

A Matter of the Heart

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Date: 13 October 2024

Preacher: Matthew Capone

[0 : 0 0] be seated. Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today. A special welcome if you are new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word. We're continuing this Sunday in our series in the Book of Romans, and you'll remember that the Book of Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD, and it's called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that it's written to the churches in the city of Rome. This letter is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection, and Paul's hope, as we saw back in chapter 1, is that these churches would be established in the gospel. Paul will make many applications as we go through this letter, but he's especially concerned with the mission and the unity of the church, and there are many spokes, there are many side quests and topics we're going to explore as we go through this. Paul constantly is going to take us back to the gospel. As I've told you before, it's tempting when we come to passages like this to just see each set of verses as sort of a random statement with random points, but what I want you to see is that Paul is making this overarching argument in the first three chapters of his letter, and the overarching argument is what he summarizes in chapter 3 when he says, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So Paul spends three chapters to say everyone is a sinner. Okay, that's the main point.

We're looking at that each week from different angles. Chapter 1, we talked about how Gentiles deserve God's wrath. Now in chapter 2, we're talking about how Jews deserve God's wrath, and we might, for us today, split that up into how those who are non-religious, those who are outside of the church, deserve God's judgment. Those who are religious, those who are inside the church, deserve God's judgment.

Last week, we looked at this idea that having the law, having access to God's word will not save us. This week, Paul is going to close chapter 2 by reminding us that circumcision will not save the Jews, which is a way of saying religious symbols, religious signs, religious activity is not our hope.

And so with that, I invite you to turn with me now to Romans chapter 2, starting at verse 25. As we turn there, remember that this is God's word. God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so that's why we read now Romans chapter 2, starting at verse 25. For circumcision indeed is a 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.

[3 : 50] Verse 28. 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. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and we thank you as we do every Sunday, that you speak to us clearly in your word.

And we ask, as we do every Sunday, that you would do that again. That you would unstop our ears, that you'd open our eyes, that you would clear our minds and you'd soften our hearts.

That we would be able to hear and see and understand and believe everything that you've written in your word. And most of all, we ask that you would show us Jesus Christ, and that we would see his great glory and majesty and beauty and holiness and power and authority, his mercy, his grace, and his love.

We ask that you would grow us, that we would have more love and affection and reverence and awe and obedience for him. And we ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

[5 : 09] I want you to imagine with me for a minute that you are having a one-on-one meeting with someone.

You are meeting with a man, and it has just come out that this man has been engaged in an extramarital affair for 10 years. So he's had 10 years of cheating on his wife, and he's finally been caught.

His wife knows, and it has shaken the foundations of his marriage. And so you meet with him, and you ask him, you say, How are things going? Is there anything left of your marriage?

And this man says to you, things are going great. My marriage is actually fantastic. It's very strong. And you can tell this man's not joking, and so you're shocked, right?

How in the world could he say such a thing? And so you start to ask him questions. You say, well, are you and your wife talking right now? He says, no. Are you living?

[6 : 13] Is she still living with you? He says, no. She's moved out. She's with her sister. You say, have you cut things off with that other woman? He says, no. Right?

And so you say to him, how in the world can you say to me that your marriage is strong? And at this point, he whips out his left hand, and he says, look.

Look at it. You can see my ring. I'm still wearing it. And he looks like he's just presented this royal flush, right, in a game of poker.

He has got you with that, right? Read it and weep. Checkmate. I've got the ring.

Nothing else matters. And you might be thinking, and you would rightly to think this, what planet is this man on? Right? What planet is he on that he thinks that what really matters in the midst of his unfaithfulness, that he's still wearing his wedding ring?

[7 : 15] You would say to him, man, you're not connected to reality. If you're a member of Gen Z, you might say, brother, you need to touch grass. Okay? Something is off here.

What has happened? This man has confused the symbol and the reality. He's put those things together.

He's in a wrong way, right? He's confused the ring with the commitment it signifies. Right? He's taken this ring. He thinks that's enough, not the life of commitment and the substance of his relationship.

That's the point that Paul is making here at the end of Romans chapter 2. Remember, Romans chapter 1, he's saying, look, all the Gentiles receive God's judgment. Then in chapter 2, he turns to the Jews and he says the Jews deserve God's judgment as well.

And yet he knows he's going to be met with skepticism. And so throughout chapter 2, he's raising all the objections that he knows that they will come up with. He knows that the Jews are going to say, as we saw last week, look, we have the law.

[8 : 27] Right? Now he comes to the final and last objection. The Jews are going to say to him, what do you mean we're under God's judgment? We have circumcision.

