

Who Receives Praise from God?

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity On the 8th of July 2001 The preacher is Paul Barker His sermon is entitled Who Receives Praise from God And is from Romans 2 Verses 17-29 Heavenly Father we thank you that you speak to us Through the words of scripture And we pray that you'll do so now Write your word on our heart That we may not only be hearers of it But doers also for Jesus' sake Amen The young couple came in and sat down nervously It was a baptism interview Little Johnny was to be baptised And the parents were nervous Because clearly they didn't know much About spiritual things They wanted to say the right thing They were a little bit afraid That I might say

Well no we're not going to baptise Johnny And they said to me That we want Johnny to be done So that he can go to heaven And nothing bad will happen to him Well I've often had that Or words to that effect said to me Baptism is seen by many As a passport to heaven Splash a bit of water And you end up with a magical watermark That will guarantee you entry Into heaven Some people have slightly different views Some parents send their children To Sunday school So that they can know about God And learn lots of things about God Because knowing about God Is the passport to heaven No doubt such people Are all very keen to see Australia Become a knowledge nation And so on And people become knowledgeable about God It doesn't just apply for parents With their children There are plenty of adults Who pursue knowledge about God Read the Bible And go to Bible studies And so on Because they regard knowledge As their passport into heaven

Other people might respond to that And say well it's not what you know About God But it's who you know That is you've got to know God Himself In a relationship with God And God is my passport to heaven So when I get to the pearly gates I won't need to show a passport Because God knows me And he'll let me in He'll welcome me Because he recognises me One of the mistakes We can fall into Is forgetting the correct passport to heaven Or we rely on the wrong things As our passport If you travel overseas The first thing on your packing list Ought to be your passport To get out of the country And to get into another country Sometimes you hear of people Who get to the airport And they've forgotten their passport When the group that I was leading 18 months ago Was leaving Israel At Tel Aviv airport One of the group realised That he didn't have his passport He'd left it back in Jerusalem Frantic phone calls and taxis and so on

And the passport arrived in time You need to have the right passport If you're going to get into A particular place A few years ago I went to Lords Cricket Ground in London And took my MCG members card Because I'd been told That you could get into Lords with that And there was a test match on England was losing to somebody else Not Australia that day And I showed my card And I wasn't allowed in Because I was told It didn't apply to test matches Well I went around to another gate And the guy didn't know much about it So I sweet talked my way in And sat down for a few hours To watch a few England wickets fall When you arrive at heaven There's no sweet talking God There's one passport And one only And all too often We think something's the passport to heaven And we're wrong We might think baptism is The magical passport to heaven But we'd be wrong We might think knowledge about God Is the entry passport to heaven As though there'll be some exam

At the pearly gates We're wrong We might think that church attendance is That when we get there The passport to heaven Will be the attendance roll That God will have And he'll tick us off Wrong We might think that it's being A Sunday school teacher Often in our dim distant past Or a Bible study leader Or the fact that we've evangelised And shared the gospel With other people And brought people to Christian faith We're wrong Indeed Even boasting of our relationship With God That's not our passport to heaven either In Romans thus far St Paul has been arguing That all people Will face the judgment throne of God One day No exemptions No exceptions All are guilty Of suppressing the truth about God Exchanging the glory of God For the glory of other things Idols And for self-righteousness And we saw last week How the self-righteous are not exempt From that judgment throne of God And how ignorant people Are not exempt From the judgment throne of God

[5 : 04] Because they've never heard about God Or the gospel But now he turns his attention To another group of people And into this category Many of us might fall What about those people Who know lots about God What about those people To whom God has revealed himself Not the ignorant Who've never heard about God But the knowledgeable The people who've received God's word And God's law In particular Paul has in mind The special group of people Called the Jews To whom in the Old Testament God had revealed much about himself His law And his purposes And it's those people He addresses here And he addresses their Presumed objection To what he's said so far Saying Yeah that's all very well For those people The ignorant The self-righteous And the pagans It doesn't apply to us Jews So Paul says Yes it does But what we find Is that the sort of thinking Of the Jews Is precisely the sort of thinking That many of us Fall into From time to time

Now the Jewish people Certainly had Many good claims For the title deeds Of heaven Paul lists In these verses 17 and 18 And 19 A whole list Of about 10 things That were their privileges He says If you call yourself A Jew That's the first thing It was a privilege To be able to be called A Jew The Jews The name Jew Derives from The name Judah One of the 12 sons Of Jacob Way back in the early part Of the Old Testament So to call yourself a Jew Was to say I stand in the line That goes all the way Back to Jacob One of the great patriarchs And to his grandfather Abraham To whom the promises Of God were made It is a privilege To call myself a Jew Paul's not disputing that He's saying Yes it is a privilege It is a good thing To be able to call yourself A Jew And then he says And you rely on the law Well again That's a good thing He's not telling them off For relying on the law The law is what God

