

**Romans (11):  
The true and false Jew  
(Rom. 2:17-29)**

**Introduction:**

Let us turn to Romans 2:17-29.

One of the common manifestations of sin is the way in which we view ourselves as sinners. We tend to think that we are not as bad as we really are. We tend to think that we are generally better than others. We tend to think that we will endure God's future judgment quite well. But we tend to think that others are going to get what they really deserve when God judges them. God's Word and God's Spirit must show us the truth lies elsewhere. But the fact is that there is a little Pharisee in each of us; is there not? This was true with the Jewish people generally, as we will see today in the passage before us. They thought that because of who they were, Jews, and because of the privileges and blessings that God had given to them, that they were exempt from the guilt of breaking God's laws. The text before us argues otherwise. The Jewish people also, just as the Gentiles, could only be saved from their sin into a relationship with God by the activity of God's grace, through the work of Jesus Christ to atone for their sin and the work of the Holy Spirit to transform them inwardly. Let us read Romans 2:17-29.

<sup>17</sup>But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God <sup>18</sup>and know His will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; <sup>19</sup>and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, <sup>20</sup>an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth-- <sup>21</sup>you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? <sup>22</sup>You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup>You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. <sup>24</sup>For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

<sup>25</sup>For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. <sup>26</sup>So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? <sup>27</sup>Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. <sup>28</sup>For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. <sup>29</sup>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. (Rom. 2:17-29)

The apostle Paul is setting forth the case that the whole world, that is, all people everywhere, is guilty before God due to sin, so that all are in need of the grace of God for salvation that is only through Jesus Christ. Paul had first indicted the pagan Gentiles in their sin in Romans 1:17-32. He then charged the "moralist" in Romans 2:1ff, in which he implied that Jews also were in need of God's saving grace. But here, beginning with Romans 2:17, Paul addresses the Jew specifically, charging him with sin before God. Paul has shown that the Jew is no better off than the Gentile if that Jew is not keeping God's law. Further, he stated that a Gentile who keeps the law is in truth the true Jew, that is, he is the one who is in a covenant relationship with God.

Let us work through this passage to understand better its assertions.

**I. The meaning of the text**

I might say a quick word about approaching a selection of Scripture text to understand its meaning. First seek to identify the paragraphs of the passage, for a paragraph, by definition, contains a single major thought. Once that is done, then the sentences within each paragraph may be assessed as they contribute to the single idea of the paragraph. In this way the general flow of the writer's purpose may be more easily discerned in its progression through the text.<sup>1</sup>

As we look at the passage before us, we can easily discern two paragraphs, verses 17 through 24 and verses 25 through 29.<sup>2</sup> I may suggest to us at the outset that the overall theme of the section, verses 17-29, addresses the Jewish failure to glorify God, with the first paragraph showing the Jewish transgression of God's law (vs. 17-24) and the second paragraph addressing the conditional value of circumcision (vs. 25-29).<sup>3</sup>

## A. The Jewish failure to glorify God (2:17-24)

In this section of Scripture, the Jew is shown to have failed to keep God's law. Paul first described...

### 1. The blessings and privileges of being a Jew (2:17f).

Paul cited **four advantages** that had historically belonged to the Jew. *First, is the designation "Jew" is itself a privilege.*<sup>4</sup> The first part of verse 17 reads, "But if you call yourself a Jew." The designation as a Jew set him apart from the Gentile as one chosen by God and set apart and treated by God in a special manner.

The name "Jew," which originally referred to a person from the region occupied by the descendants of Judah, was applied to Israelite people generally after the [Babylonian] Exile, when the territory occupied by the Jews encompassed not much more than the original Judah. By Paul's day, "Jew" had become a common designation of anyone who belonged to the people of Israel. It suggests the special status enjoyed by the people of Israel, in distinction from all other peoples (cf. 1:16; 2:9, 11). "To be named a Jew," then, refers to the religious status shared by anyone who belonged to the covenant people.<sup>5</sup>

The Jew stood in covenant relation with God. He was favored by God above the Gentile. Here, Paul described the privilege of the Jew; elsewhere, Paul described the lack of privilege of the Gentile.

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<sup>1</sup> Recognize that paragraph divisions are the imposed assessments of translators and editors of translations. Ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament did not have paragraph divisions. There was very, very little punctuation. In fact, there was no space between words. The paragraph divisions we have in our English texts are helpful tools to help us understand the message of the text.

