

Paul takes up the status of the Jews compared to those who had not the benefit of the revelation God had given the Jews. Paul is faithfully hard on his countrymen here. But he loved his people dearly as we will see in chapters 9-11 and 15. Having been given the law through Moses the Jews found themselves totally unable to keep it. Having it and keeping it perfectly would be an achievement to boast of. But history shows that they heard the Ten Commandments spoken to them audibly from the mountain and the voice was so fearsome they pled with Moses to stand between them and Jehovah, Exodus 20. So he did and God called him up into the mountain. He was there forty days. They grew impatient and thinking Moses was dead they sought another less dangerous God, an idol, to worship. The Law was broken even before the stone tablets it was written on reached the camp.

Before giving the Law God had made them an offer no reasonable person could turn down if he understood it. Their response was utterly senseless. They either had become totally ignorant of God's covenant with Abraham or totally self absorbed and self confident, or all of these.

Hebrews 4:2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

This despite the events that they had just experienced, marvelous, miraculous interventions of Jehovah in Egypt: in ten plagues, the Passover, the pillar of fire, crossing the Red Sea dry shod, God's provisions in the wilderness those three months following, Marah's waters made sweet, the Manna, the restful oasis, the water from the rock, the deliverance from Amalek's cowardly attack, the voice of Jehovah from Mount Sinai.

What was Jehovah's offer they spurned?

Exodus 19:3 And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; 4 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. 5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: 6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. 7 And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him.

What was **His covenant**? This covenant was made 400 years before the Exodus or the giving of the Law to Moses. It was unilateral by God to Abram. Grace. Abram was not required to do anything to earn it or maintain it. Merely believe and accept it and "keep it."

Jehovah instituted circumcision, commanding Abraham to do so as a sign of his accepting the promises and as a token and reminder of the covenant God had made with him. Receiving this mark a man showed that he valued the covenant. He was to live daily by faith in the reality of the promises he had been given. His descendants and servants received the same mark and promises to keep in mind.

Genesis 17:10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. 13 He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.

This mark in a very personal and private body part was a daily reminder to every male when he passed his water. "Oh yes, I am under God's covenant of promise!" Today this concept is still rather difficult for us to relate to in "polite society" or mixed company, but this was God's choice of a sign for those who received His covenant with Abraham. It was a humbling sign for it symbolically cut off the male organ, naturally prized by a man as his masculine power and prowess to procreate himself. Paul refers to this side of it in Chapter 4.

But back to the covenant. If the people had been aware of the no-strings-attached nature of God's covenant with Abram (still in effect today) they should have rejected any thought of linking that covenant to their consequent obedience. God was testing them. He knew their hearts. Hadn't they discovered anything about their own hearts in their repeated failures to trust God and His covenant with their father Abraham? Jehovah had preserved them as a separate people as a nation enslaved by the Egyptian tyrant and had delivered them with miraculous mighty power from Egypt and had shepherded and provided for them three months through the wilderness. Why didn't they fall on their faces and cry out for mercy, confessing their lack of faith and human ability to **obey anything** He commanded?. They didn't. They really didn't know Jehovah. They boldly, or was it fearfully, proclaimed their readiness to DO. To "DO ALL." In saying this they took themselves out from the covenant of grace through faith given to them in Abraham and put themselves under a covenant of obedience. They

continued to keep the rite of circumcision (with lapses and reminders down through the centuries) for it was included in the Law given through Moses. But they ignored the promise it was given to recall to mind. They would DO what this mighty God required. Most people seek to take the same ground with God today, and deceived and deceiving teachers are only too ready to accommodate them on their path to failure and ultimately hell. Israel quickly showed their true colors, their unregenerate hearts, first failing to keep the Law, then neglecting it, then ignoring it. What was the point in trying to keep a Law they had learned from experience they couldn't keep. Still there was no repentance as a nation, although individuals of faith did repent and walk with God from time to time. Their ungodliness has made their outward sign of circumcision to be uncircumcision before God and men.

And meanwhile Paul states Gentiles, if they by nature should actually fulfill the law, could well rightly stand in judgement on the Jews who having the law do not keep it. (That remark was bound to inflame the Jews against Paul.) It was a hypothetical but true statement, but there were no Gentiles going to succeed either. Man looks on the outward appearance but God looks upon the heart, 1Samuel 16:7, 2Corinthians 10:7. The Pharisees in Jesus' time were into outward appearances. Hypocrites. But Jesus exposed their wickedness so they had Him crucified. Later Saul of Tarsus was a leader among them. But now, saved by grace and renamed Paul, he demonstrates the worthless thinking of the Jews.

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

The concept of circumcision of the heart is not new here. It is mentioned in over 70 passages in scripture, over half of these in the New Testament.

Deuteronomy 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.

30:6 And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

Jeremiah 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

Philippians 3:3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Colossians 2:11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the

circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

God allowed all of this history to be experienced by Israel so He could show them His power, grace and mercy. He demonstrated to all mankind by the history and experience of this most favored nation the total inability of man to obey God on his own.

Galatians 3:24 (JND) So that the law has been our tutor up to Christ, that we might be justified on the principle of faith.

Have we learned?

Paul anticipates a final challenging question. If the commands and rituals of the Law but serve to condemn those who assay to live under them one might ask what advantage is it to be a Jew. What profit to be a circumcised Jew. He honestly responds "Much every way." They had committed to them the oracles of God. The Old Testament, and particularly the Law, is the God given, God spoken, God inspired, Word of God. They had access as no other nation then on earth. If some do not believe, do not chose to have faith, their decision doesn't annul the promises and revelations God made to faith to be received by faith. Some might reason (*confused thinking alert!*) God's righteousness shines out the more gloriously because of the contrast of my unrighteousness. He won't judge me because my failures, my unrighteousness acts, my lies make Him look good. Huh? He doesn't need my unrighteousness to make Him look good. God IS Good! Paul cites the same faulty human reasoning in Chapter 6, "shall we sin that grace may abound? Far be the thought!" Pride doesn't easily give up its struggle to exalt itself, justify itself and to remain in control. God's righteous vengeance upon sin will not be deterred by such foolish reasoning.. He **will** judge the world! Righteously! Some accused Paul of saying "let us do evil that good may come." He affirms God's just damnation of any who reason thus. [Who would be making such an assumption or accusation about Paul's teaching? What in his teaching would lead men to say that he taught that?]

But having reached the end of the prosecution witnesses he sums up the findings, gives the verdict next week. He then presents The Way out. But read ahead, for next week may never come for you and you will remain lost in your sins, forever.

By Ron Canner August 1, 2007