has to be some perks for working in this place! Or we fiddle on our tax returns – after all we pay too much tax anyway – or we add a few extra damages that didn't actually happen - to our insurance claim – after all the premiums are so high – we need to get something back!
- We teach against telling lies – **but we tell lies ourselves** – or fail to disclose everything – omitting the bad bits! And **we also gossip about people** – and **exaggerate about how bad they are!**

- We teach against wanting other people's stuff – but we'd sure like to have a house like so and so – it's not fair they have so much money. And we'd love their boat or caravan – why are we so far behind everyone else? How come they managed to retire at 60 – but we're still working at 70? How come they're a self-funded retiree but we're scrimping by on a centre-link pension?

How are we going? Feeling good yet?

(pause)

When we fail to practice what we preach - we are very poor example and witness to non-Christians – they see us as hypocrites and they're not going to want to join us – and come and follow Jesus

What will we do about this?

First - repent of this hypocrisy – bring it to the Lord – and attach ourselves to Jesus – *apart from Him we can do nothing* (John 14:5)

Second - mere possession of God's Word is not enough – we need - to read it – meditate on it – follow it – and live it – and apply it to our lives!

Third - Our vision here at Toukley - *is to transform the community with the love of Jesus?*

That Vision is not just something we made up as a good idea – this vision is - based on Jesus' summary of the commandments – from John 13:34-35:

³⁴ “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

So, in everything - we - say – or do – or even think

We need to ask ourselves – what would Jesus say? What would Jesus do? What would Jesus, think?

Circumcision (Genesis 17:1-14 & Romans 2:25-29)

[Slide 6a-Circumcision]

The 2nd thing the Jews have in their possession is - **Circumcision**

So, we need to be clear what **circumcision** is

And that’s where our **Old Testament reading** comes in

[\[Please turn to Genesis 17\]](#)

In this passage **Abram is rewarded for his faith in God.** Abram is rewarded with a name-change to Abraham which means “father of many nations”. And **God established an everlasting covenant with Abraham.** Abraham was promised many descendants and a new land – called Canaan – the Promised Land.

As a **sign or seal of this covenant agreement.** All male descendants of Abraham when they were 8 days old were to be **circumcised**.

But notice this sign of circumcision **was given on the basis** of Abraham and his descendants **keeping their covenant agreement with God** by **having faith in God and obeying God.**

So, when God gave Abraham the sign of circumcision – it was an outward sign of the inward reality of a personal, intimate faithful relationship with God.

Circumcision is actually a visual sign of the penalty for breaking the covenant.

In ancient culture – when people made a covenant agreement with each other - they would act out the curse or penalty that would happen to them if they broke the covenant agreement.

For example, a man might pick up some sand and pour it on his head – and say *'if I break this promise I have made today, may I become like dust'* or he might cut an animal in half and walk between the two pieces and say *'if I disobey this agreement, may I die like this animal'* (see Genesis 15:9-21)

So, in the case of - circumcision – **this was a visual sign of the penalty for breaking covenant.** What God was saying to Abraham was: *'if you want to be in a relationship with me, you need to be circumcised as a sign to you and everyone that, if you break covenant, you will be “cut-off” completely. Cut off from life, cut off from me; you really will be circumcised!'* [Tim Keller – Romans 1-7, page 63]

[\[Back to Romans 2:25-29\]](#)

Now that we understand what circumcision is

We can look at what Paul is saying to the Jew who takes pride in circumcision

And it goes a bit like this – from vv25-27

You are a Jew and you take great pride in circumcision

But remember circumcision is only an external symbol **of what should be going on inside you.**

Circumcision is **a sign that you're God's people** and **you're going to obey God's law**

But you circumcised Jews – **are not obeying God's Law** – so it's like you're not even circumcised at all!

Whereas those non-Jews you know - who are not circumcised – **well they're keeping God's Law** – and so it's like they're the ones who are circumcised!

Can you Jews – see how you've got it all wrong – and the ones who aren't Jews and are not circumcised - **are showing you up** – and condemning you – because they're doing what you should be doing!

Paul goes on to describe **what a true Jew should look like** – in vv28-29

It's not the **outside** that matters – but the **inside**

What really matters is **their heart** – Paul says – **the Jew must undergo a circumcision of the heart**

Just like we said about the Law – **mere possession of circumcision doesn't make them faithful to God** – **they need to have a transformation of the heart** – **and have a heart for God** and want to please Him and obey Him – so - **their hearts have to be spiritually circumcised!** This is nothing new – God told Moses to tell the Israelites this in Deuteronomy 30:5-6. But *they conveniently forgot about it!*

How does this apply to us today?

