

No refuge in religion

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[0 : 00] I'll turn with me, if you would, to the passage we read in Romans chapter 2, page 940, if you have one of the church Bibles. And it's a passage that tells us that there is no refuge in religion from the judgment of God.

Last week we read together these fearful words in the second half of chapter 1 of Romans about the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. And we saw that verses 26 to the end of chapter 1 really do seem to aptly describe the society that we live in. Verse 29, malice, murder, strife, deceit.

Verse 30, slander, delinquent children, heartless and ruthless people. And not just that degenerate behaviour, says verse 32, but flaunting and celebration even of that kind of manifest ungodliness. Official approval and applause, as verse 26 and 27 elaborate, even for twisted and unnatural sexual behaviour.

[1 : 17] I wonder if you went home and you were tempted to think to yourself, well, I'm in to that, I couldn't agree more. What a dreadful sick state our country is today.

Thank God that I'm not caught up in some of those things that those people are. Maybe very genuinely you can pray, as I can pray, thank you Lord for the privilege that I've had in being brought up in a Christian home and a Christian church and taught from the very earliest about right and wrong and protected from so much of the lifestyle that is described in Romans chapter 1.

I'm so glad, you might say to yourself, that I can read Paul's words here and I can say, yes, that is absolutely true, Paul. I can see why God is exactly right to be angry with his world like this.

They do have no excuse before him. They have suppressed the truth. And they're guilty, there's no doubt about that. I agree with you, Paul. And Paul says at the beginning of chapter 2, Hello?

I think I'm losing you, he says. Read on. Read verse 1. It's you I'm talking to, not them.

[2 : 42] If you've grasped my point, you'll understand that. And you'll understand that because of what I've said about God, therefore you have no excuse. In fact, all the great privileges that you've had, he says, by your birth and by your background, mean that you have far greater responsibility before God to respond to his lavish grace.

And the response God wants you to have is not to live out respectable evangelical religion, but to live out continuously real and true evangelical repentance.

Now the former thing, you see, you can do right here in St. George's Tron all your life, and you can have a totally unchanged heart while you do it. But the latter, you can only do from a humble heart, totally changed by the life-giving Spirit of God.

And that change is what must be real and true for every single person who is going to be saved, as Paul says, verse 5, from the day of wrath, from the day when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

That's my gospel, says Paul. Look back over the page to chapter 1, verse 16, just to get this very clear. Who is my gospel for, says Paul? Everyone who believes.

[4 : 08] Not just the reprobate pagan, the Greek, but the religiously privileged, the Jew. Indeed, he says it's to that person first. Why?

Verse 17, For in it God's righteousness, his way of salvation is revealed. And it's not at all about breeding, he says. It's all about belief.

It's about faith from first to last. And it has to be. It has to be that way alone for, verse 18, God's wrath is being revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

So they are all, as he says in verse 20, without excuse. As we saw last time, God has given up all mankind to disobedience.

Three times he used that awful phrase. He gave them up. And therefore, chapter 2, verse 1, his conclusion is not, they have no excuse, but you have no excuse.

[5 : 15] I, who rightly disapprove of the kind of behavior that he describes, and don't give approval to those who do those kind of things, I also have no excuse.

That's what Paul tells me this morning. Religion and morality is no refuge from the judgment of God. The privileges that I've had and that you may have had will not in themselves protect you from the day of wrath when verse 16 says, according to his gospel, God will judge all people by Christ Jesus. And we in the Christian church, says Paul, we need to know that. All of us, religious or irreligious, those inside the church or outside the church, all of us, he says, will stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ.

I found it very striking this week when I realized that the first mention of the name of Jesus Christ after verse 16 when Paul begins to expand his gospel is here in chapter 2, verse 16, when he appears as the judge of all humanity.

It's that fact that Paul forces us, every one of us, to see long before in chapter 3, verse 21, he begins to expand the good news that there is for all who believe.

[6 : 41] All who exist will stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. And that's what he rams home here, chapter 2, right up to chapter 3, verse 20, in a much longer section than we looked at last week.

He dialogues and he debates with the religious and the moral person far more and longer than he does with the miscreant and the reprobate. And that's because it's far more difficult for that kind of person to be convinced that he really does face the wrath of God.