Had revealed To the people of Israel Descended from Abraham At the time of Moses At Mount Sinai When God passed to them Not only the two tablets Of the Ten Commandments But indeed a whole range Of other laws As well for them To live by Yes it's a good thing And a good privilege That you can rely on the law Paul is saying Indeed the third thing Is that they boast Of their relation to God We can sometimes Take the word boast In a negative sense As though somebody's Bragging about something Which really is not For their credit But that's not the sense here It's somebody Who's boasting Or perhaps We might say Rejoicing in their Relationship with God It is a good thing And a positive thing They know God They have a relationship With God Paul's saying That is a great privilege The next thing in the list Is that they know God's will That is through the law That's been revealed God has revealed His moral will His purposes Not only for the Jewish people But indeed for the world

That it might come to be saved Through his Jewish people And come to faith in him And for his glory Yes that again Is a good privilege That these people have That they know God's will And also that they can Determine what is best Having received God's law They can understand What is the best thing That they should be doing And what God's purposes Are about And that is because You're instructed in the law As he says at the end Of verse 18 Well God has Without doubt Revealed himself To the Jews In the Old Testament Through what we call The Old Testament At least And they know God And the privileges Are real privileges Moreover it seems Paul is Having in mind here Jews who are Who are good Jews So they take seriously He goes on to say In verse 19 That they are A guide to the blind And a light to those Who are in darkness Expressions that come From the prophet Isaiah About the servant of God And that is referring

To the fact That the Jews Were to be people Through whom The light of God Would shine So that pagans Or Gentiles Non-Jews Might come to know Something of God And have faith in him Moreover Verse 20 They are a Corrector of the foolish And a teacher Of children Maybe referring To the same thing But the Old Testament Is full of commands That the people of God Not be fools But be wise There's even a body Of the Old Testament Literature Called the wisdom literature That people are to be Wise in their living And wise in their Relationship with God And they are to instruct Or teach the children Something again That the parents Are often taught to do In the Old Testament In the wisdom literature Where fathers are to teach Their sons wisdom And fear of the Lord But in other parts as well Like in Deuteronomy The parents are to go on Teaching their children The faith of the Old Testament The basis of that teaching

[10 : 08] Is as Paul says At the end of verse 20 The law Having in the law The embodiment of knowledge And truth These are good And real privileges The law is a good thing It embodies The truth about God Truly the Jews Are a privileged people There is no doubt About that And Paul is not Trying to undermine Or to put aside The real privileges That the Jewish people Have received We see that expressed In the Old Testament A number of times For example In the Psalms The longest psalm Psalm 119 Goes on for 176 verses Of praise of God For the law That he has given To the Jewish people And the privilege Of having the law Paul doesn't deny that He affirms it But now he turns The tables On these Jewish readers And listeners In verse 21 Yes he says All these privileges Are real They're stacked up there They are great things

That God has given to you But You then That teach others Will you not Teach yourself Paul doesn't object To the fact That the Jews Have received the law And they take Responsibly Their duty Or obligation To teach the law For the sake Of other people Children Fools And Gentiles But he does object To their hypocrisy That they might Teach others But they don't Practice what they teach They teach others But they don't In effect Teach themselves He's saying In effect That their religion Is what we might Call Hyacinth bouquet Religion That is It's all about Keeping up appearances But it's not Actually doing What they teach He follows up That general Rhetorical question With three specifics As if to give Examples of them Teaching others But not practicing What they themselves Preach So he says While you preach

Against stealing Do you steal But the implication Of the question Is yes you do You that forbid Adultery Do you commit adultery Again the implication Is Yes you do You that abhor idols Do you rob temples And again the implication Of the question Is yes you do The last of those Is probably referring To the fact That not only Do Jews abhor idols They wouldn't have A statue of God Or anything like that But it seems That they're probably Pilfering things From pagan temples And then selling them To pagans To use as their Idol worship In effect saying Yeah what you do Is okay Making profit Out of the sale Whilst all the time Preaching that Idolatry is a Wrong thing Paul is not saying That every single Jew commits Those sins They're representative Sins But what he is Saying is that You Jews Hold fast So keenly To the law As your passport To heaven But you don't Actually fulfill The requirements

