

How Spirituality and Religion Immunize People Against God

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[0 : 00] Father, we confess before you that we can get very impatient with you. Father, we confess before you that in our culture, we like snappy slogans and really easy to digest phrases and things that just make it, Father, so that we can at least think we understand very quickly and easily without having to think.

And Father, we confess before you that that's what we're like. That's partially how our culture has formed us. And so, Father, we acknowledge that when we come to your word, that often we find it hard to understand and difficult to understand.

And we confess before you, Father, that we're not patient with that and we're not humbled by it, but we get frustrated with you. And maybe, Father, we confess that we just skip over all those parts until we find a quote we like that's easy for us to understand.

And we confess before you, Father, that we do this without even being aware that we do it. So, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would gently humble us and grant us penitent hearts, Father. Help us, Father, to be willing to have your word form us, that we might be made in the image of Jesus as we dwell on your word. And forgive us, Father, for trying to tame you and make you our pocket God that does what we want when we want it.

[1 : 26] So, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would do this work in our lives as we open your word now. And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. Is my battery dying, Andrew?

No? Okay. Okay. So, just a bit of an aside. You know, sometimes it can be odd for me. This has nothing ever to do with the sound guys.

In fact, we should, after the service, I'll give the sound guy like a big round of applause or offer to buy him a free coffee or something like that. But sometimes what I hear is different from what you're hearing. And that can sometimes just throw me off a little bit.

And obviously, anyway, there you go. So, this week, you know, it's really funny. I always pray every day for my sermon. And I pray as I'm reading the Bible. And I ask God to help me to understand the Bible.

And this week, actually, the text which Laurie just read a few moments ago, I found it to be quite a hard text to understand. I'll be honest with you.

[2 : 27] I found it hard to understand. And, like, about two or three weeks ago, I had to talk about one of the clearest texts about homosexuality in the Bible.

And actually, ironically, that text was really, really, really, really easy to understand. But it required lots of thought in terms of how I would talk about it in a place like Ottawa in 2015.

But this text was just hard to understand. And then, in the process of trying to understand, something odd happened to me this week. I don't know if you notice it, but when I come up to the front, I have this, like, journal notebook.

And I do all my notes. If you were to come and see me working on my sermon, you'd see me with a pen. I know it's very, very old-fashioned, but a pen in this book. And you'd see me reading and making these handwritten scrawls here.

So on Saturday, when I was coming in to do some more work on my sermon, and I was in a Starbucks, this couple looked like they were in their late 30s, early 40s. They'd looked like they'd maybe just, one of them looked like they'd come maybe from a yoga workout, because they had, or maybe Pilates or something.

[3 : 40] They had the yoga mat. And so they sit beside me, and the woman sees me with a journal like this.

And I'm, you know, looking out the window, and I'm thinking, and I'm writing things down. And she said, wow, that's really neat that you don't see many people anymore who actually just use pen and paper and write in journals like this.

Like, that's really neat. Like, what are you doing? Like, what are you writing about? Now, here's what goes through my mind. Like, she's paying me a compliment, right?

Like, she's basically saying, you must be deep. Like, you're not like all these other people just with their computers. Like, you're deep, thinking deep things, probably getting in touch with your feelings or your past.

And so I have to confess that it's a great temptation to say, oh, you know, I'm just really trying to think through things in life. And I just like working with pen and paper.

[4 : 41] And who knows, we'd have a conversation, and she'd go away thinking, wow, that's a deep man. And I struggle because, you know, in fact, I'm looking at the Bible text, and I'm thinking about Romans 1, 16 to 17, and I'm going to preach a sermon.

And I struggle. I have to confess that it was very powerful temptation for me to not say that I was working on a sermon. And I was, it's funny, you know, it's almost like I'm going in slow motion, because the whole thing, she wouldn't have even noticed a pause.

But inside of me, I can feel this huge pressure not to say that I'm working on a sermon, but to try to have her think, and the fellow think very well of me, have the two of them think well of me.

And so I say, well, I'm, actually, all week I've been reading the Bible, and I'm sort of reading the Bible now, and I have, I make notes as I try to think through what the Bible is teaching me, because I'm going to preach a sermon tomorrow, and I'm trying to work on my sermon.

That's what I said to her, to the couple. And as soon as I said that, you could see the light in their eyes and their facial expression change. Like, it was like, oh, you're one of those.