As Christians **we have a different sign or seal.**

It's **baptism**

And just like circumcision – **baptism is an outward sign of something that is going on inside us.**

Baptism in water – doesn't **make someone a Christian** – but it's an **external sign of** – Jesus washing our sins away on the cross - **and an external sign an internal baptism of the Holy Spirit** – when a Christian is born again – born from above (John 3) – **and the Holy Spirit comes and lives in us!**

For example, my wedding ring shows people I'm married – and off the market. But it's not my marriage to Heather. If I just wear a wedding ring – and don't take part in the marriage – **then it's not a marriage.**

[Slide 6b-spiritual circumcision]

So as Christians – Paul says in Colossians 2:11-12 – we are **spiritually circumcised** by Jesus. Paul says:

In Jesus you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ,¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

This **spiritual circumcision** experienced by believers results in **a renewal and transformation of the heart and soul.** They are no longer enslaved to sin **but are**

empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a life characterized by righteousness, holiness, and obedience to God.

(pause)

How can we be sure we have undergone this spiritual circumcision?

Well – Paul tells us in Galatians 5:22-23 that the **evidence of having a spiritual transformation** is the **fruit of the spirit** – Paul says:

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

As we examine our hearts this morning

How are we going with this spiritual fruit?

Which ones are obvious to us?

Perhaps ask someone close to us – to be honest about what we lack? And ask God to help us with these.

Paul tells us in Galatians 5:25 – to live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit.

If we practice this – we are less likely to be seen by non-Christians – as hypocrites; legalistic and lacking love and compassion.

And we will be worthy ambassadors for Christ – because it's NOT about US – it's ALWAYS about HIM!

(pause)

Objections Answered (Romans 3:1-8)

[Slide 7-Objections]

As we hit chapter 3 – and verses 1 to 8.

Paul anticipates some objections to his teaching in chapter 2 – especially from those in the Roman Church with Jewish background.

What Paul does is place himself in his listeners' shoes – **respecting them enough to think deeply about how they would be reacting/responding to his teaching.**

So, verses 1 to 8 – is like a question-and-answer routine – a Jew asks a question – and Paul answers

Question. V1 - Paul, are you saying **there is no advantage to being a Jew?**

Answer. V2 - No, I'm not saying that. **There's great value in having and knowing God's Word** – and you've had the privilege of being entrusted with it from God

Question. V3 – But Paul, many have been unfaithful to God – **does this unfaithfulness mean God's promises won't happen?**

Answer. V4 – Not at all. **God is always committed to the truth** – even if every human being is a liar!

Question. V5 – If people doing the wrong thing only shows how good God is. **Isn't it wrong of God to be angry with people.** Besides, **God simply answers people's sin with more and more of His goodness?**

This is a bit like a naughty child saying to their mum – ***"You shouldn't punish me, Mummy; don't you realize the naughtier I am the better I make you look, Mummy!"***

Answer. V6 – That doesn't make sense. **Because we all know God can't look at sin and He has to judge and punish it!**

[Slide 7b-Us answering objections]

Why does Paul include these objections and knock them down?

Well – because **He's a great evangelist** – and **he anticipates objections.**

In the same way – as Christians – as we share our faith with people – in our own context – we need to anticipate objections to the Gospel – and we should be prepared to give an answer.

This is not always easy – that's why we need to read and understand the Bible.

And that's why it's important to be part of a Bible study group – or at least do some Bible study at home.

And of course – that's why David's giving us regular **evangelism tips** – and we have regular **Christianity Explained Workshops** – to help us to be equipped with answers.

Let's pray...

Father God, thank you for your Word – and your Law – which is perfect.

We are sorry that we cannot fulfil your Law perfectly – but we're ever so thankful that you sent your Son, Jesus – who is able to keep your Law perfectly – and is the perfect once and for all sacrifice for sin.

Thank you that Jesus circumcises our hearts – and that we have the Holy Spirit living inside us.

Enable us to live by the Spirit and keep in step with the Spirit – and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit – so that we are authentic ambassadors of Jesus.

In His Name, we pray. Amen.