Of the law He's not saying That everyone's An adulterer Everyone's an Idolater Or everyone's A thief They're just Examples of The general Principle That they hold Fast to the law They treasure it As their privilege They think it's Their passport To heaven Because they've Received it And heard it But because They don't do it In its totality Then their hypocrisy Exposes them The climax Of this series Of questions Comes in verse 23 You that boast In the law You boast That you've got it That you've heard it That it's your Treasure and your Passport Do you dishonor God by breaking The law Yes you do Paul's saying The question Demands a Positive answer Yes you Break the law And thus you Dishonor God Instead of giving Glory to God You're no better Than the people We saw last week And the week Before Who've exchanged The glory of God For idols And idolatry

And for self Righteousness They're not Glorifying and Honoring God As God Because though They've got the law They break it And the result Is in verse 24 That the name Of God Is blasphemed Among the Gentiles Because of you Instead of being A light to the nations So that the nations Will come to glorify And honour God By their wrongdoing The Gentiles in fact Continue to blaspheme God Paul is saying here That their teaching Might be fine But it's not Backed up with Their own actions And the words Are right And important Perhaps But the lack Of actions To back it up Dishonours God So they are Guilty of what Paul said Back in verse 13 As we saw Last week It is not The hearers Of the law Who are righteous In God's sight That certainly Is the Jews But it's the Doers of the law Who will be Justified Now we

[15 : 11] Christians Face the same Sort of Obligations Here We are to Be a light To the world In spreading The gospel Of God But often Our actions Let us Down We might Say the Right things But when Our actions As a church And as Individual Christians Are inconsistent Then we Lead to People Well We Encourage People In fact To continue To blaspheme God And dishonour Him Our world Is well Populated By people Who refuse To come To God Because they See Christians Who lack Love Or lack Care They see A divided Church They see Christians Who are no More honest Than anyone Else in the Workplace They see Christian marriages Breaking down And sexual Infidelity Practised by Christians As much As pagans So the Christian faith Seems to Offer little Its words Seem to Be hollow Often

People of Other religions Such as Muslims Think that Christians Are in fact Quite immoral Because of Their sexual Practices Or drinking Of alcohol Or whatever Sometimes Their standards Are not Quite God's But it's Rather Salutory For us That we Are to be Lights to This world As the Jews Were meant To be We must Not only Speak The words Of the Gospel But live Lives that Are consistent With that Paul Turns to One specific Thing That Jews Held fast To as a Passport To heaven And that Is the Practice of Circumcision Of Jewish Men Back in the First book Of the Bible Genesis God Commanded Abraham To be Circumcised And to Circumcise His male Descendants Male members Of his Household And all Others Thereafter It's an Odd Sort Of right But it Was to Be a Sign of Covenant Membership

Of belonging To god If anything Is a Passport For heaven Circumcision Was regarded As such It was Indeed The right Thing to Do God Commanded It Paul's Not Saying It's A Bad Thing But what He says In verse 25 Would have Shocked Many Jews Circumcision Indeed Is a Value If you Obey The law He says But if You Break The law Your Circumcision Has become Uncircumcision That is If you Are Disobedient To the Law Of God You Jews Are No Better Off Than A Gentile You Might As Well Not Be Circumcised It Does You No Benefit It Is A Privilege That Gives You No Greater Standing With God If You Break The Law Of God But then What he Says Is Perhaps Even More Shocking Verse 26 If Those Who Are Uncircumcised Keep The Requirements Of The Law Will Not Their Uncircumcision Be Regarded As Circumcision Well

That's A Horrifying Thing For A Jew To Contemplate That Pagans And Gentiles Might Obey God's Law And Be Regarded By God As Being Circumcised The Physical Act Of Circumcision For Jews Was A Very Important Sign Of Belonging To God's People And Without It As A Man You Were Not Part Of The Covenant People Of God Paul Is Challenging Here The Very View About Who Makes A Real Jew Jews Would Have Expected That At The Final Day They Would Have Sat In Some Sort Of Judgment Over The Pagans Of The World But Paul Says No The Opposite Will Happen Those Who Are Physically Uncircumcised But Keep The Law Will Condemn You That Have The Law Or The Written Code And Circumcision But Break The Law That Is The Tables Are Turned You Jews Think You've Got A Privilege That Will Put You In Higher Standing On Judgment Day Than The Pagans No Paul Says If You're Disobedient Then You Will Be Judged