[5 : 52] And I, and off you go. I mean, and then the conversation ended. In fact, to tell somebody that you're reading the Bible and want to preach a sermon is often how you stop conversations, not how you start them.

Not all the time, obviously, as you know. And I mention that because it struck me that, that in some ways, God, I think, orchestrated that conversation to have that couple sit beside me.

And it both reveals my own heart, how I desire to be flattered and to be thought well of of the world, and how I can start to be ashamed of the gospel. And it's a telling moment about myself.

But it's, the fact of the matter is, is that, you know, for many people in our culture, people who go to church, that's not a, not often a sign of, of health and maturity. That people want to emulate us.

Now, you're probably saying, George, this is Thanksgiving Sunday. You've just depressed the heck out of us. Like, here we are in here. And, by the way, I, I, I understand increasingly in our culture, I appreciate every person who's come on a Sunday morning.

[7 : 00] You make big choices. There's lots of other things. And there's lots of easy drifts in our culture to do something else. So I'm very, very appreciative of the fact that, that we're all here together this morning to be able to meet with Jesus in the presence of his people.

But we know that many people in our culture see the church and the Bible as something toxic, not as something healthy. And it's interesting that this odd Bible text, which probably, as you were listening to it, you're thinking, what on earth is he talking about?

That, in fact, this Bible text is a warning from the Bible about how the Bible and Bible knowledge and baptism and church attendance can, in fact, be toxic.

That there's, in fact, ways of being involved in all of these things that act to immunize us against God. And immunize us against God in, in a form of self-justification and self-righteousness that people will find abhorrent and poisonous and want to run from.

That's, in fact, what the text is largely about. So it'd be a great help to me if you were to get your Bibles and turn in them to, to Romans. Actually, and while you're turning to Romans chapter 2, Andrew, could you put up Romans 1 for, for us?

[8 : 14] I'm going to have you, if you could read this with me in a moment. Those of you who've been coming here regularly, the way the book of Romans is written is the first seven verses sort of talk about a lot of the themes in the book.

And then Paul has some very personal types of comments. And then it's almost as if in verse 16 and 17, those of you who are in university or have to read university papers, it's almost as if Paul gives an abstract of the entire book in two verses.

And so week in, week out, we're going to keep sort of cycling back to this verse because it helps us to understand what's going on in the book. If we realize that everything in the book is unpacking and helping us to understand these two verses.

So if you would read them with me, that would be great. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. So now, if you have your Bibles open, let's hear what Paul says in Romans 2.

[9 : 27] Mindful that somehow or another, this that we're reading here, somehow or another serves Romans 1, 16 to 17. So Romans chapter 2, beginning at verse 17.

But if you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent, because you're instructed from the law, And if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth.

One second, just want to pause here for a second. I'm going to go back and we're going to reread this. I'm going to read it again a second time. But one of the things that we have to do to help us to understand what Paul is saying is we have to make a word substitution here.

And I'm not saying this because I'm trying to devalue people who are Jewish, but this text doesn't have any sting to us.

And the text is supposed to have some sting. And in fact, for some of us who are anti-Semitic, it's just, oh yeah, those Jewish people. Yeah, yeah, Paul. Yeah, you know, yeah, Bible.

[10 : 39] Get on those Jewish people. And so for some people, it ends up just being something that allows us to point fingers at somebody else. And the Bible is never written so that we can point a finger at somebody else.

It's never written for us to point fingers. And so we need to have a bit of a sense here about what Paul's doing. And so we're going to make a word substitution because Paul is talking about how good things that God has actually provided get twisted by us and end up making us abhorrent to people outside and end up actually keeping God far away.

It's like those of you who took the early alpha courses. And so we're going to make a word for us. It ends up just being a way to keep God at a distance. So what we're going to do is that when we read the word Jew, I'm going to say Anglican. And if you're a guest here this morning, you're Roman Catholic, what you should do is you should say Roman Catholic.

And if you're a guest here this morning and you're from a Pentecostal church, you should say Pentecostal to yourself. And if you're Baptist, you should say Baptist. And if you think that your denomination doesn't fit here, then this text is really for you.

[12 : 22] Like God has led you here this morning just to realize that, you know, Reformed Presbyterian can't put that in. Yes, you've got to put in Reformed Presbyterian, whatever it is.

I'm going to say Anglican because it would actually be really rude for me to say Baptist when I'm an Anglican. So I'm going to say Anglican. So now listen to this text now in light of this.