<sup>2</sup> Editors and translators may differ in their assessments of what verses comprise a paragraph. Interestingly, the original King James Version had no paragraph designations. Newer editions of the King James Version will commonly identify the beginning of a paragraph by making bold the verse number in front of the first sentence of the paragraph. Most of the newer, major English translations divide this section of the second chapter of Romans section of Scripture into these same two paragraph divisions. The exception to this is the NIV, which has three paragraphs (vs. 17-24, 25-27, and 28-29). The editors of the modern Greek text, which is the United Bible Society, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of *The Greek New Testament*, have all of this section of Romans 2:17-29 in a single paragraph. I usually follow their division, but chose not to do so in this section.

<sup>3</sup> These are the descriptions of these sections proposed by Thomas Schreiner in his commentary, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Paul uses the word "Jew" in this passage and so I am using it. However, I was told years ago by a friend who was a missionary to the Jewish people in Israel. He told me that Jewish people themselves did not like Gentiles to refer to a Jewish man as a "Jew." It was perceived as derogatory by them. My friend said it was "softer" to them and not offensive to them to refer to them as simply "Jewish." I have tried to follow this pattern through the years lest I unwittingly cause offense to Jewish acquaintances.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (William B. Eerdmans, 1996), p. 159.

<sup>11</sup>Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands-- <sup>12</sup>remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. (Eph. 2:11f)

God had uniquely blessed the man who was a “Jew.”

**Second**, Paul described the Jew as one that did “*rely on the law*” (v. 1b). This, too, was a blessing from God. He had God’s law to “rely” upon, for God was his God and he was one of God’s covenant people. The law was God’s gift to him. God had promised the Jew that He would guide him and direct him through His law that He had given him. The Jew could trust God to care for him, protect him, and provide for him. God intended his law to show the way of life in His world characterized by His blessing.

**Third**, the Jew had the privilege and blessing to “*boast in God*.” He was proud of his relationship with God. It was the single greatest delight and purpose in life.

The **fourth** advantage of the Jew was that he, through the revelation that God had given Him, could “*know His will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law*” (v.18). The Jew had the blessing of God in that he had been given the means of the Holy Scriptures to know and understand God’s will and thereby possess the ability to discern what was right, good, pleasing to God and best for himself.

Now some have suggested that these four “advantages” are abuses of the Jew or points on which the Jew was wrong in his attitude and behavior.<sup>6</sup> They say his reliance on God’s law was wrong, and reflects his self-righteousness. They say that the Jew’s “boast” in God should be viewed as presumption, rather than faith. But in Paul’s writings, boasting in God is a good thing.

**Romans 5:11.** “More than that, *we also rejoice in God* through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

**1 Corinthians 1:28-31.** “God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup>so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup>And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup>so that, as it is written, ‘*Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.*’”

**2 Corinthians 10:15-18.** “We do not boast beyond limit in the labors of others. But our hope is that as your faith increases, our area of influence among you may be greatly enlarged, <sup>16</sup>so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another’s area of influence. <sup>17</sup>“*Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.*” <sup>18</sup>For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.”

We may conclude that Paul was not criticizing the Jew at this point, but rather he listed the legitimate privileges and blessings that were his. The Jew’s boast in God was not a bad thing, but a good thing. These four privileges of the Jew were just and admirable, and a great cause of blessing and joy for the Jew. The point of criticism comes later, when Paul shows how the Jews failed in their response to their privileges.

The apostle next delineated...

## **2. The ministry the Jew had towards the Gentile (2:19, 20)**

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<sup>6</sup> This is the position that Charles Hodge took in his commentary of Romans. I have the highest respect for Hodge, but I believe that he was wrong in his understanding that Paul was criticizing the Jews by these descriptions in verses 17 and 18. See Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1882), pp. 91-94.

Paul next recited the mission that God had given to the Jew that his privileges and blessings were to be directed. God had not given the Jews these blessings and privileges just cited by Paul to be enjoyed only by them. God had equipped them and called them to lead the Gentile world to know and worship God. God has always intended for His people to be missionary minded and motivated. With the privilege of God's blessing always comes the responsibility of God's ministry to others. We read in **verses 17 through 20**:

<sup>17</sup>But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God <sup>18</sup>and know His will and approve what is excellent, because you are instructed from the law; <sup>19</sup>***and if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, <sup>20</sup>an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—***

The apostle described “the ministry that the Jews extended to Gentiles by virtue of possessing the law.”<sup>7</sup> The Jews knew that they had a calling of God to represent Him and bring the blessing of knowing God to the Gentile world. From the early days of Abraham's call from his own family and home among the Gentiles, God intended and told Abraham that He would bless the Gentile world through Him. God had said to Abraham,

“Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and ***in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.***” (Gen. 12:1-3)

We also read God's Word to Israel in **Exodus 19:5 and 6**: when God was giving His law to Israel:

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, ***for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*** These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. (Exo. 19:5f)

They were to represent God as a kingdom of priests before all the earth. Paul will later show that national Israel failed utterly to achieve this end. But what Israel failed to do, God's only begotten Son, His true Israel, achieved on bringing forth His glory to the Gentile world, through His church. Peter later used the description that would have applied to ethnic Israel, to the fulfillment of God's purpose in His church, the spiritual Israel of God, through which God would accomplish His purpose of glorifying Himself in His world. Peter said of the New Testament church, which was comprised mostly of Gentiles:

<sup>9</sup>But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; <sup>10</sup>who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1 Pet. 2:9f)

Now it is true that in Romans 2:19 and 20 Paul did not directly reference the Gentiles, but he identified them implicitly by describing the objects of Israel's ministry were “blind... in darkness...foolish...and children.”

Clearly, the responsibility of the Jew was to provide instruction for the world, communicating God's law that He had entrusted to them. Paul described the “Jew” as a ***guide, a light, an instructor, and a teacher.*** The Jews were to be the mouthpiece of God, performing a prophetic ministry to the world, making known the will of God to all people everywhere. Paul was arguing, however, that the Jews had utterly failed in their noble calling. So we next read of...

### **3. The failure of the Jew in fulfilling his responsibility to the Gentiles (2:21-24)**

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<sup>7</sup> Schreiner, p. 130.

... <sup>21</sup>you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? <sup>22</sup>You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? <sup>23</sup>You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. <sup>24</sup>For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”

Israel failed the Gentiles, for while they taught the Gentiles keep God’s laws, they themselves broke God’s laws. The result was that instead of the Gentiles glorifying God through their witness, the Gentiles were blaspheming God.

Paul asks *four rhetorical questions* that depict the Jews’ transgression of God’s law. Paul used these to advance his charge of verses 21 and 22. Each question follows a stated premise of their calling to teach God’s law to the Gentiles.

- (1) “You then who teach others, do you not teach yourself?”
- (2) “While you preach against stealing, do you steal?”
- (3) “You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery?”
- (4) “You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?”

The first question is the leading charge that they were not keepers of the law that they taught others to teach. The next three questions are specific examples of their transgressions. Paul charged the Jews with hypocrisy. These represent transgressions of three of the Ten Commandments. God prohibited stealing, adultery, and idolatry. But the Jews were guilty of these sins.

By these charges Paul was not accusing every Jew of committing these sins. Some have argued that Paul was saying that only those Jews who committed these sins were guilty of them. Therefore, those who did not must be regarded as righteous before God. In other words, they would say that Paul was only indicting some Jews, not all Jews. But if this were the case, then his argument in these first three chapters of Romans breaks down, for he is in the process of demonstrating that all the world is guilty before God. And so, the charge that Paul is addressing only some Jews is not correct. Of this wrong view Thomas Schreiner rightly responded:

This conclusion would follow [that Paul was condemning only some Jews] if Paul were actually saying that all Jews were guilty of stealing, adultery, and robbing temples. Such a conclusion is questionable because it is unlikely that Paul himself ever committed such blatant sins, and he presumably knew many other Jews who had never indulged in such vices. We should recognize that Paul engages in a piece of rhetoric designed to argue for the principle that the Jews did not keep the very law they possessed and taught... To conclude that these examples charge every Jew of committing these particular sins is a mistake... Paul uses particularly blatant and shocking examples (like any good preacher) to illustrate that Jews violated the law that they possessed. Moo (1995:31-33) observes rightly, “It is not, then, that all Jews committed these sins, but that these sins are representative of the contradiction between claim and conduct that *does* pervade Judaism.” Furthermore, the indictment is against the Jews as a *nation*... They are still subjugated to Rome and their bondage demonstrates that sin still reigns in the nation.<sup>8</sup>

To confirm that this is the right understanding of this section of Paul’s argument we may take note that Paul speaks of the singular “Jew” in these verses. This suggests strongly that he is indicting all of Israel in that he references the singular Jew generically of all Jews. The point is this: although the Jews possessed the great blessing and privilege of having God’s written law, and they taught that law to others, not even they kept God’s law, but were transgressors.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 134.