It's far harder to really get through with the gospel to somebody who's very conscious of their own goodness, their own self-righteousness, than somebody who's conscious of their badness and their self-ruin.

And that is why it is very often the poor wretch drinking buckfast in the gutter who will embrace the gospel of the kingdom long before the society man sipping his burgundy in the golf club.

Or even the churchgoer sipping their communion wine in the choir. So, says Paul in chapter 2, are you listening?

[7 : 55] Watch my lips, he says. I'm talking to you in the pew and in the pulpit in St. George's Tron.

There's a day coming, he says in verse 5, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. And on that day, says verse 16, God will judge the secret of every person in Christ Jesus.

And on that day, there will be no refuge in right evangelical morality and no refuge just in right evangelical theology either.

only in a heart that is truly changed by the Spirit of God. Well, Paul's argument here is quite dense and difficult, so let's try and follow it through together because it literally is a life or death matter.

So first, look at verses 1 to 11 where Paul tells us there is no refuge from God's coming judgment in Christ in the mere fact that we have a clear perception of right morality.

[9 : 06] The message of these verses is that it's not pride and presumption on God's grace but it's penitence in response to God's grace that is the only way to our acceptance with God.

We of all people, and that's probably most of us here this morning, we know what is right, says Paul, and therefore in verses 1 to 3 he says there is no excuse for you.

You have no excuse, verse 1. Every one of you who judges disapprovingly of these things. And that's because acceptance with God is not just about disapproving of evil, it's about departing utterly from evil in your own heart.

And in that regard, says Paul here, look, the critic is just as bad as those he condemns. Verse 1, you condemn yourself because you do the very same things. Holding up your hands in horror, he says, that the state of society doesn't make you righteous.

In fact, very often it makes you a hypocrite. He's not saying that everyone is doing exactly the same particular sins as he spoke of in chapter 1. It's perfectly true that the Jews, for example, abhorred homosexual practice.

[10 : 20] Very unlikely they were indulging in that. But who could deny that any of verses 29 to 31 didn't apply to them?

Could you deny that? But Paul's main point, you see, is in fact that the more knowledge you have of God and his gracious revelation to mankind, the more culpable you are when you suppress it and ignore it and when you fail to depart utterly from everything that it reveals to be wrong.

You who have the Bible know so much more, he's saying. And you're right, verse 2, to recognize that God's righteous judgment does fall on wickedness.

But you're totally wrong to think that somehow God will excuse you just because you're not as bad as some other people are. Now we love to think about that, don't we?

We love to think in that way, to justify ourselves just because we're not as bad as some others. So perhaps you've been feeling this week you're not being a very godly or a good husband to your wife.

[11 : 26] But then you switch on the news and you say to yourself, well, I'm a lot better than that Wayne Rooney at least. Isn't that right? So that's all wrong, says Paul in verse 3.

Do you think you will escape God's judgment as if he judged like you do? No. No. And that's a clear answer of verses 4 and 5.

There's no excuse for you, he says, and so there will be no escape for you either. You cannot presume, he says, on the privileges of God's grace. Verse 4.

If you've had the privilege, he says, of God's kindness and forbearance and patience, then God has been extraordinarily gracious to you in order to lead you to repentance, he says.

Not that you might have pride and presumption just because of your background. Now that is the classic sin, isn't it? Of those who make a great deal of God's election, of being God's chosen people, but forgetting that that is all of the grace of God.

[12 : 38] And forgetting that God's grace always demands a response. It demands the response of obedient faith from his people. You presume, he says, on God's forbearance and kindness.

I'm sure Paul is thinking here of Deuteronomy chapter 29. Just listen to the warning that Moses gave at the end of his great sermon laying out the whole privileges of the covenant grace of God and what it meant to be God's people.

Beware, says Moses, lest there be among you one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart and says, I shall be safe even though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.

No, the Lord will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the Lord and his jealousy will smoke against that man and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven.

You see, I'm one of the Lord's people, I'm one of the elect, nothing can touch me. And Moses says, and Paul says right here, think again, you are very wrong.

[13 : 54] Verse 5, because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

That's what he says. No escape for you whether you're elect or not. That's what he's saying. It's really very fearful, isn't it? I think so.

