

Securely Insecure

(Romans 2:17-29)

(preached 3/8/20; Pine Grove BC Sun AM)

Introduction

With the girls getting ready for college, I have been reading about what job markets and professions will likely grow over the next decade.

Medicine and technology lead the way in most studies followed by the finance and sales.

But one industry that has been steadily growing and will continue to grow in the security industry.

Now, security is a broad term but it would include things like alarm systems, cyber security, background screening, and video surveillance.

And needless to say, people are very interested in security these days.

This new coronavirus COVID 19 is a great example of how insecure people feel.

Schools are shutting down.

Airports are shutting down.

Entire nations are closing off their borders.

All in hopes of keeping people safe and secure, despite the fact that the flu kills way more people each year than this virus.

But this is the norm these days in terms of security.

Last year, the security industry generated 85 billion dollars in revenue, and that is expected to double in the next 10 years.

In other words, people don't mind paying for things that make them feel more secure.

The irony is that there is no security in this world.

For those of you with alarm systems and locks on your doors, we understand that even those things provide limited security.

People can still enter your house, steal your car, and hack into your computer.

In fallen world, complete security is impossible, yet that doesn't prevent people from trying.

But physical security is not the only security that people seek.

Folks also want spiritual security.

They want have security in what happens after death.

So people do all sorts of things to get that security.

Some create a world where God doesn't exist.

In their minds, if there is no God, then there is no judgment to come.

We call these people atheists, and their security is in the fact that God is not real.

Some create a world where they can't know if there is a God or not.

We call these people agnostics, and their security is in their ignorance of God.

Some create a world where God is pleased by our good works.

We call these people religious, and their security is in their ability to do more good than bad.

And all of those folks create all of those defenses to give them spiritual security because this is what the sinful nature craves.

And many people are in world today are holding on to what I call false spiritual securities.

In fact, there are many people who got up and went to church today who are holding on to false spiritual securities in the form of church membership or church attendance or baptism or a card they signed or a talk they had with a preacher.

This the tragedy of seeking spiritual security in a fallen world, and it is a tragedy that the Jewish people mastered.

And that false spiritual security is what the Lord seeks to destroy through the words of Paul in Romans 2 today.

For the past few weeks, we have been looking at the guilt of the Jews in Romans 2.

Though they had incredible privilege as a nation that was chosen by God and protected by God and forgiven by God, that privilege was not enough to render them guiltless before God.

And Paul, a former Jew, pulls no punches as he lays out their guilt in Romans 2.

Now Paul has already explained the guilt of Gentiles.

The Gentiles are guilty and deserving of God's wrath because they rejected the evidence that God's existence in creation.

Instead of acknowledging God, they eventually made up a god in their own image based upon their own foolish reasoning.

They worshipped that idol instead of God, so God gave the Gentiles over to their own foolishness and sin.

And because of that rejection, God's wrath is being slowly poured out on Gentiles but an unleashing of His wrath is coming.

However, the Jew was equally guilty.

Though the Jew had been exposed to more of God's works and truth and person, that exposure did not exempt the Jew from judgment.

In fact, the Jew was more accountable because of what he knew, and God's wrath was coming to him in the same way it was coming to the Gentile because there is no partiality with God.

But today in the last section of Romans 2, Paul desires to leave no doubt in the Jewish mind about their guilt before God.

So he goes after the 3 spiritual securities that every Jew had.

He goes after their national identity, their moral expertise, and their external symbols.

Now before we begin, why have I spent so much time on Jewish guilt?

Why have we had we had 4 sermons of the guilt of Jews when we are Gentiles?

And the reason is simple.

Church-going southern Americans have much in common with the Jews.

Not only have they been exposed to God's truth and God's ways since childbirth, many of them think their identity or family will get them a free pass into heaven.

Many of them think that their excellent moralist and good man or good woman nature will gain favor with God.

And many think that their religious symbols will protect them in death.

But the reality is that the Jew and the church member may find themselves near to God's truth on earth but far from God in eternity.

And what a scary thought that is, so let's listen to this final section of Romans 2 where we discover that 3 apparent spiritual securities are actually insecurities..

We will begin in the first few words of verse 17..

I. The Insecurity of National Identity (17a)

Look at verse 17..

17 But if you bear the name “Jew”

The descendants of Abraham go by a number of names.

