

BIBLE & BAGEL

Romans – Our Common Faith

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As we continue in our study of the book of Romans it is important for us to understand the situation of the church. When the Bible says “church” it does not mean a particular congregation but the entire body of believers in the city. In the time when Paul was writing “churches” did not meet in their own led by Christian pastors rather they met in synagogues with the Jews. These were the days before the New Testament was written and the only “Word of God” they had was the Torah (Old Testament) and the only place those could be found was the synagogue so the only place where the Word was taught was in the synagogue and anyone interested in hearing about God had to go to the synagogue. So the church in those days consisted of Jewish and Gentile believers and only Jewish and Gentile pre-believers. The Roman government hated both Jews and Christians because they believed in only one god whereas the Romans worshipped many gods, also the Romans considered Caesar to be a god but Jews and Christians would not accept this. Therefore neither Jews nor Christians were allowed to have buildings to worship in, they synagogues of those days were homes of Jews which were large enough to accommodate the group, as long as they had a place to keep the Torah scrolls it was considered a synagogue. Keep this in mind as we continue our study.

Romans 2:12-29

12 For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law 13 (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; 14 for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, 15 who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) 16 in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel. NKJV

Paul begins to address the Jews and tells them that no one is justified by law (Torah) whether those who do not the Torah, the Gentiles or those who do, the Jews. It is not hearing the Torah or having it that justifies a person it is living it. Those who do not know the Torah yet keep what it says, show that the Torah lives within them, this is what God will judge.

Torah does not mean law exactly; law has to do with legislature and punishment, Torah is better translated as “Instructions”, God gave the Torah to His people as an instruction manual so that they could live the way He wanted them to and be a witness to the nations of His existence¹.

It is not enough for us to hear the Word of God or claim that we are Christians, we need to live it out, the Word of God has to come alive in us and this is shown by our actions.

17 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. NKJV

The Jews were proud that they were the chosen people of God, who knew the torah and thus knew God's will and were called by Him to be a witness for Him to the nations. Yet Paul says they themselves are not living up to their calling, they were themselves committing the same sins that Gentiles were and by this they were fulfilling the prophecies of Isaiahⁱⁱ and Ezekielⁱⁱⁱ that they would profane the name of God among the nations instead of glorifying it.

The Greek word for witness is "marturo" from which we get the English word "martyr", it implies to us that our witness is not in word only but in our actions. We need to live lives that glorify God, that show the world we have a God, it is not about our being prosperous or being blessed it is about walking in obedience especially in the hard times. The book of Job shows us a man who was blessed by God and God allowed testing in his life such that he lost everything, and when the world told him to give up on God he refused. This is the kind of faith that speaks to the word. The world's definition of God is a being who is there to give them what they want, our definition of God is "He is our Lord and master and whatever happens in our life we will obey Him".

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. NKJV

Jews took pride in their circumcision, indeed many still do, it was a sign of their covenant, their connection with God. The Apostle says here that it was good if they lived according to the covenant which is the Torah but if they live like everyone else (unbelievers) they are no better. It is not the physical circumcision that makes one different it is the heart that matters, the law must not be external it must be internal.

As non-Jewish believers we too have signs of our covenant with God; baptism^{iv} and communion^v. But partaking of these sacraments alone is not enough; it is the inward work of the Holy Spirit who transforms us that is important. We must show the world a transformed life this is what glorifies God, this is our witness to the world.

ⁱ Isaiah 43:12, 44:8,

ⁱⁱ Isaiah 52:5

ⁱⁱⁱ Ezekiel 36:22

^{iv} Colossians 2:11-12

^v Luke 22:20