And Paul wants us to fear. He's warning us very seriously. I don't misunderstand. He's not eroding the assurance of the tender-hearted believer who's only too aware of their failings and their sin, who's constantly finding themselves having to ask for God's forgiveness.

not at all. Quite the opposite in fact. It's not the imperfection that he's speaking about here, but it's persistent impenitence.

It's the person who professes Christian belief, but in fact is just complacent and is presumptuous. And whose great sense of assurance that they have is in fact totally false assurance.

[15 : 00] It's empty and therefore it will be exposed, says Paul, on the last day when everything is revealed. He's talking about the person who says, ah, but I'm a saved man.

I went forward at Billy Graham in 1955 in the Calvin Hall, once saved, always saved. I'm washed in the blood of the Lamb. And yet his life tells a very, very different story.

Quite the opposite. That's what Paul's talking about. He's talking about the man who revels in telling his friends, oh, I've been converted now, I've seen the light, I'm a real evangelical Christian, not like you and your church.

I understand the Bible now, I believe the Bible. And you know, I can tell you because of my new knowledge a whole lot of things that are wrong about your life and you ought to change too. A veritable torrent of pious words to other people.

And yet he goes out from the church meeting and immediately behaves in a way that reveals that the truth is he has a hard and impenitent heart that hasn't changed at all. Well, says Paul, if that is you, there is no excuse for you and there is no escape for you.

[16:17] And that is because, verses 6 to 11, God will make no exception for you. God makes no exceptions, he says, verse 6. He will render each one according to his profession.

No, according to his works. For, verse 11, God shows no partiality, no exceptions.

Now, Paul is speaking simply here about the ultimate division of all mankind that will occur on the last day, the day of judgment, that Jesus himself is the one who speaks about more than anybody else in the whole Bible.

Do you remember? The sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares, the righteous and the wicked, and on and on. Also, Paul says here, verse 9, those who do evil will be divided from, verse 10, those who do good.

Well, what is that division? Well, it's not, says Paul, a division between the moral and the religious on one side from the irreligious and the pagan on the other side.

[17:30] Notice carefully in verses 9 and in verse 10 that the Jew and the Greek, the Gentile and the religious person, that each one appears on both sides of the divide. Now, the great division that Paul is talking about here is the same division that appears all the way through his letter to the Romans.

It's a division between those who obey the gospel of God and those who disobey the gospel of God. That is, between those who repent and believe in the gospel and those who reject and disbelieve the gospel.

And here in verses 7 to 10 he tells us that twice as if to underline it. First, he contrasts the righteous and the unrighteous and then the unrighteous and the righteous.

It's very instructive to see what he says. Look very carefully. Start at verse 8 and 9 in the middle because side by side he tells us there who are those who are going to be condemned by God.

Verse 8, there will be wrath and fury, says Paul, for those who do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness, who are self-seeking.

[18:39] That is, verse 9, there will be distress and tribulation for everyone who does evil, both Jew and Gentile. You see? What does it mean to do evil?

It's the disobedience of unbelief in the truth in the gospel of God. And the condemnation, says Paul, is fearful, wrath and fury. Now look at verses 7 and 10 where we have the exact opposite.

Those who will be accepted and not condemned on that day. Verse 7, there will be eternal life, he says, for whoever by patience and well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality.

That is, seek it in the obedience to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He's describing there the exact opposite of verse 8. Verse 7 and 8 are opposites. Self-seeking disobedience to the truth or God-seeking glory and honor and immortality in obedience to the truth.

Same in verse 10. There will be glory and honor and peace, he says, notice, for everyone who does good by obeying and not rejecting the truth.

[19:52] Whether they're Jew or Gentile, whether they've got a Bible background or whether they have no background at all. Couldn't be clear. And that is the fundamental division all the way through this letter to the Romans.

The obedience of faith, which leads to salvation, and the disobedience of unbelief, which leads only to condemnation. And there are no exceptions for anyone, says Paul.

No special pleading of Bible or background or belonging. God shows, verse 11, no partiality. Now, hang on a minute.

Is he really saying in verse 6 that final judgment, therefore final acceptance with God or condemnation before God will be by our works?

