Driving to preschool one morning, a doctor had left her stethoscope on the car seat. Her little girl picked it up and began playing with it.

“Be still, my heart,” thought the doctor. My daughter wants to follow in my footsteps and be a doctor!

Just then the child spoke into the instrument: "Welcome to McDonald's. May I take your order?"

While this is not a sermon about medicine or doctoring, a doctor would be needed for a procedure addressed in today’s sermon text!

We’re several weeks into our Sunday morning sermon series on the New Testament book of Romans. God, through the Apostle Paul, communicated the great biblical doctrines we’re studying as we work our way through this magnificent part of God’s Holy Word. I’ve entitled the study Christianity Explored because this is Paul’s longest New Testament letter, and it is chock full of doctrine.

Today, we wrap up our study of Romans Chapter 2. Last Sunday, we left off our study with verse 16. As we begin with verse 17 today, we note that Paul is specifically addressing the Jewish Christians in the fellowship of the church in Rome. His admonishment can easily be applied to us here and now; after all, this is God’s Word to the Church, and it is therefore timeless in its applicability.

So, open your Bibles, if you’re not already ready, and let us tune our ears, and give attention to the spoken Word of Almighty God, and do so while standing if you’re able.

Romans 2:17-29:
“Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, 18 and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, 19 and are confident 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 babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. 21 You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? 22 You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? 23 You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? 24 For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” as it is written.

25 For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. 26 Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? 27 And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; 29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and
circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.”

I’ve divided this passage into 4 brief points, each beginning with the letters “pr.”

- **Privileges** (verses 17-20);
- **Pretenses** (problems) (verses 21-24);
- **A Practice** (verses 25-29);
- **Praise** (verse 29).

It’s tempting for us to think Paul was only addressing “other people” here in Romans Chapter 2. But, since verse 18 of Romans Chapter 1, Paul has been addressing all people. Not a one of us among the human race, left to our own devices, can truthfully believe, say or think that we are righteous, holy people. We come into this life at war with God. We are self-focused and concerned only for our own survival or advancement. And, it’s only in the depth of our wickedness and inability to help ourselves God stoops to lift us out of the cesspool of our sin and make us new creatures in Christ. We are wholly unable to help ourselves; to think that we can, even slightly, robs God of some of His glory. Only Jesus can save us from a life of purposelessness now, and an eternity in the torture of hell forever.

With verse 17, Paul now addresses the Jews specifically. **They were the privileged “religious” people of Paul’s day.** The Jews, as a people, were God’s favored ones. He gave them the law and instructed them in His law. As such, their lives were to be different from those around them who were not favored by God. Because of God’s favor, Jews were a privileged people, equipped by God with everything they would possibly need to live lives to His glory.

Paul does not here say that it was wrong to be a Jew. Instead, he diagnosed the attitude toward the Jews’ nationality and morality as the problem. They were relying on their nationality and morality, “making what is moral (good things) into a system of salvation.” (Keller, 54)

**From verses 21–24, Paul asks a series of questions to reveal the Jewish spiritual hypocrisy - their pretenses.** Were they practicing what they preached? As teachers of God’s Word, were they teaching themselves? Did they preach against stealing, understanding that they, too, were thieves? In condemning adultery, did they make sure they weren’t guilty of committing adultery? As those who hated idols, were they profiting from temple worship? Were they boasting in the law, realizing that they broke it, even in the slightest of ways?

We should ask ourselves the same questions and determine our own answers. We are in a similar danger of relying upon our morality. We must realize Paul’s words here also address the Church. Substitute the word “Christian” for the word “Jew” in verse 17 – “…you are called a (Christian), and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, knowing His will…approving things that are excellent…” Or, you can replace the word “Jew” with “Protestant,” or even a specific denomination, “Presbyterian,” for instance.
How do you practice what you preach? Are there any areas of your life where you are failing to practice what you preach? If so, how will you change? Are you developing relationships and friendships within the body of this congregation? Are you regularly in contact with other believers to help you (and you them)? If not, why not? There are no good reasons not to.