And so he's responding to this idea that was common among Jews of that time, that this sign that God had given, this special sign of his people in Genesis chapter 17, the sign by itself was enough to save.

They believed that this was a guarantee of God's blessing. That those uncircumcised Gentiles, they needed to worry about God's judgment. Those who are circumcised do not.

They're safe. They're protected. And so that's why he says here in verse 25, circumcision is indeed is of value if you obey the law.

We might say to this man, yes, your wedding ring is of great value if you are a faithful spouse.

[9 : 30] Right? Outside of that, it's lost its meaning. You think that this sign is enough to cover you when the substance is missing. Verse 27, he goes on to make the same point.

He who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision, but break the law.

Okay, you have this great sign of God's people, but you don't walk in God's ways. The sign will not help. Oh, you have this sign, this symbol of your commitment to your spouse, but that's not how you're living?

That sign's not going to help you. It's not going to save you. That is not what really matters. Verse 26, you don't have circumcision, but you keep the law.

Well, it can be saved. The symbol is not ultimate. And so what Paul is highlighting here, his point, is this.

[10 : 33] The Jews are relying on religious ritual, religious symbols, religious activity. What they do not have is a new spiritual reality.

The Jews are relying on what is on the outside. They're not concerned with what's going on on the inside. And you'll see this on page 7 of your worship guide.

Circumcision was of great value if one understood and lived its intended significance. However, if its meaning was disregarded, it was as meaningless as a wedding ring on an adulterer's finger.

Faith and performance gave circumcision its reality. And so Paul's warning them here. He's saying, look, you take confidence in this religious ritual, these signs, this activity, but the internal reality of your lives and your hearts is not attached to God and his ways.

Circumcision, what one can see on the outside, will not save. We might say this today, baptism will not save you. Baptism points to something.

[11 : 52] It represents something. It shows something. It's God washing you clean of your sins. Is that true on the inside as well? Is your hope in God's mercy and his grace or is your hope in your religious activity?

Many years ago, you know, when you come and join our church and become a member, you meet with the elders of the church and we ask you this question, you know, how do you, why do you believe that you're a Christian or how did you come to know Jesus?

And we asked this a number of years ago of an older man who came to be interviewed for membership. We said, how do you know that you're a Christian? And this man said to us, well, I worked for many years to send my children to Presbyterian schools.

We thought, wait, what? You're a Christian because you sent your kids to the Presbyterian school? We need to talk some more about this. Okay, we need to unpack that and understand what you mean by this.

The very suggestion that we would need to talk more was so offensive to this man that he just stormed out of our church. He said, you think you want to talk about whether I'm a Christian or not?

[13 : 08] How dare you question that? I sent my kids to Presbyterian school. I was involved in the right religious activities. I participated in the right rituals.

If you're not a Christian, you might be surprised by that. You might think, wait, I thought that's what Christianity was about. I thought it was about keeping the right rules and living in the right way. And so I'm here to tell you this morning, no.

Paul's reminding us Christianity, in fact, is about a radical transformation of the heart in which we have a heart of stone replaced by a heart of flesh. And so we have new loves and affections and desires and hopes.

Yes, there's a way of living that flows downstream of that. It's not those religious rituals or activities that we put our hope in.

If you are a Christian, you might be thinking, well, of course, I know better than to say something like that, right? I've been to enough Sunday school classes. I'm smart enough to not say something like that out loud.

[14 : 13] I know the right answer, but I've saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. And that doesn't mean that we always think that or live that.

And so Paul is raising a question for us, which is this. How do you know that you're a Christian? How do you know that you're a Christian?

Are you a Christian because you grew up in the church? No. Are you a Christian because you helped put on the Christmas pageant at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church?

No. Are you a Christian because you're planning on voting for the right candidates next month? You know, the Christian candidates, whichever ones those are.

No. Are you a Christian because you serve on the missions team? No. No. Because you're a church member and you're here on Sunday morning?

[15 : 15] No. Because you were baptized? No. Because you read the holiness of God by R.C. Sproul and you now know the correct way to think? No.

Verse 28. You'll see this on page 8 of your worship guide.

Human beings are comfortable with what is outward, visible, material, and superficial. What matters to God is a deep, inward, secret work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Paul here is saying, look, it's great that you've been circumcised on the outside. But the real question is, are you circumcised on the inside?

In fact, that's what Britt read for us from Deuteronomy chapter 10. Through Moses, God says to his people, circumcise the foreskins of your hearts. He's saying, what's true of the sign, let it be true in reality.