Oh yes, that's what it says in my Bible right in front of me and in yours. And that is what the Bible constantly and consistently teaches. Do you remember Jesus in Matthew 16?

[20:58] The Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of the Father and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. How does the Sermon on the Mount end?

Matthew chapter 7. Jesus says, it's not those who profess, Lord, Lord, who will be accepted into the kingdom. Who will it be? He who does the will of my Father.

It's not those who are hearers only of my words, says Jesus, but the one who hears them and does them. Who will have built his house upon the rock that will not collapse in the storm of judgment.

Now what Jesus is saying and what Paul is saying exactly the same is simply this. Yes, salvation is by God's grace alone received through faith alone.

But he is saying there is real faith and there is spurious faith. And when God judges each person on the last day by their works, as verse 6 says, he will be doing by that exactly what verse 16 says.

[22 : 10] He will be judging the secrets of men's hearts. Because real faith always changes the heart. And that always results in a changed life.

life. A life that bears the fruit of faith which is visible to the world and will certainly be visible to the judge on the last day is a heart that bears testimony to true saving faith.

It's by their fruit that they will be known as genuine, says Jesus. That's how you tell a healthy tree from a bad tree, he said. Every tree bears fruit, either good or bad.

And every tree that does not bear good fruit, says Jesus, is cut down ultimately and thrown into the fire. Because it's shown to be a fraud.

A real believer, Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 2, is created in Christ Jesus for good works that we should walk in them. By contrast, he tells us in Titus 1 verse 16 that there are those who profess to know God but deny him by their works.

[23 : 23] He goes on in that letter to Titus to say, of course, we're not saved by works done by us in righteousness but according to his mercy. We're justified by his grace. But he goes right on to say that we are saved for the good works of an utterly transformed life.

So do you see what God is saying to us here? To an enlightened and privileged people who clearly do perceive most of us God's morality, who do possess God's truth.

He's saying to us, do not presume upon the riches of God's kindness to you. That is no refuge for you. Indeed, that will heighten your condemnation.

You of all people should be those who show the fruits of true repentance. Don't be fooled, he's saying. Don't say to yourself, I'm an evangelical Christian.

I'm an elder in the church. I've known the Bible all my life. I've been serving the church for decades. Once saved, always saved. When the role is called up yonder, I'll be there.

[24 : 35] Paul says, well, just remember that on judgment day you will have no excuse, no escape. and God makes no exceptions for anyone.

Their heart is not truly changed. It was to the great and the good of the evangelical church of Israel that John the Baptist said, you brood of vipers, don't begin to say to yourself, we have Abraham as our father.

Bear fruit in keeping with repentance, is what John said to them. Every tree that doesn't bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Be careful, says Paul. God's kindness, his forbearance, his patience, all his gracious privilege given to you and given to me is meant to lead us to repentance.

And not just once, but always, every day, on and on, is a pattern of our lives. It's not presumption, but it's real repentance in response to God's grace that is the only way to be right with God.

[25 : 46] Not disapproving of evil, but departing from it in a radically changed life, away from self-seeking disobedience to God and towards the glory and honor of the immortal God.

That becomes even clearer in the second half of the chapter here from verses 12 to 29 where Paul similarly tells us that there's no refuge from God's coming judgment in Christ in the clear privilege of right theology.

Verses 12 and 13 lay out the clear principle that it's not possession of gospel truth, but possession by gospel truth that is the only way to be right with God.

Just as it's not the disobeyers, but the obeyers of the truth who will find eternal life. So also, says verse 13, it is not the hearers of the law, but the doers who will be righteous in God's sight, who will be justified on the day of judgment.

Now wait a minute, somebody's saying, I don't get that. Isn't that legalism? Isn't that about just doing the law? Isn't that the opposite of faith? Isn't that what Paul's arguing? No, it's not.

[27 : 01] Not at all. Paul is simply, once again, echoing the words of Jesus to describe what real faith actually is. Matthew 7, verse 24, listen, not the hearers only, but the doers of these words of mine will be saved in the coming judgment, says Jesus.

Or Luke 8, verse 21, my mother and brothers, my true family, who are they? All those who hear the word of God and do it. That is, show the obedience of real faith.