With verses 25-29, Paul gets practical with his Jewish audience. He uses the practice that best marked out Jews as different from others. In so doing, Paul points out how relying upon it for eternal benefit is a losing battle. I refer to circumcision.

In the Old Testament, circumcision was the sign that God gave to the people of His covenant promise. When God called Abraham out of Mesopotamian paganism, He promised to be Abraham’s God and to make him the father of a great nation. What God required of Abraham in the covenant was circumcision, which was the cutting off of the foreskin of the male reproductive organ. Throughout the Old Testament the sign of the covenant, circumcision, was given to adult males as well as their infant male children from the time they were 8 days of age.

The problem wasn’t giving or having a sign of being in relationship with God. From New Testament days to the present, that sign is no longer circumcision; it is water baptism. Baptism signifies the washing away of sin, and is a New Testament sign of being included in the fellowship of God’s Church. Just as the Old Testament people of God had the sign of being in covenant with God (circumcision) placed upon their infant children, so the New Testament people of God continue to have the sign of being in covenant with God (baptism) placed upon their infant children. Only now, the sign is more inclusive – it is placed upon both male and female believing adults and their infant children.

Among the passages teaching this is Peter’s sermon in Acts Chapter 2. He concludes that sermon in Acts 2:38 & 39 this way, “Repent, and let ever one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” When God gives his covenant promises, He gives them to those who receive them and to their children.

As we did earlier in this message, it is helpful to substitute the word “circumcision” in these verses with other words to help understand their applicability today. “So what if you have been baptized? So what if you are a church member? This only counts for anything if there has been a real change in your life, if your heart has been truly affected. Don’t you know that you are not a Christian if you are only one externally that real Christianity is not about having confidence in external things? No, a Christian is someone who is a Christian inside; what matters is inner baptism, a heart-membership of God’s people. And this is a supernatural work; it is not a human one. (Keller, 60)

Let’s look again at verses 28 & 29 – “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; 29 but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter;”
When God looks at us, He looks on our hearts. This was evident in I Samuel Chapter 16 as Samuel was looking for the man who would be anointed king over Israel. In I Samuel 16:7b, God said these words to Samuel as he came to examine Jesse’s sons: ‘...the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’”

Our hearts must be changed from the hearts we were born with. The prophet Ezekiel puts this in terms that shed light upon today’s text. In Ezekiel Chapter 36, we read of a covenant renewal ceremony whereby God restored His sinning people to Himself. They had profaned God’s name before the heathen nations – a reference made by verse 24 of today’s text in Romans Chapter 2, which was originally spoken by God through His prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 52:5) – “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,”

According to Ezekiel, God said these words (Ezekiel 36:22-23) “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. And I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord...when I am hallowed in you before their eyes.”

And how would God accomplish this? Verses 24-27 of Ezekiel 36 answer that question. “For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean: I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statues, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”

This sprinkled clean water of Ezekiel Chapter 36 symbolized the washing away of the sins of the people. In like manner, we receive the sprinkled waters of baptism in the New Testament dispensation, which symbolizes the cleansing of our sins.

To affect this circumcision of the heart that was needed to be right with God, Paul reveals it is a work of God in his letter to the Colossian church (Colossians 2:11), “In Him (Jesus) you were...circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ...”

In the very next verse of Colossians Chapter 2, Paul shifts from the Old Testament sign of God’s covenant to the New Testament one when he writes, “Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God...” “One has to be a true Jew which, as Paul points out in today’s passage, is not a matter of external criteria, but of conduct which flows from spiritual changes within.” (Boice, 259)

The fourth ‘p’ is “praise from God” as we read in verse 29. As we undergo the work of salvation in our spirits by the Holy Spirit, we become objects of God’s praise, not His condemnation. On the cross, Jesus took all the punishment of our sins, and we received in return His righteousness. Practice and preach that message, dear ones!