Paul was writing of Israel as a nation, “You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law” (2:23). Gentiles did not glorify God because of Israel’s witness of God’s Word to them. Gentiles blasphemed God because of them. As Paul states in **verse 24**, “*For, as it is written, ‘The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’*” Here Paul quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures. The statement is very close to Isaiah 52:5 in the Septuagint translation (LXX), which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament that was widely used among first century Jews and Christians. Schreiner again gives a good explanation of Paul’s use of this verse

Paul rightly applies this text to the Jews of his own day. Their sin placed them under the dominion of Rome. The deliverance promised in Isaiah had not come. Of course, for Paul the deliverance had come in the good news about Jesus Christ (Isa. 52:7-10), but many of his Jewish contemporaries had rejected this message. They still hoped for deliverance through the law and old covenant, but that covenant had led only to judgment, not salvation.<sup>9</sup>

We now arrive to the second paragraph of this section of the epistle, which may be said to set forth...

### **B. The conditional value of circumcision (2:25-29)**

In the verses that follow, the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Paul to set forth the nature of true Israel, a view that was not known or believed before Paul had taught it. It was a view of Israel that few understand and fewer embrace today, even among evangelicals. He showed that the true Jew, that is, the one who is in a saving covenant relationship with God, is one who has undergone a spiritual circumcision of the heart that had been performed by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>25</sup>For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. <sup>26</sup>So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? <sup>27</sup>Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. <sup>28</sup>For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. <sup>29</sup>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. (Rom. 2:17-29)

In **verse 25** Paul declares that circumcision only has value for the one who obeys the law. It would seem here that he is speaking of perfect obedience to God’s law. Prior to Paul’s teaching here, the Jews believed that physical circumcision was a necessary rite in order to be numbered among the true people of God. But Paul declares that a lawbreaker renders his circumcision as though it were uncircumcision; in other words, it counted for nothing before God. The Jew who was circumcised, but did not keep the law, was regarded as no different from an uncircumcised Gentile; he was no true member of the people of God who alone are in covenant relation with God.

But where the Jew who fails to keep the law is regarded as uncircumcised, **verse 26** declares that the Gentile who keeps the law will be regarded as a true Jew, a covenant member of God’s people. “*So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?*” (2:26). The rhetorical question implies the answer, “Yes, he will.”

Furthermore, rather than the Jew being a judge of the Gentile, as all Jews thought themselves simply because they were Jewish, Paul reasoned that the Gentile who keeps the law would sit in judgment of the Jew who fails to keep the law. As **verse 27** declares: “*Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.*”

Paul’s explanation of why this would be the case is in **verse 28**, “*For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.*” Natural birth or physical circumcision is not what determines the identification of a true Jew, one who is in covenant relationship with God. It is a matter

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 135.

of God's grace and a work of the Holy Spirit, not a matter of physical descent or of the physical rite of circumcision. Merely being born Jewish does not bring one into a right relationship with God. Simply by being Jewish and possessing the written Word of God does not make one a Jew. Rather, one becomes a true Jew, a true member of the covenant community, who has been the object of God's work of grace in the soul, a spiritual circumcision of the heart. This is what is described elsewhere in the Holy Scriptures as regeneration, or the new birth, or being born again. When God gives new heart where there is currently spiritual death, he makes that one a true Jew, a member of His people, the covenant community of faith, who are the recipients of His salvation from sin and who are destined to inherit everlasting life.

In the epistle to the Galatians the apostle Paul had declared that once one submitted to physical circumcision, he became obligated to keep the entire law of God. It was the entrance into covenant relationship with God under the old covenant system. But under the new covenant circumcision still occurs, but it is a spiritual circumcision performed by the Holy Spirit in the soul of every true child of God. When this circumcision occurs, then the new covenant member begins a life of obedience to the law of God as under Jesus Christ the Lord as He is the giver of the Holy Spirit to His people.

Paul describes the faith and heart of this true Jew, whether born Jewish or Gentile, who has experienced this spiritual circumcision: ***"His praise is not from man but from God"*** (2:29). It is solely due to God's grace that one enters into the covenant community of God's people. The one that God has saved by His grace knows this. He has experienced a work of the Holy Spirit, and the work of God's grace. It is the true believer in Jesus Christ who is the member of the true Israel of God, the people of God. And that one who enters that relationship truly boasts in the Lord alone, for He alone is the author of his salvation.