[16 : 29] We might say, be baptized in your hearts. As baptism represents being part of God's people, united to Christ, washed clean of our sins, and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Let that be true of your life as well. Baptism by itself is of no help. I've told you that Romans is the fifth gospel because what it teaches, Jesus taught first.

Jesus tells us in Matthew chapter 7, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

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? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

[17 : 33] We might say this. On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not attend worship every Sunday morning? Lord, Lord, did we not embrace the right doctrines and understand that reformed theology is what our church subscribes to?

Lord, Lord, were we not busy with many religious activities? Yes. But was there a transformation of your heart and mind and life?

Did you love the Lord Jesus Christ with your soul and mind and strength? Paul's point in these verses is very simple.

Religious activity, religious signs, and religious symbols will not save. Religious activity, religious signs, religious symbols will not save.

Now, if those things don't save, and by the way, I'm not saying those things aren't important. They don't matter. Paul's not saying circumcision doesn't matter. In fact, he says, verse 25, circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law.

[18 : 53] We might say the same thing about wedding rings. Wedding rings are, in fact, of great value if what they represent is true. They're very helpful.

There's a reason we use them in our culture. There's a reason we talk about the ring check. It's extremely helpful if you're single to know whether someone's taken or not.

It's a value if it represents what's real. It's a value to the person wearing it. They look at it and they remember, I made promises until death do we part. Right?

But it's only of value if it represents what's true. What does matter in this situation? What is Paul commending to these folks in these churches?

Well, he tells us, it is the work of God's Spirit transforming the entire person. What matters is the work of God's Spirit transforming the entire person.

[20 : 00] That's what he tells us in verse 29. He says, And when he says Spirit versus letter here, the letter, he's talking about the Old Testament law that was given to God's people.

And what he's saying is that the law is good, right? The law cannot change your heart. Man, it's great. We'll talk about this next week.

It's great that you are given the Old Testament. You have access to God's Word. It is going to show you the way to walk in this world. But it cannot change you.

You know what can change you? The Spirit. The Holy Spirit, God's Spirit at work being sent by Jesus as he sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty is what brings new life into a Christian.

The law can show your heart. It can reveal your heart. It cannot change your heart. Only the Spirit of the living God can do that.

[21 : 14] And so what's Paul talking about here in verse 29? He's speaking of the obedience that comes from a transformed heart. He's talking about someone that we hear about in Ephesians chapter 2.

Someone who was spiritually dead who's been brought to spiritual life. And what does that person do? Ephesians chapter 2, verses 8 and 9. They do the good works that God has prepared beforehand.

They're changed by the Spirit, not by the letter. Verse 29, he tells us. This is the end. I didn't read this part. His praise is not from man, but from God.

How do we know that this person is being transformed and changed by the Spirit rather than relying on religious activity and ritual and sign? Well, because this person cares about what God thinks more than what man thinks.

This person's eyes are set on heaven. Remember, we talked about that in chapter 1. They are looking for God to say, well done and good and faithful servant.

[22 : 26] They're not looking for man to say that. They care about God's opinion more than anyone else. That's what Paul is telling them here.

Stop relying. Stop trusting in circumcision. That's not what's going to save you. That's not what's going to transform you.

In the summer of 2007, before my freshman year of college, I went through this series of lectures in the book of Ephesians by a scholar named Bill Wilder.

And I had this kind of spiral notebook in which I took notes from it. And I have no idea where that notebook is today. And I really don't remember most of what I listened to because 2007 was a long time ago. But I do remember this.

That as he taught about Ephesians chapter 1, he spent a special focus on verses 19 and 20. And in verses 19 and 20, Paul says this, look, there's a power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

[23 : 29] There's a resurrection power. If you're a Christian, that same power is at work in you. There is a coming back from the dead sort of power.

And in fact, that's the kind of power that's necessary. Because in Ephesians chapter 2, Paul says, look, you're so spiritually dead, you can't give yourself life.

Now, I was a very zealous 18-year-old. And so I showed up to my freshman year of college, trying out these different Christian ministries. And I don't recommend doing this. But I met with a woman who was leading InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at my college.

And I asked her this, because I had just listened to this sermon series on Ephesians. I said, is the same power that raised Christ from the dead at work in your community?

Is that what I'm going to find in InterVarsity? Because I just listened to this man talking, and he said, that's what the church should be. It should be this place where we see resurrection power at work, raising people from spiritual death to spiritual life.

[24 : 31] And I could tell that this woman had never had an 18-year-old ask her that before. And I don't recommend dropping that. It is an intense question.

It's also a clarifying question. It's a clarifying question. What are we doing here? What are we doing? When we gather on Sunday morning, are we playing religious games?

