

TALKS FOR GROWING CHRISTIANS TRANSCRIPT

Even Religious Jews were guilty Before God Roman 2:17-29

"Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, ¹⁸ and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, ¹⁹ and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. ²¹ You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? ²² You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? ²⁴ For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written. ²⁵ For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. ²⁶ Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? ²⁷ And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? ²⁸ For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; ²⁹ but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."

Background Notes

The good news in the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans is that God has a plan of salvation for mankind! Even though people are sinners and don't deserve salvation, God in His grace has provided salvation for us in Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, came into this world for the express purpose of going to the cross to die for our sins. The penalty of sin is death, and Jesus Christ paid that penalty as our substitute. This is the gospel! This is all part of God's wonderful plan and package of salvation for people. But before that great plan of salvation can be unfolded in the epistle to the Romans, the whole world must be shown to be guilty and in need of salvation. The foundation must be laid, the decks must be cleared. Mankind's great need of salvation must be demonstrated before God's great plan of salvation can be presented. That's what chapters 1 through 3 of Romans are all about.

In chapter 1, the uncivilized barbarian is shown to be guilty before God. Whether they be godless heathen or idolatrous pagans, no one has an excuse. All are guilty before the Creator! In the first half of chapter 2, we saw that the good and morally upright self-righteous person also falls short of God's standards. It's not only the uncivilized pagan who falls short -- the civilized and cultured person falls short as well.

When Paul wrote the first 16 verses of Romans 2, most likely he had more folks in mind than just the civilized and cultured Jew. But now, in verses 17-29, he definitely zeros in on the religious Jew. Not only are the uncivilized pagans guilty before God, and not only are the civilized self-righteous people guilty before God, but even the religious Jews, who had the law of God given to them -- even they are guilty before God!

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. God condemns religious hypocrisy.

Look at verses 21-23 "You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? ²² You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? ²⁴ For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written." The point here is that the religious Jews were hypocrites. They claimed to be keepers of the law (v17), they boasted about law of God (v23), they claimed to know God's will and do only what was good (v18), they claimed to be guides to the blind and light those in darkness (v19), they claim to be spiritually mature teachers of God's Word (v20), but they were **hypocrites!** The religious Jews taught others -- but didn't teach themselves (v21)! They preached that you should not steal and that you should not commit adultery, but they themselves were committing these same sins (v21-22). Some of the religious Jews were even known to take treasure from the heathen temples, while they professed to hate anything connected with idolatry (v22)! They were hypocrites, and God condemns religious hypocrisy.

Do you see the application for us here? Is it possible that you're a religious hypocrite? Are you wearing some kind of spiritual mask, but behind this mask you're involved in kind of some secret sin? Are you sitting in church with your brothers and sisters in Christ, but behind their backs you are slandering them and saying nasty things about them – maybe because you're jealous of them, for whatever reason? Is it possible that you're a religious hypocrite? Maybe you're not even a Christian -- you're just faking it! Listen, **you have to get right with God**, because God **condemns religious hypocrisy**.

Remember our Lord's words in Matthew 23:13-15: "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. ¹⁴ Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation."^[a]

¹⁵ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves."

Let's make sure we're not involved in religious hypocrisy, because God condemns religious hypocrisy!

2. God condemns religious ritualism.

Verse 25: "For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision." Circumcision, as you know, was the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant for the Jewish people. As long as the Jewish people honored God and followed His law, circumcision was meaningful. But the Jewish people were **not** honoring God, and they weren't following God's Law, even though they continued to practice circumcision. They were practicing it only as a ritual – a religious ritual. Therefore God said that their circumcision was merely a meaningless ritual. The ritual meant nothing if the heart was not right with God. The heart must be circumcised, not just the flesh (v29).

In fact, the uncircumcised Gentile was better off with God than the circumcised Jew, if the Gentile honored God and His Law. Verses 26-27: "Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? ²⁷ And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you

who, even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law?" The "uncircumcised man" here would be Gentiles.

In verse 29, there is a play on words in the last phrase where we read *"whose praise is not from men but from God."* You see, the root meaning of the name Jew (which comes from Judea), is **praise** -- and that is what God was looking for! But because of religious ritualism, the religious Jews weren't Jews **inwardly**. They weren't bringing praise to God. You can see that play on words there at the end of verse 29: *"but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."*

Do you see how all of this applies to us today? God condemns religious ritualism, and unfortunately **many** people practice religious ritualism today. Take Christian baptism, for example. Baptism is a God-given ordinance, and it is good if it is practiced in a biblical way. But some people treat baptism as a "rite," a religious ritual. As long as they've been baptized, either as a baby or as an adult, they think they're saved. They think that they have "made it" with God, even if they don't honor God with their heart -- and thus are not right with God. How wrong can you be? Baptism means nothing if you haven't trusted Christ as your Savior.

God condemns religious ritualism.

Practical application

Is the "name of God blasphemed" because of you?

Verse 24: *"For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."* The Jewish people claimed that they were following God, but at the same time they were breaking God's law by lying, stealing and committing adultery. As a result, the Gentiles blasphemed the God of the Jews! How terrible!

Unfortunately this happens today because of the behavior of some Christians. Let me give you an example. Some years ago, when we were about to sell our home, a Christian realtor (whom we knew only by name) decided without our permission or knowledge to get a little "piece of the pie" by notifying our own local, non-Christian realtor that we were his clients! As a result, he would get a cut of the commission when the house was sold. Well, to make a long story short, the name of God was literally blasphemed more than once because of this Christian realtor's actions.

That's a sad story, but it's a lesson for all of us. Many more examples could be given. We need to ask ourselves honestly: How is my behavior on the job? In my neighborhood? Does my behavior honor God, or is the "name of God blasphemed" because of me?