It will actually start to make a little bit more. It's still going to be confusing, a bit dark, but it will make a bit more sense. So Romans 2, 17. But if you call yourself an Anglican and rely on the Bible and boast in God and know his will and approve what is excellent because you are instructed from the Bible.

And if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the Bible the embodiment of knowledge and truth.

You then who teach others. Do you not teach yourself while you preach against stealing? Do you steal? You who say that one must not commit adultery. Do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols.

[13 : 29] Do you rob temples? You who boast in the Bible dishonor God by breaking what the Bible says. For as it is written, the name of God is blasphemed amongst people who hang out in bars because of you.

Now that's in terms of a bit of a different text and some of us might be a little bit insulted by it. But it becomes a different text when we put ourselves into it rather than thinking about how it refers to somebody else.

Andrew, could you put up the first point for me, please? Baptism, church attendance, and Bible knowledge can immunize me against God.

Baptism, church attendance, and Bible knowledge can immunize me against God. See, part of the problem with this text is, like, many of the things in this text are good things.

Like, shouldn't we rely on the Bible? And shouldn't we try to know what his will is? And shouldn't we try to approve what is excellent? And shouldn't we be instructed by the Bible?

[14 : 37] And if we've done that, shouldn't we be willing to talk to the blind and try to bring light into darkness? And shouldn't we try to be a teacher of the foolish and a teacher of children?

And shouldn't we acknowledge that the Bible is the embodiment of knowledge and truth? Like, George, isn't that what it's supposed to be? Well, it is.

And part of the key in the text is the two things. It's how the text ends and how the text begins. You see, the fact of the matter is that sometimes the Bible really is very hard for us to understand.

Like, the Bible isn't just put out by some slick marketing guy or gal who's trying to figure out how to get a good Twitter thing that will be in 120 characters so that it can be retweeted and easily digestible.

And the fact that some parts of the Bible just require us to really think about it. And sometimes it requires us to seek, like I had to seek the guidance of older, wiser Christians who knew the languages and all to try to get a bit of a handle on what it's talking about.

[15 : 45] But it can be very, very, it can be difficult. But in the beginning of the text, it talks about relying on the Bible and boasting in God.

And at the end of the text, it obviously is the case that they're relying on the Bible and boasting in God in a way that it shouldn't be. And so here's a little bit about what it's a very, very fine line.

It's as if you're going along a mountain ridge and you can go down one side or the other. And it makes a big difference whether you're going down one side or the other. Maybe one side is into the wilderness where you'll get lost and end up suffering grievous harm.

And the other side is where you'll go back to where your campsite is and you'll have a wonderful meal with your friends and just be so happy that you've had a wonderful day. And, you know, it's a little bit of a way to maybe get at it is two different ways to boast in your wife.

I'm going to use that as an example because I'm a man. I am so grateful that Louise has put up with me for 34 years.

[16 : 48] In a couple of weeks, we'll have our 34th anniversary. In late September, 40 years ago in late September was the first time I ever laid eyes on her. And I thought she was the most lovely person I'd ever seen.

And I really wanted to meet her. And I still think she's the most lovely person. And I'm just so glad that she's married to me and she's put up with me. And it fills me with gratitude.

It really does. And I've probably embarrassed her and she'll be upset with me afterwards. But hopefully she's not too upset because it's true and it's heartfelt. How does a man with a trophy wife talk about his wife?

Very, very different. A rich man with a trophy wife will boast in his wife in a very, very, very different way. Both will talk about how excellent their wives are.

But everything about it is completely different. And, you know, relying on the law and relying on the Bible. See, here's the thing that the Bible is going to get.

[17 : 53] I'm going to try to give you another illustration about this. Imagine for a second that I was to write out for my kids. Louise and I, let's say, we're going to be gone for, let's say we're going for a month or two.

And, like, when we were in our previous church, we lived in a rectory. And so people would drop around all, you know, would drop around. And quite a bit. In fact, sometimes they would just come and walk into our house without knocking.

But that's a separate story. Louise would come downstairs. There's somebody sitting in our living room. But that's a whole other story. Anyway, so imagine that we sit down and we write out a list of instructions about how it is that you handle guests.

And the kids get all excited. And every day they read the instructions about handle guests. And every day they go through brief ceremonies or rituals about how to handle guests.

I'll be the guest. This is what you say. And then you say this. And I say this. And you say this. And I say this. And actually, it becomes, in a sense, part of their identity. It's something that helps to form

and structure their day.