So, now follow carefully, verse 12. The pagan of chapter 1, says Paul, who sins without the privilege of God's fullest revelation in scripture, he is without the law of Moses, doesn't have the Old Testament.

Yes, says Paul, he will be judged for his sin, even though he doesn't have the scriptures, he is without excuse, because he has rejected the light that God has given him in creation and in his conscience.

That's what he said in chapter 1. And he will be condemned, he will be judged. He's no excuse. But that's not the whole story, second half of the verse. And all who have sinned under the law, that is, having had the huge privilege of access to God's revelation in scripture, he will be judged too by that revelation that he's had, judged by the law.

[28 : 29] Just having reality theology, he says, won't protect you. It's not about hearing, it's about doing. It's not just about possessing the truth of God, it's about whether the truth of God has really possessed you and changed your heart.

Now Paul is explicitly here speaking to the Jews, but it affects us in the 21st century exactly the same way, friends, because it's all about the privileges that some people have had and some people haven't had in a background in the Bible and in the church.

And that means his message is quite incendiary for a church like ours, where some of us have known the huge privilege of being nurtured here all their lives, imbibing God's word with their mother's milk.

And at the same time others might have just walked in this morning and it's the very first time you've ever been in a church in your life. And Paul says this, listen, it's possible to have had none of those outward privileges of God's grace around you all of your life and yet for you to gain all the riches of God's great salvation when he changes your heart by grace.

Absolutely wonderful. But it's also possible, he says, for you to have had around you all your life, every one of these great privileges and yet for you to be condemned by God forever because your heart is not truly changed by his grace.

[30 : 07] It's hard, impenitent, uncircumcised. Verses 14 to 16 speak about the former case and verses 17 to 24 the latter.

Look at verse 13 again. It's the doers of God's command who will be justified, who will be declared right with God. For, verse 14, when the least privileged who don't have by nature, who don't naturally have God's law, the Bible, because they're not Jews, or in our case because they weren't brought up with any Christian background or any Christian faith at all, when they do, says Paul, what the law requires, verse 15, they show that what really matters to God, the works of the law, righteous, are written on their hearts.

Their hearts have been changed even though they were Gentiles. God has done to them just what the prophets promised would happen in the day of his great new covenant. I'll write my law upon their hearts, said Jeremiah. A new heart, a new spirit I'll put in them, said Ezekiel. So that even with no background whatsoever in the Bible or in the Christian faith, someone is changed utterly and begins to live for God in his ways.

His conscience, verse 15, is being renewed. So that it teaches him right and wrong. And on that day, verse 16, Paul is saying, many such people will be excused, they will be acquitted at the judgment seat of God.

[31 : 42] That day will reveal everything, that they are truly his. And that is the wonderful truth of the Christian gospel, that people with no background, no knowledge, who are once by nature, as Paul says in Ephesians, sons of disobedience, children of wrath, enemies of God, can become, through the grace of God in Jesus Christ, can become his workmanship, created to do marvellous things for his glory.

That means that you can have walked into this church for the very first time today, had no knowledge of the Christian faith ever before, and God can utterly transform you and call you to be one of his people forever and ever.

But equally, verse 17, look, without that real obedience of faith, loving obedience to God, from a heart that is truly changed by the gospel, all the right doctrine, all the church going, all the knowledge, all the preaching, is as nothing in God's sight.

You can have come here all your life. You can have the Bible, as verse 18 says, you can know its instruction, you can teach others, verse 20, you can instruct the ignorant, you can teach the young in the Sunday school, you can cherish in the scriptures, verse 20, the embodiment of knowledge and truth, you can have a flawless doctrine of scripture, all of these things.

And Paul says, do you do the truth? Is it real? Or verse 21, are we teaching others?

[33 : 29] And yet at the same time, living a lie. Like the scribes and the Pharisees that Jesus said, they preach, but they do not practice. They possess the great doctrines of grace, but in reality, Jesus said, they shut up the gates of heaven in people's faces.

They hindered the mission of the kingdom. And that's Paul's charge here to the Jews, the people of the Bible, whom God had chosen to be his lights to the world.

They had vast privileges, possessing all the truth, and yet what they did, led, verse 24, not to God's name being praised, but his name being blasphemed in the world.