Even Condemned By Pagans Who Might Keep The Law Of God What Then Is A Real Jew A Little While Ago I Saw My Nephew's School Photo And One Of The Members Of My Family Made The Comment There Aren't Many Australian Names There And I Responded By Saying Well They All Look Australian To Me I Mean What Makes Somebody A True Blue Aussie What Makes Somebody Have An Australian Name What Makes Somebody Australian Did Number Of Us Were Talking About This The Other Night At A Dinner Is It Your Place Of Birth Is It Your Citizenship Is It Your Parental Heritage The Color Of Your Skin Your Accent We Might Say What Makes A True Blue Jew Place Of Birth Citizenship Parental

[20 : 14] Heritage Color Of Skin Accent No None Of Those Things Is It Being Circumcised Physically If You're A Male No Paul Saying Is It The Fact That You've Got The Law No He's Saying Is It Your Racial Descent From Abraham No What Makes A Person A True Blue Jew Is That Their Inward Heart Has Been Circumcised By God's Spirit He Says In Verse 28 For A Person Is Not A Jew Who's One Outwardly Nor Is True Circumcision Something External And Physical But Rather A Person Is A Jew Who's One Inwardly And Real Circumcision Is A

It Is It God God Is God Is God Is God Has Always Been On About Seeing People Whose Hearts Are Right With Him And The Old Testament In Many Places Early And Late In The Old Testament Promises That One Day God's Spirit Will Change The Hearts Of People To Use One Expression And From One Prophet Ezekiel To Change A Heart Of Stone To A Heart Of Flesh That Is From Being Stubborn And Hard As We Saw Last Week At The Early Part Of Chapter Two To Being Responsive And Soft To God's Law Or To Use Another Expression To Have Our Hearts Circumcised By God In Deuteronomy 30 Or To Take Up Jeremiah's Expression To Have The Law Written Not On Tablets Of Stone Something Out There That We Can Read An External thing But Paul Is Implying Here That What The Old Testament

Expected One Day In The Future Is Now A Reality It's A Reality Because Of God's Spirit Doing It How That Happens He'll Explain Later On You've Got To Hang On For A Few More Weeks To Get The Details Of That But What Paul Is Saying Is That God Has Only Ever Wanted People Whose Hearts Are Right With Him That's What He Looks For That's What He Looks For Inside Us Not The External Appearances We Saw Last Week That God Judges The Secret Thoughts Of All That Is He Judges Our Hearts That's What He Looks For Whether Hearts Have Been Changed By His Spirit So Paul Is Saying That True Jews Are Not Physically Racially Descended From Abraham But They're People Whose Hearts Are Changed By Maybe Gentile By Descent Or Race It Doesn't Matter We're On An Equal Footing With God What He's Looking For Is

A Heart That's Right So He's In Fact Implying That Christians Are True Blue Jews There's No Sort Of Two Streams Of God's People The Jews Descended From Abraham And Christians But Always The True People Of God Are People Whose Hearts Have Been Circumcised Whether They're Jewish By Race Or Not The Purpose Of The Heart That's Been Changed By God's Spirit Is That It Will Produce From Us The Obedience Of Faith And If You Remember Back To The First Week Of Preaching Through Romans Back In Chapter 1 Verse 5 The Object Of The Gospel The Point Of It For Us Is The Obedience Of Faith For The Sake Of Jesus Name In This Letter People's False Passports To Heaven Ignorance Is No Excuse Self Righteousness Is Not A Passport

Receiving The Law Or Being Circumcised Physically Are Not Passports To Heaven Nor Is Baptism We Might Say Baptism Is Nothing Without A Change Of Heart The Lord's Supper Is Nothing If Our Hearts Are Not Right With God Because The Passport To Heaven Lies Not In Anything External But In A Heart That's Been Changed By God's Spirit They Are The People Who Receive The Praise Of God As Chapter Two Ends Such A Person Receives Praise Not From Others But From God They Are The People Who Honor God As God They Are The People Who Don't Exchange The Glory Of God For Idols Or Self Righteousness And They Are The People Who Find God's Approval And It Applies To People Who May Be Jews By Race And Those Who Are Not It Is Why Jesus Came Later On In This Letter Paul Says In Chapter Fifteen

[25 : 29] Welcome One Another Therefore Just As Christ Has Welcomed You For The Glory Of God For I Tell You That Christ Has Become A Servant Of The Circumcised On Behalf Of The Truth Of God In Order That He Might Confirm That The Gentiles To Your Name And Again He Says Rejoice O Gentiles With This People And Again Praise The Lord All You Gentiles And Let All The People Praise Him And Again Isaiah Says The Root Of Jesse Shall Come The One Who Rises To Rule The Gentiles In Him The Gentiles Shall Hope So Then May The God Of Hope Fill You With All Joy And Peace In Believing So That You May Abound In Hope By The Power Of The Holy Spirit Amen