[18 : 58] That every day they read about from the letter from dad and mom about how to handle guests and what to do when guests come. But then when a guest actually comes, they might hate it.

Because guests are messy. They don't follow the script. They show up. They sit in your room. You know, it's a lot easier just to read the instructions about handling guests.

And having ritual and reenacting how you should handle guests. For some people, it becomes that that's what they really like. But actually, having a guest is a pain in the butt.

And that's what can happen with God. You know, it can be, and I'm going to use an Anglican example, that Anglicans can get all caught up. You would not believe the controversies that can happen about, you know, in the Lord's Supper and what words you should say after the words of institution.

And whether the Gloria, we don't do the Gloria, so some of you don't even know what that is.

Whether the Gloria for a communion service should be at the beginning of the service or whether it should be at the end. And whether you should wear this robe or that robe, or whether you should lift your hands this much or this much, or not lift your hands at all.

[20 : 14] Or whether you should bow or never bow. And there's a whole pile of big things about it. But the fact of the matter is, why did Jesus institute baptism? I mean, sorry, the Lord's Supper.

Why did he institute Lord's Supper? It was the whole, if you read the whole gospel, the implication is that when we celebrate communion later on, that Jesus is present. The Bible says that we're two or more present.

Jesus is in their midst. It's all about, we gather to be present with Jesus in the company of his people. And you do communion to remember that Jesus died on the cross for us.

That when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, we enter into a covenant that Jesus has made available for people like us to enter into a covenant. And that God will never let us go and that Jesus is coming back.

And it's all about Jesus. It's not just about us following instructions about it. Like, in a sense, it's all about being open to God. That God might actually show up.

[21 : 12] That God might actually be real. And so what this text is saying is that there's ways. And in fact, actually, later on in Romans chapter 10, you can look at it if you want. Romans chapter 10, verse 4.

Paul, in fact, like, because he keeps following up his argument. He says that Christ is the end of the law. That everything in the Old Testament is pointing to Jesus. Everything in the Old Testament is pointing to the fact that God would send a deliverer and that that's Jesus.

Everything is all about that and receiving him. Not just going through ceremonies to enact what happens when the Messiah comes, but that when the Messiah comes that you recognize him and you receive him.

The guest shows up. And he's sovereign and he's messy. But everything's about him. Everything's about him.

And so this Bible text is saying that, you know, we can be baptized, we can attend church, and we can know the Bible, and there's ways of doing that that actually immunize us against God.

[22 : 18] That it ends up being that the Bible and baptism and church attendance ends up becoming a way of justifying yourself and me justifying myself, and it's all about my self-righteousness, and it's all about me being moral and me being moral in the ways that I want to be moral, and it ends up sort of being all about me or my tribe and not about God.

And this is true of liberal churches, which have their own problems, but it's also, it can end up being in Orthodox churches.

Like, it's really odd. Like, in many Reform-type churches, which talk about election, and election is this wonderful truth that God actually calls us. It's that when we, like, if today the Holy Spirit is putting a pressure on you and you realize that it's time for you to give your life to Jesus, it's never that you think of this before God does, but that God is always calling you.

That every single person you meet today, even if they complete, even if the mention of God makes them fly into a rage, that you will not meet a single person today that God, in a sense, is not right beside them saying, I've sent my son to die for you.

I'm really hoping that you will turn to him and come to me so that you can be my adopted child and I can be your heavenly father. You will not meet a single person that God is not calling that to.

[23 : 47] But for some people, the doctrine of election ends up becoming something that you have to try to figure out what you have to do to show that you're elected or have a particular feeling. And in an odd way, that whole doctrine of election ends up being a way to immunize us against God, to sort of justify us doing all sorts of things that we just completely miss it.

But it becomes a way of keeping God distant because we're looking for the proof of it or something, or we have to feel it, or we have to be worthy of it, and it has nothing to do with worthiness, has nothing to do with any of those things, and it becomes a doctrine that keeps us far from God.

You could go on and on and on and on, that unless you have the certain feelings and certain, you know, in certain traditions, I was at a Christian weekend a couple of weeks, a couple of years ago, and it really struck me that people there, unless they felt they had an emotional experience that involved tears, that they could not know that God loved them or that Jesus was their Savior.

And it ended up being a very odd type of time where you could really see that they spent the whole time trying to work up certain experiences and feelings. And they might be horrified to think that they've taken the Bible and their confidence in the Bible and used it in such a way to actually keep God distant.