And that must mean that the stealing, the adultery, the making money out of idolatry that's mentioned in verse 22, that's not just metaphorical. It must have been real and visible corruption that the world could see in God's people.

Well, we saw, didn't we, going through the Acts of the Apostles, how the behavior of the Jews against the gospel so often held them up to scorn, even among the pagan Romans, who were much more fair and much more just. Israel as a whole had not been a light to the world, but it turned into utter darkness and shame.

[34 : 49] But alas, what is the truth about the Christian church over twenty centuries? Well, the truth is that both individually and collectively, far too often we've fallen into exactly the same thing.

Isn't that so? Professing Christians who show no evidence of the heart change, and therefore no evidence of the real life of the Lord Jesus in them.

That is so much worse, isn't it, than somebody who makes no profession at all. It's dead, and it's deadly. It's like whole churches that are devoid of the heartbeat of the life of God's Spirit, possessing His people to change them.

In the words of this last paragraph, from verses 25 to 29, all that circumcision becomes uncircumcision, says Paul. All that Christianity becomes unchristian and anti-Christian.

That's the force of it. Paul is saying a very shocking thing here. Circumcision, you see, it summed up all the privileges, all the heritage, all the profession of the covenant faith.

[35 : 55] It was what marked out the Jews as God's special people. It stood for acceptance with God, for salvation from God, as opposed to condemnation and rejection by God.

But if it's all just outward, says Paul, and not inward, it's not a matter of a real changed heart. It's worse than nothing. It's anti-circumcision. It's not acceptance with God.

It's utter condemnation from God. Who is the true Jew, says Paul? Who is the true member of the people of God, truly saved, truly accepted into God's family on the last day?

Who is the true believer? Look at the last two verses. Not, verse 28, the one who is one of God's people outwardly, circumcised in the flesh, possessing gospel truth, professing to be part of Christ's church.

No, but rather, verse 29, the true believer is one who is one inwardly, whose heart is circumcised, changed by the Spirit of God.

[37 : 09] Where God's gospel truth is not just outward, a matter of the letter, but it's inside, possesses his heart. Because in his response to the gospel of Jesus, his heart has been changed and utterly transformed by God's Spirit.

And it's that, says Paul, and it's only that that makes you a true believer, a doer of the law, who will be justified on the day when God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

God's truth. The fruit of our lives, says Jesus, on that day will declare to the world that we not only possess God's truth in our hand, but God's truth truly possessed our hearts and changed our hearts and changed our lives.

Or else, it will declare the opposite. it. And that day, every secret will be exposed. But even now, Jesus says that the true and the false, the good and the bad tree will be known by their fruit.

And Paul says the same here. It's the one who has God's praise, verse 29, his real acceptance, not man's. He's the one whose heart is changed by the Holy Spirit.

[38 : 24] And therefore, the whole of the direction of his life will be changed by the Spirit. That's what verse 15 is talking about as well. The law is written on his heart. Whatever he once was, God's commands are now the things that thrill him and possess him and motivate him with desire.

That's what the Holy Spirit does when someone is converted to Jesus Christ. We'll see that when we come to chapter 8, verse 4. The requirements of God's law are fulfilled in our heart by his heart. Holy Spirit. We begin to live not for ourselves, not self-seeking, disobedient to the truth, as verse 8 says, but rather obedient to God's truth. Living for his glory and honor and immortality.

Obedying his law, verse 25. Keeping his precepts, verse 26. Keeping his law, verse 27. These are all just different ways of saying the same thing. Nothing to do with legalism.

It's about loving God's ways and living in God's ways. We're not talking about a sinless life. Of course not. He's talking about a truly spirit-filled life.

[39 : 35] People who are real Christian people whose hearts are possessed by his truth, are changed by his grace. So friends, let me ask you this morning.

Is that you? Has your heart really been possessed and changed by the truth of the gospel of God? Maybe you've grown up in this church all of your life and you've been surrounded by the privileges of God's grace and truth. You've possessed the gospel. You've been baptized in the flesh outwardly just as the Jews were by the mark of circumcision.

So many of God's gracious kindnesses that he has given to you to lead you to repentance. To cry out to God to touch your heart for real, to change it, to possess your heart.