Are we going through religious rituals? Or are we worshiping the living God? What are we doing? Why are you here?

It's a question, maybe not for the leader of InterVarsity, but it is a question for the Christian. When you look at your life, what do you see? Do you see merely religious activity?

Or do you see a resurrection power at work? Is the power that raised Christ from the dead at work in you? Is that power taking you from death to life?

[25 : 39] Is your heart of stone turning to a heart of flesh? Do you have a new ability to say no to sin and yes to godliness? Do you have a hunger that's growing for God and his ways?

Not that you're perfect, right? Not that we as a church have it all figured out, but this is a place where people are being transformed. This is a place where the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is at work in us.

Is this a place, is your life a place where you're being changed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ? Are you having a life that's characterized by growing in holiness and obedience?

Or can you tell that your heart and your mind and your life, little by little, step by step, are changing? That is a matter of the heart, not of the letter, but by the spirit.

That is someone who is living not for praise from man, but from God. Is that you? Paul tells us that's what it means to be a Christian.

[26 : 55] Yes. Showing up to church is of value if you're following after Christ. Serving on the missions team is of great value if you're following after Christ.

Helping, studying in God's word is of some value, great value, as we'll see next week, if you're following Christ.

If you're feeling troubled by all this, great. Conviction is the first step.

Conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit, right? What does it mean to be changed by the spirit and not by the letter? The Jews that were presuming on circumcision when they heard this, they weren't convicted, they were angry.

Right? Those without the Holy Spirit don't get convicted. Their hearts are hard. If you're troubled by that, this, that's good news.

[28 : 10] That's God's spirit at work. That's the spirit of the living God turning hearts of stone to hearts of flesh. Maybe you're not troubled by this, you're overwhelmed by it.

And you ask yourself, how can this be true if Jesus tells us in Matthew 11, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. This doesn't sound like an easy yoke or a light burden. This sounds pretty daunting.

I'm supposed to have this transformation of heart and mind and life and you're telling me that this religious activity that I've been involved in is not enough and it sounds like from all of this that I really just want to go home and take a nap.

The good news is that it's not the letter at work and it's not you at work.

[29 : 16] It's the spirit of the living God. Jesus has this encounter in John chapter 3 with a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus is this religious leader of the Jews.

He certainly places a high value on circumcision. And yet he also knows that Jesus is saying something that's very true. He recognizes that he's missing something and so he has this late night meeting with Jesus so he can not be seen by anyone because it would be scandalous, right, for him to be talking to someone who opposes the Jewish religious leadership.

He says, Jesus, what is going on here? We know that you're saying things that are true. And Jesus says this, truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom.

of God. Does this feel overwhelming? It's good because you can't do it. Unless you are born of water and the spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

The point that the Holy Spirit, that the resurrection power needs to be at work is that the Holy Spirit, the resurrection power, needs to be at work. What does it take for there to be a power that raised Jesus from the dead at work in us?

[30 : 37] It means that the power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in us. It's not a coincidence that immediately after his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus says this, for God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

This is the gospel. The gospel is recognizing I must change and I cannot change myself. I must change and I cannot change myself.

There must be a resurrection power at work. There must be something so powerful that it raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Christian, that is the power that's at work in you. We rely on that, not on religious signs and symbols and activities.

Remember, circumcision is an outward sign of an inward reality. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward reality. What is that inward reality? Have you ever seen someone baptize themselves?

[32 : 01] No. It's an outside power acting upon us. And so what is our hope? It's that God would do that very thing. And so that's what we're going to sing now.

Not that we would change our hearts, no. Change my heart, oh God. Make it ever true. Change my heart, oh God. May I be like you.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you for your word that is living and active. We thank you that as we know we must change and that we cannot change ourselves, that your Holy Spirit is at work in your children.

We ask that that would be true of us this morning, that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead would be at work in us, changing our hearts and our minds and our lives. We thank you that we don't worry this morning about whether we've earned or deserved these things.

We know that we haven't and so we ask for them simply in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn. Thank you.

[33 : 35] Change my heart, oh my heart, may I be like you. You are the powder, I am the clay.

Mold me and make me, this is what I pray. Change my heart, oh God, make it ever true.

Change my heart, oh God, may I be like you. You are the powder, I am the clay.

Mold me and make me, this is what I pray. Change my heart, oh God, may I be like you.

Make it ever true. Change my heart, oh God. May I be like you.

[35 : 04] Change my heart, oh God. Make it ever true. Change my heart, oh God.

May I be like you. Change my heart, oh God. Change my heart, oh God. Time together with a benediction.

And a benediction is...