Now they're looking for a certain experience, not Jesus, not God. And in fact, they'd look down their noses at people who say that they've come to trust Jesus as their Savior and their Lord, who haven't wept those tears or had that experience.

[25 : 25] It would lead them to feel superior and look down their nose. Just as many Anglicans will look down their nose and feel superior at others because they don't wear the robes, they don't have the liturgy, they don't have this.

There's an old joke that we Anglicans are very, very open-minded. We understand that many people worship God in whatever way that they choose and we worship whatever way that makes right to them and we worship God in the way that he's told us to worship God.

So, you know, we're following God and the rest just are following their own. It's all sorts of ways to look down your nose at other people and therefore, you're actually hearing the Bible and using church membership and good Bible knowledge to be superior, to make yourself right with God, to look down the nose of others and keep God distant.

So, some of you might say, oh, by the way, just that one little phrase about robbing temples, what that's all about is that we know, we all know that we shouldn't have an idol up here.

We shouldn't have Venus or Zeus or Hermes or Adonis or any of these other Greek gods and goddesses up here. We all know that that's, we should never have that.

[26 : 53] But how many of us throughout the week worship Venus? I mean, what's pornography about other than worshipping the goddess Venus and the goddess Eros and paying them homage and serving them?

And we would never have a statue for mammon up here, but how many of us, and it's not necessarily the people with more money, how many of us, in fact, worship the god mammon and pay him homage?

One of the guys that gives me a hard time at Starbucks, he, whenever I see him with his Lotto 649 tickets, you can see why I don't make any, nobody comes to faith through me, I say to him, ah, you're worshipping the goddess Fortune today, paying her homage with your Lotto 649 tickets. And he gets grumpy and he'll come back at me later on about something, but we don't go to temples to worship them, but do we secretly come in to rob them so that in the secret places of our heart we worship those idols?

You see, in all of these things, what Paul, this is all part of a long argument from Paul, and a long argument from Paul is that we need a righteousness from God that will make us right with God, that we need God to act because we can't fix ourselves to make ourselves right with God.

[28 : 23] We need God to act. There is no way that we can make ourselves right with God, and that that's not only true for people who are part of the gay pride parade, and it's not only true for people who are, every night they're closing the bar and they stagger home drunk, but it's also true for people who go to Reformed Presbyterian churches and Pentecostal churches and Vineyard churches and Anglican churches, that everybody has to understand that they need God and they have to receive something that only God can do for them.

Everybody has to, and that's what Paul's trying to, he's going through a whole series of different scenarios, trying to leave nobody out, that they will come to realize that unless God acts with effective power in a way that's right, we can't be right with God.

God has to act with effective power in a way that is right, to make us right with himself, and he's done it in Jesus. So some of you might say, George, this is, okay, well, this is a different take, and I know you're going to talk about the next few verses, but George, are you saying that you sin less than other people?

Like, you're talking as if you understand this text, and you've seen through what's going on. Are you saying you're superior because you've seen what's going on? That's, by the way, always a great temptation for us.

It's one of the things that just shows us the depth of our sin is that even at moments when we have a real aha moment and breakthrough with God that instantly we can feel better than other people.

[29 : 59] Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. But are you saying, George, that you sin less? Or that people who hear this sermon are going to sin less than other people?

And if I'm reading this correctly, isn't the Bible warning people against you? In fact, George, are you saying that the Bible is one of those really, really cynical texts that warns people against itself and is sort of like just a really cynical type of thing?

No, that's... This is where seeing the really weird thing, because this was already... The first few verses are just puzzling.

But all of a sudden, it seems to us that out of the blue, God's... Paul's talking about circumcision. How does circumcision help this text, this dilemma?

And it's like a puzzling type of thing. And it's... Here's one of those things where the parts of the Bible sometimes that are most weird can often be the type that the texts that are actually going to help us to get to understand if we're patient with them.

[31 : 10] So let's look at Romans. This... What happens? So Paul's... Romans 17 to 24, chapter 2, now verse 25 and following, where he talks about circumcision. It goes like this. For circumcision...

So it's just gone verse 24. Remember, for as it is written, the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you. That's one of the literary clues to help us to understand that all those good things that he was talking about, that somehow these good things have gotten rotten.

they've gone putrid, that there's something in there which is of death because, you know, the Bible's telling him to re-look at these things and try to understand these things because verse 24, and he quotes the Bible to let us know that this is the case.