At times, the Bible calls them the Hebrews which is a primarily a reference to the language they spoke.

At times, the Bible calls them Israelites or the people of Israel, and that is primarily a reference to their land.

At times, the Bible calls them Jews and that is primarily a reference to their nationality.

And the Jews were proud of each of those realities.

They bore the name “Jew” with great pride.

It was their national identity.

Now the word Jews was derived from Judah, who was one of the 12 sons of Jacob, the grandson of Abraham.

And Judah’s name meant praise.

So how does the whole race end up bearing the name of just one of the tribes of Abraham?

Well, the 12 tribes of Israel divided after the reign of Solomon into a northern a southern kingdom.

The northern kingdom was made of 10 tribes, while the southern kingdom was made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

The northern kingdom, collectively called Israel, was carried off by the Assyrians in 722 BC, while the southern kingdom, collectively called Judah, survived until 586 BC.

IT was then carried off into exile in Babylon, and it during this exile in Babylon that this group of people began to call themselves Jews.

So though the name Jew is derived from one tribe, it came to represent all the nation.

And by the time that Paul writes to the Roman church in this letter, Jew was the name to refer to the descendants of Abraham.

It was a derogatory term at all.

It was a term of pride for the Jews.

They were God's people.

They were his chosen nation.

They were the apple of his eye.

In the first century, Jews saw their Jewishness as a mark of superiority in the world.

They were untouchable.

They were extra special.

A lot of people use titles to promote their supposed superiority today.

Even national identities can be used in the same way, and the Jews certainly had that mentality.

And the end result was nation of people who did have incredible access to God but used that access as an excuse for disobedience.

In fact listen to Micah describe the attitude of the Jews in the OT.

Micah 3:11..

***Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe,
Her priests instruct for a price
And her prophets divine for money.
Yet they lean on the Lord saying,***

***“Is not the Lord in our midst?
Calamity will not come upon us.”***

Israel’s leaders were being bribed and led astray by their own greed, yet they thought that they would escape because of who they were.

The leaders were ‘leaning’ on the Lord, which means they were putting pressure on Him to let them off their hook because He was their God.

They were depending on their nationality to provoke God to mercy and grace.

Their security was their identity as Jews.

Sadly, they were dead wrong about that.

And many in the church today are dead wrong about their identity getting them into heaven.

Heaven is not reserved for Americans or Baptists or Southerners or Republicans or any other category or title that a person may wear.

Heaven is for people of faith, regardless of their identity or nationality or voting preference.

You will not slide into heaven based upon your skin color, your family name, your supposed morality or the country in which you were born.

And neither would the Jews based on the fact that they were simply called Jews.

National identity does not provide spiritual security, and anyone who thinks so is severely self-deceived.

If the Jews had any hope of heaven, it wasn't found in his family heritage.

But it also wasn't found in his moral expertise.

Look at the rest of verse 17..

II. The Insecurity of Moral Expertise (17b-24)

17 But if you bear the name “Jew” and rely [p]upon the Law and boast in God,

The Jews not only relied on their national identity to gain entrance to heaven, they also relied upon their relationship to the Law.

Now we have seen this before in verses 1-16, but the Law of God was simply the commands of the OT.

It would include the 10 commandments but also various other moral and civil laws that God gave to Israel over the years.

Now understand, we are grateful to the Jews in general for receiving that law and writing down that law and passing down that law through generations.

We are grateful that they preserved the law with such care and accuracy.

Sadly, the Jews took the privilege of receiving the Law and let it go to their heads.

Instead of becoming experts at how to live by the Law, they became experts at how to judge everyone by the law.

And they boasted in their expertise with the Law but failed to obey it with their lives.

Look at the ways that the Jews boasted in the Law..

Verse 18..

18 and know His will and [q]approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law,

The Jews boasted that the Law enabled them to know the will of God, and it did.

The Law revealed what was pleasing God.

It revealed God's will for man.

So the Jew knew the will of God, but sadly, he didn't do the will of God.

On top of knowing God's will, the Jew was also equipped with to approve or disprove what was pleasing to God.

Paul says that the Jew was able to approve the things that are essential.

In other words, the Jew could make righteous judgments.

The Jew could also teach others about the Lord.

Look at verse 19..

19 and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, 20 a [r]corrector of the foolish, a teacher of [s]the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth,

Long story short, having the Law put the Jews at a great advantage in the world.