## II. Some important implications of our passage

**1. To be a true member of God's covenant community, "Israel", one must have faith in Jesus Christ.** People do not enter into a right relationship with God because they are born Jewish, were circumcised when young (or baptized when young for that matter), who claim to possess or keep the law. People of faith are the true covenant people of God. New Testament believers, whether born Jewish or Gentile, become "true Jews", people of promise, through God's grace through faith alone, not by natural birth or circumcision.

Paul elsewhere shows that the unconverted Jew is not a covenant member of the people of God. The reason that Jews thought that they were God's covenant people was because they were physical descendants of Abraham. But Paul will argue in **Romans 4** that the promise of inheritance of eternal salvation is not to physical children of Abraham, but to spiritual children of Abraham, who are those who have the same kind of faith that Abraham had possessed.

<sup>5</sup>And to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, <sup>6</sup>just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

<sup>7</sup>"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,  
and whose sins are covered;  
<sup>8</sup>blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

<sup>9</sup>Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. <sup>10</sup>How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. <sup>11</sup>He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. ***The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised***, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, <sup>12</sup>and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

<sup>13</sup>*For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.* <sup>14</sup>For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup>For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

<sup>16</sup>That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed *to all his offspring*—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of *Abraham, who is the father of us all*, <sup>17</sup>as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. <sup>18</sup>In hope he believed against hope, that he should become *the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.”*

In **Galatians** Paul made this clear also—non-Christian Jewish people are not “the true sons” of Abraham, in that they are not the inheritors of God’s covenantal promises. Only those people who are saved through faith in Jesus Christ are the true sons of Abraham who are heirs of God’s promises to Abraham.

<sup>7</sup>Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup>And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” <sup>9</sup>So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. (Gal. 3:7-9)

At the end of Galatians 3 Paul wrote of believers, whether they are Jewish or Gentile believers in Jesus. “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29).

And then in **Galatians 4**, Paul made some assertions that would have resulted in the Jews stoning him if he had made them in a Jewish synagogue. He declared that Jews who do not believe in Jesus, that is, they are not Christians, have no more privilege or right to inherit the blessings that God had promised to Abraham’s true children, than Ishmael or his offspring had, even though they were physical descendants of Abraham.

<sup>21</sup>Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? <sup>22</sup>For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. <sup>23</sup>But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, <sup>24</sup>which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar-- <sup>25</sup>for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children-- <sup>26</sup>but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. <sup>27</sup>For it is written:

“Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear!  
Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor!  
For the children of the desolate one will be more  
than those of the one who has a husband.”

<sup>28</sup>Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup>But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. <sup>30</sup>Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” <sup>31</sup>So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free. (Gal. 4:21-30)

Jewish people who do not have faith in Jesus Christ are as children of Hagar; they are Ishmaelites with respect to God’s promises. The “children” of promise, that is, whom God had promised to Abraham, are those who have faith in Jesus Christ. They are the true children of Abraham, children through Sarah, as it were, the freewoman.

The major point is this: It is not by physical birth one comes into the realm of God's eternal promises of His covenant, it is through spiritual birth. It is not through the possession of the law, but through the possession of the Spirit of life that one may be confident he or she is a child of God, who will inherit everlasting life.

**2. Beware of the many errant teachings and ministries that promote ethnic and national Israel, and all Jewish people everywhere, as the "true" people of God.** God's covenant with His people that counts for all things eternal, is by grace, not race, through faith, not through the law. True Christians are members of the true Israel, which the Lord Jesus had reconstituted as His people under the new covenant. Jesus Christ is the only "door" into the place of blessing and security before the presence of God.

**3. Recognize your connection with the people of God through the ages, both in Old Testament and New Testament times.** True believers in Jesus Christ are true members of the family of faith. Abraham is our spiritual father. He has been made the father of many nations. Every true believer in Jesus Christ is connected with the promises and has been assimilated into the extended family of Abraham and the other Patriarchs. In us the promises to Israel have been, are being, and will be realized.

**4. There is no place for self-righteousness in the heart and life of the Christian.** We who believe on Jesus Christ and have experienced the new life that is in Him, because we have sin residing in us, we can fall into the same errant way of thinking that we are better than those who do not believe. We are to be as Paul described people of faith, ones who boast in God, in that our "praise is not from man but from God" (Rom. 2:29).

It is not what we believe that makes us different and privileged, but how we live in the light of what we claim to believe that is all important. We show forth who we are by how we live as God's people as we believe and submit to our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. May He continue to give each of us who truly believe, grace to live before Him.