And so verse 25, he continues, for... In other words, it's following on from this. For circumcision indeed is a value if you obey the law. But if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.

But one moment, just before we read any further, we already understand that nobody keeps the law. Does that mean that everybody's uncircumcised? That everybody... And maybe here, if you're gonna...

[32 : 15] And later on we'll see, but... Well, I'll just read with circumcision, but you might want to put in the word baptism there rather than circumcision. So if a man who is uncircumcised, verse 26, keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?

Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code. And here what this word condemn means is not that they're a judge, but that they give evidence.

That's what it means here. In other words, it would be as if... One of the things, if you... I don't know how many of you have ever lived in really small towns, like really small towns.

When we lived in Eganville, I think they advertised a population of 2,000, but it was probably less than that. And there was this young guy that our family knew, and he was getting a little bit, putting on a little bit of weight.

He was only like 13 or 12 or something like that. And his parents told him that he wasn't allowed to eat potato chips and other types of things. And I guess all the time they would tell him, you're not allowed to eat these things after school.

[33 : 18] So one day, he'd bought himself a big bag of potato chips. And on his way home, he stopped, and it was a nice sunny day, and he stopped at a bench and he ate the bag of potato chips.

He didn't realize that a photographer from the Eganville Leader took a picture of him eating a bag of potato chips on a sunny spring afternoon.

I think it was spring. And so, you know, he's like an 11-year-old, 12-year-old, whatever he was. He never read the Eganville Leader. And so, you know, the Eganville Leader comes out a couple of days from now, and his mom says, oh, I almost said the guy's name, which would be bad.

Oh, son, you know we've told you not to eat bags of potato chips on your way home. You don't do that. No, no, mom. I don't do that at all. Well, look what's here in the Eganville Leader.

Who's this person eating potato chips in the afternoon on their way home? So this, in a sense, that picture condemns him. In other words, by giving evidence. And that's what's meant here.

[34 : 22] Okay, that's how you have to understand it. So when it says here in verse 27, so verse 26, so if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?

We'll talk about that in a moment. But then verse 27, then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and uncircumcision but break the law. In other words, what it's saying here is that in heaven, there'll be lots of people in heaven who've given their lives to Jesus but they've never been baptized. Okay, and in heaven and in hell, there'll be lots of people who are baptized but haven't given their life to Jesus.

That's to sort of make it a little bit more like relevant to us. If you've given your life to Jesus, you should be baptized, by the way. You should seek to be obedient to baptism. But there'll be people in heaven who've given their lives to Jesus, never got around to baptism or whatever happened, just didn't happen, but they're in heaven because the key thing is something that went on in the center of who you are.

Not whether or not water got, you know, not whether or not, oh, you know, you weren't really baptized because you got baptized as an infant because you didn't go underneath the water the proper way or, you know, like it's not about somehow getting the water thing right or even the water itself that the relevance of that has to do with something internal.

[35 : 43] That's what the Bible is trying to get at. Verse 28, for no one is a Jew, no one is an Anglican who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision or baptism outward and physical, but an Anglican is one inwardly, but actually here really a member of the covenant people, that's here where it breaks down, is one inwardly and circumcision or baptism is a matter of the heart by the Holy Spirit, not by the letter.

His and her praise is not from human beings but from God. So here, if you could put up the next point, Andrew, my heart needs to be circumcised and baptized.

The Bible says, my heart needs to be circumcised and baptized. And by the way, Paul will later on in Romans 6 make this connection between baptism and circumcision himself.

But as you'll see in a moment, it's saying that my heart needs to be circumcised. My heart needs to be baptized. but when I say this, remember I began this sermon with the story of me in the Starbucks and this couple, both but 40, yoga mats and sort of complimenting me in a sense, wanting to start a conversation with me because I must be deep and more authentic because I'm writing in a journal with a pen.

pen, I just can't type actually. I do like paper and pen and that's partially because I'm old and I can't type. So is this text saying, George, you've just got to be more deep?

[37 : 39] You've got to be more deep. But that's what it means when I say that my heart needs to be circumcised and baptized. Is that just saying that you can't be just focused on externals? It is partially saying that but you've got to be deeper as a person and you've got to get in touch with your feelings and maybe get in touch with your body and you've got to be in touch with your history and you've got to be more reflective and you've got to think about your family of origin and is that what this text is saying?