Well, have you done that? Not just once, but to keep on doing it day by day by day, to keep changing it, to keep filling your life day by day with his Holy Spirit so that you know that you're his.

[40 : 50] Have you done that? You have no idea how privileged you are if God has given you all these things to lead you to that place. Don't harden your heart. Don't be impenitent.

Don't presume on God's grace, says Paul. His grace demands that you respond. Maybe you're a new student and it's your first week in Glasgow and you've come from a Christian home and you've come to university.

Well, if that's you, then a choice stands before you right at this juncture in your life. All the privileges of the gospel faith have surrounded you perhaps all of your life.

But this week is the crossroads, not just for the rest of your life, but for the whole of eternity. Is it going to possess your heart for real?

Or is it all for you going to become uncircumcision? Worthless? Because it's never really changed you. And the answer to that question, let me tell you, is far more important than the answer to any question that will face you on your exam papers in your four years at university.

[42 : 10] What about the rest of us? Pillars, maybe, of this church. Privileged people. And I include myself in that. There are a few here who have had all the privileges in their life that I've had.

The privilege of being an evangelical pastor in this church. The privilege of being raised in a Christian home with a father who is an evangelical preacher. The privilege of serving here in a church with all its great heritage, alongside so many of you with your great Christian heritage. But listen to this. If my heart is not truly changed, if all of this is not leading me daily to a life of repentant, obedient faith, then all that heritage is just humbug.

All that circumcision is uncircumcision. And will condemn me before the throne of God. And you also.

If you dare to presume merely on the privilege of a right background, a right theology, right doctrine, being in the right church, moving in the right circles.

[43 : 20] If that is so, says Paul in verse 27, look, on the day of judgment, he says, many who have had none of the privileges that we have had will rise up and they will condemn us.

Just as Jesus said to his pagan contemporaries, the Ninevites, he says, will rise up and condemn you on that day because they repented at the preaching of a mere Jonah. But you have rejected the Son of Man himself.

Hence we need to realize this. People whose theology that you reject or even despise. People whose background perhaps that you disdain, they will rise up and condemn you.

You who have all that right doctrine and practice and heritage. If your heart is hard and not penitent before God.

You stand on that day and say, I'm a solid evangelical. I'm reformed. I'm a Calvinist. I'm a Presbyterian. And Jesus will say, all your Protestantism is just Romanism to me.

[44 : 33] All your Calvinism is just Arminianism to me. All your Presbyterianism is just Pentecostalism. All your evangelicalism is just utter liberalism. Whatever your cherished thing is.

Because your heart is not changed. You hardened your heart to my spirit. And you wouldn't let my truth possess you and change you. You resisted because in your heart, deep down, the truth is, you were self-seeking.

You didn't truly seek for the glory and honor of the immortal God. Friends, God's kindness to us, all the privileges he gives to us, are meant to lead us to repentance.

You and me both, today and every single day. Because God's true people are not just those who are in the pew or the pulpit on a Sunday, listening to preach or doing the preaching, so as to possess God's truth.

God's true people are those who are living that faith, whose hearts are possessed by that glorious truth, by his Holy Spirit.

[45 : 49] You know, it's only if we are, together, a people like that, that God's name won't be blasphemed in the pagan world because of us. But rather, we'll fulfill our destiny as the true circumcision, the great light of the world that God has called us to be, set on a hill, not to be hidden, so that people will see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven.

And so that total pagans, with no background, with no Bible, with no baptism, that they might, through faith in the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the power of salvation to everyone who believes, that they might have their hearts changed forever.

by the Spirit of God, and find praise, and acceptance, and salvation, from the God who shows no partiality, but will give eternal life, and glory, and honor, and peace, to all, all, who obey the truth, that is in Jesus Christ.

isn't that something worth living for? And isn't that a reason for every one of us this morning to cry out to God, change my heart, change it today, and change it tomorrow, and go on possessing it by your Holy Spirit, that all that I am, and all that we are together, might be for the glory, and the honor, of the immortal God.

Let's pray. Gracious God, your word, pins us, to the floor, there is no escape, from the piercing eye, of your truth, you who see our hearts, who know us, touch us, we pray, and may there be no hiding place for us, but may we be found, now, and always, possessed, by your Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[48 : 23] Amen.