It is like being the only expert on a certain subject in the world.

Not only are you the only one who knows how to do it, you are the only one who can teach it to others.

And you will either use that privilege to help others or you will exploit that privilege to take advantage of others.

The Jews allowed that privilege to inflate their heads and puff out their egos..

Verse 19 says that they were confident that they were a guide to the blind and a light to those in darkness.

Verse 20 says that they were confident that they were a corrector of the foolish and a teacher of the immature.

And why were they confident?

Middle of verse 20..

They had the law.

Now in theory, they could make those claims.

The Word of God is a light to those in darkness.

It is a guide to those blinded by sin.

It is a corrector of foolish people.

It is a teacher of the immature.

Look at Psalm 19:7-8.

***7 The law of the Lord is [d]perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the
simple.***

8

***The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening
the eyes.***

9

***The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous
altogether.***

In theory, the Jews could do all those things with the Law of God.

It is that powerful and helpful.

Look, I have a toolbox in the shed behind the parsonage.

It is filled with all sorts of tools.

In theory, I could fix and build all sorts of things.

In theory, I could have the resources to build a house and teach a class on construction.

In theory, I could boast in all the tools I have.

But if I don't use them, they just sit in that toolbox and collect dust.

The Jews were confident that they had the truth, but their practice of the truth was very much lacking...

Verse 21..

21 you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who [t]preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? 22 You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols,

do you rob temples? 23 You who boast [ujin the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?

The bottom line is that the Jew had the law but broke it regularly.

They told others not to steal while stealing themselves.

They told others to not commit adultery while committing adultery themselves.

They told others to avoid idols but they would go into pagan temples, take their gold and silver idols and sell them for money.

It is like the cop who is sworn to uphold the law but breaks it in his personal life.

It is like the judge who is called to dispense justice but acts unjustly in their personal life.

This is high handed hypocrisy.

This Jewish hypocrisy is what Jesus was addressing in Matthew 23..

1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, 2 saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; 3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according

***to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.
4 They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's
shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move
them with so much as a finger.***

And the Jews hated Jesus for pointing this hypocrisy out.

In fact, this is why they wanted him dead.

They couldn't stand for someone to point out the inconsistency of their lives, and Jesus did it regularly.

And now Paul is reminding the Jews of their hypocrisy, and here is the worst part of it all..

***24 For "the name of God is blasphemed among the
Gentiles because of you," just as it is written.***

Though the Jews felt superior to the Gentiles because they had the law.

And though they were confident they could teach the ignorant Gentiles the truth of the law, Paul reminds the Jew that all they are teaching the Gentiles is how to be a hypocrite.

They were teaching the Gentile how to blaspheme God by saying one thing and doing the other.

And Paul was exactly right.

Sadly, hypocrisy hasn't disappeared in the people of God.

There are people in churches lecturing others on how to please God while living lives that are totally displeasing to God.

There are men standing in pulpits talking about the dangers of greed while stealing from the church.

There are Sunday School teachers warning their students of the danger of anger and impatience while losing their temper daily.

There are believers in churches telling their neighbors about the danger of sexual immorality while committing adultery themselves.

And we wonder why the church is shrinking and losing its influence...

Maybe it is because the people in the church knows the truth but practice just the opposite.

Ultimately, Paul wants to make it clear that you can be an expert on how to live but if you aren't practicing the morality you preach, you are living a lie.

And your security in knowing the truth is not enough to save you in the day of wrath.

It is possible to be an expert in knowing what to do to please God while living a life that is not pleasing to God.

The Jews had no security in their national identity and not security in their moral expertise.

And there is one more insecurity for Paul to point out in verses 25-29..

III. The Insecurity of External Symbols (25-29)

Verse 25..

25 For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice [v]the Law; but if you are a transgressor [w]of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.

The Jews circumcised their children on the 8th day after birth.

Even though it was essentially a private symbol, it was a symbol of membership in the Jewish community.

It went all the way back to Genesis 17, where God commanded Abraham to circumcise Isaac.

And Jews had been faithful to do it throughout all their generations.

But now Paul is reminding them that circumcision is of no value if you don't keep the law.

In other words, don't think that your outward symbol of Jewishness is going to give you a pass with God.

In fact, verse 25 says that circumcision is of no value if a Jew is a known transgressor of the Law.