Not at all. Not even remotely. Not even remotely. Andrew, could you put up the next point? The first point was that the point just before this was that my heart needs to be circumcised and baptized but the text is trying to get us to understand that only the Holy Spirit can circumcise and baptize my heart.

A journal and a pen doesn't baptize my heart. A yoga mat doesn't baptize my heart. taking communion in and of itself doesn't baptize my heart.

Doesn't circumcise my heart. Look at verse 29 again. But a Jew or an Anglican or a Christian is one inwardly and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the Holy Spirit not by the letter.

His praise is not from man or human beings but from God. See, we have to understand the heart here doesn't mean feelings.

[39 : 21] I've heard lots of Christians say that the biggest journey in the Christian faith I should have measured it. I can't remember if it's 12 inches from here to here or 18 inches. I know some people have really long necks but whatever some people I don't know is that a foot or 18 inches?

Well, I'll say a foot but maybe it's more. They say the longest journey in the Christian faith where the Christian faith begins is where the 12 inch journey from here to here and what they mean is that you have feelings.

That's not reading the text correctly. It's not telling you to have certain feelings. That's actually sort of a real trap that a lot of Christians fall into to try to have the right feelings.

The heart in the Bible is always the command center of who you are. The command center of who you are. And, you know, that command center it's partially it's, you know, how you understand what to do is partially from feelings partially from you know, emotions partially from a sense of beauty or a sense of love and partially sometimes it's a matter of thinking sometimes it's a matter of knowing what's right and wrong.

There's a variety of things that work at the command center of who we are because human beings are deep and complex and emotions and the mind and morals and beauty all have an impact in terms of us making decisions but the heart doesn't refer to a certain type of feeling it's always referring to the command center of who we are.

[40 : 50] And this image of circumcision which is so weird so it's seen that the command center of who Sinclair is has to be circumcised. In the ancient world when the Jewish people were first given the right of circumcision there were other ancient peoples that practiced circumcision pagans who practiced circumcision and when they practiced circumcision I mean scholars now looking back on it and trying to read the documents think that it symbolized one of two things.

It symbolized in a sense a token of human sacrifice that when that part of the male anatomy was cut off it's symbolizing that a human being has died for you and sometimes it was used to symbolize they think that the power of life that that's sacrificed on your behalf.

But for the Jewish people when they're given the right of circumcision in Genesis chapter 17 and then later on in the law they're given the right of circumcision and it's all from a different it's all within the context of a covenant and it's very interesting it's in your groin and grace if you look at Genesis 15 and then read Genesis 17 you get both aspects of it but it's as if God enters into a relationship with the people of Israel and within this relationship he says I will be your God and you will be my people and if you don't act as my people then there's going to be these punishments these things that will befall you if you break a covenant with me if you break the ten commandments if you break them with me and there's this scene in Genesis 15 where an animal is killed and the parts of the animal are set in both sides and then you have this symbolic acting out as if they walk between the killed parts of the animal and then in Genesis 17 it's all come to a conclusion as circumcision is given to them and circumcision is in a sense an acting out of the covenant that if you fail to keep this covenant with God you are circumcised to say

I will enter into covenant with you God you will be my God I will be your child and I know that you will provide for me and you will do this and if I break the covenant I will be cut off I will be like this dead animal that's killed and actually could you put up Romans 1 16 to 17 you want to say this with me please this is where we have to understand now why the circumcision image comes here I know it's 40 minutes I have to wrap this up could you read this with me for I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek for in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written the righteous shall live by faith so what we see in this text is that it is the power of God that God needs to act with effective power and he needs to act with effective power in a way that's right and he has to act with effective power in a way that's right to make us right with him and we're going to understand and receive this by faith in other words not by anything that we've done but by God doing something for us that we can't do ourselves so what is it that we understand about the person of Jesus person of Jesus is he's come from God and he gets cut off on our behalf in a sense he circumcision is like reading the instructions of the coming of the guests but when Jesus dies upon the cross before that in John's gospel he's introduced as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world and on the cross

Jesus cries out my God my God why hast thou forsaken me and Jesus is cut off from God not because of what he has done in and of himself but he dies in my place I deserve to be cut off from God because I have broken and violated his moral laws I have used even the Bible in a way to further my self-righteousness and my boasting in myself and I have used the Bible even the good things that come from him in such a way and I deserve to be cut off from God I am cut off from God and Jesus is cut off from God in my stead so that when I put my faith and trust in Jesus he took my cut offness and in exchange offers me his status as God's child God's son and what he does for me in the cross has to be applied to me only God can do it and the Holy Spirit does it by in a sense circumcising my heart what he does for me enters into me as I enter into him what's the symbolism of baptism the symbolism of baptism which takes the place of circumcision is that

[46 : 04] I deserve death I will die and I deserve to die and I am separate from God and I deserve to be eternally separate from God and I can't fix that myself and most of the time I don't even want to fix it and Jesus takes my death and my doom and dies my death and my doom and if I put my arms out to him he reaches down from heaven and takes me to himself and in that unbelievable exchange of faith because I can't even reach up to Jesus my arms are way too small but he can reach me and when he reaches me he takes the death and the doom that I deserve and on the cross he dies my death he takes upon himself my doom and as he holds me he gives me his life and his status as God's child forever and that has to come only God can do that and put that into the command center of my life the center of who I am

Andrew could you put up the fourth point please having a circumcised heart does not mean that I sin less than other people it means that I by sheer grace have been made right with God through Jesus Christ having a circumcised heart does not mean that I sin less than other people it means that I by sheer grace have been made right with God through Jesus Christ God acts with effective power in a way that is right to make me right with himself and as the gospel grips us this deep seated temptation within us to justify ourselves to keep God at a distance you see the problem is that when religion becomes when church membership and baptism in the Bible all ends up becoming a means by which we in a sense are trying to make ourselves right with God then when sin comes before us well we're completely and utterly caught because it means that our whole status with God is completely and utterly in question and ruined so we pretend that we don't we deny we explain away we ignore we repress we do all of those types of things because we can't actually face the fact that we're doing wrong and that our whole project of trying to make ourselves right with God is doomed to failure but as the gospel grips us there's this odd dynamic that can go on in our lives as the gospel grips us as it grips us that we can never make ourselves right with God that our sanctification is not our justification that we're justified and that only God can make us right with himself as that grips us that nothing in my hands I bring simply to the cross I cling as that grips us and as people point out George you're a sinner do you know what you did do you know whatever that thought or that thing that you said I mean part of me wants to deny part of me wants to repress part of me but as the gospel grips me I can say yes I did that that's why I need a savior that's why I need a savior and I am so glad I am so grateful that my right standing with God does not depend upon what I've done I know it can be hard for my ego to be acknowledged once again that I've done wrong but there can be this on one hand desire to make myself to say to God I'm sorry but at the same time a growing confidence that that is yet again proof that I need a savior that I'm gripped by Jesus when I'm gripped by the gospel let's stand please

I meant what I said earlier we'll talk in a couple of weeks about the doctrine of election but the way to understand the doctrine of election is that every single person that you meet today every single person God is in a sense right beside them talking to them and say I so long for you to get off of trying to make yourself righteous I long for you to come with empty hands to your to my son so that I will be your God and you will be my people I so long for you to call out to me to do what only I can do and I will baptize the command center the center of who you are I will circumcise I will deal with all of that I will do that and there is no person that we meet today that God is not already calling to them and he's calling to you and if you've been trying to keep God at a distance there's no better time than right now to rather than keeping him at a distance but to stand with empty hands and say father with empty hands I come please baptize with your but may your

Holy Spirit baptize my heart may your Holy Spirit circumcise my heart may what Jesus has done for me on the cross may that come and define now who I am whatever your words are even if it's just you just say Romans 1 16 to 17 again and then say father make that real in me today there's no

better time than today to do that let's bow our heads in prayer father thank you for the baptism of the Holy Spirit thank you that the Holy Spirit will circumcise all who call to you in faith humbly coming to you to ask you to do what only you can do thank you for Jesus thank you for his death upon the cross thank you that you will respond to all who call thank you father that we don't have to wait to feel that we're the elect we don't have to feel wait until we feel that we've that we're good enough that we're together enough that we don't have to wait until we were able to fool people about what our past was like or what our present is like father we are so grateful that we can come to you right now in a sense naked before you and that we can come to you and call out to you and ask maybe for the first time in our life that that the

[52 : 54] Holy Spirit would come and baptize our heart circumcise our heart that Jesus would be our Savior and Lord and father for those of us who've already made that transaction father thank you that you remind us again that we need Jesus that we need grace that it's all grace father forgive us for our self-righteousness and boasting thank you father for what Jesus has done for us on the cross make me make us disciples of Jesus gripped by the gospel who live for your glory humbly facing ourselves in light of the cross this we ask in Jesus's name amen