But it get worse..

Verse 26..

26 So if the [x]uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? 27 And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who [y]though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a transgressor [z]of the Law?

Not only is the disobedient circumcised Jew not pleasing to God, the uncircumcised obedient Gentile is pleasing to God.

Man, talk about a shocking statement for any Jew to hear.

Here they are with a symbol of belonging to God, yet being told that they are not pleasing to God.

On top of that, here is the Gentile with no symbol of belonging to God, yet being told that he is pleasing to God.

And then here is the punchline..

Verse 28..

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 which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Now look, this is not a ground breaking truth about God.

In the OT, God it made it clear that he judges people not on outward appearance but on inward truth.

1 Samuel 16:7.

7 But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for [b]God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

Paul simply repeats that truth right here in Romans 2, but it would send shockwaves through the Jewish mind.

And why is that?

Because every Jew thought circumcision was his ticket to heaven.

So to hear that circumcision was of no value to God would enrage Jewish ears, while destroying their security of being pleasing to God.

Now we may sit here as Gentiles and wonder what's the fuss, but let me transfer this conversation to us.

In years past, I used to go visit folks in their homes to share the gospel.

Most of the people we visited were referred to us by family or friends.

And I would go in and ask people if they had a background in the church.

Many would say yes, even though they hadn't been in years and certainly weren't living lives pleasing to the Lord.

And then I would ask this..

Why should God let you into heaven?

And very frequently I would hear this answer.

Well, I baptized in this church when I was a kid.

To which I would reply.

Well, baptism is no guarantee of heaven.

And I could often watch as the color left their faces in shock.

Sometimes, I could watch as faces filled with a lot of blood and turned very red with anger at such a statement.

You see people love their religious symbols.

Jews loved the symbol of circumcision because it was a supposed symbolic reminder that they were right with God.

And people today love baptism because it is a supposed symbolic reminder that they are right with God.

Now look, circumcision and baptism are good things.

In fact, each was commanded by God in their age, but neither are guarantees of being right with God.

Look, I love the symbol of the cross but just because I put it on a necklace and wear it around my neck doesn't mean that I am right with God.

Just because I hang it from my rear view mirror doesn't mean that I will head straight to heaven if I die in an accident.

The same could be said for all sorts of religious symbols.

Though none are wrong.

None are neither a guarantee of being right with God.

The story is told of a boxer who used to bow in his corner before every match and make a cross on his chest.

At the beginning of one match, one announcer asked the another announcer..

“Do you think it helps him make that cross on his chest before every match?”

The other announcer said...

“It helps as long as he has a good punch to go with it.”

But this is the fallen nature of man.

He looks for security in outward symbols or signs.

The Jew was no different, but Paul wants the Jew to know that circumcision offers no security, and neither does his national identity or his expertise in the law of God.

Conclusion

So what does this mean for all of us?

#1 - Security isn't found in closeness to God.

If anybody in world history was close to God, it was the Jewish people.

Yet for all their closeness to God, many died and will remain far from God for all eternity.

The same is true in the church age.

There have been many in the vicinity of God in the church.

They have heard his truth sung and taught and preached, but they too will die and be far from God for all eternity.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that being near to God is the same as being right with God.

To be right with God, you must be right with his Son.

If you don't honor the Son, you don't honor the Father.

No matter how close you may think you are to God, you will never be right with Him until you turn from your sin and put your trust in Christ alone.

And that leads to principle #2..

#2 - Security is found inwardly not outwardly.

Look back at verse 29...

29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

You could change the word Jew to true believer because that is who Paul is talking about here.

And who is the true believer?

Who is the one that has total security?

He is the one whose heart is right by the Spirit.

In other words, his life has been changed by God above and he has security in knowing that God has done the work.

God has circumcised his heart by removing the heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh.

Now what is that opposed to?

It is opposed to the attempt of finding spiritual security in keeping the law.

That is man centered security, and it will fail every time you don't keep the law.

The true believer has been changed from within by a work of God on the heart, and notice where his praise comes from.

It comes from God.

In other words, security comes from the Spirit reassuring the believer that he is safe in Christ because he wasn't responsible for his salvation in the first place.

That my friends is true security and it only possible from God.

Don't seek security in anything else.

Come to Christ in faith and repentance, and the gift of true salvation will bring the gift of true security in Christ.

Let us pray.