

Romans (2:17-24)

Don't Put Faith in Religion

PART 7 – AUGUST 1, 2004

TOUGHEST CROWD YET

Up to now, Paul has identified two groups who need Christ:

- A. The Rebellious (1:18-32) who repress, reject, & replace truth. These people have *no* rules and see no need for God.
- B. The Respectable (2:1-16) who relabel and reduce their own sin. These people have *two sets* of rules: one for judging; and one for deeming themselves better than others.

A rebellious person is usually easier to reach for Christ than a respectable person; they reach the end of their rope quicker. Today, Paul identifies a third and final group; a group far more difficult to reach than either the rebellious or the respectable.

- C. The Religious (2:17-3:8) who earn their ticket to Heaven. These people *worship* their rules in place of God.

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth – you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” – Romans 2:17-24 NIV

- Paul was not anti-Semitic; he didn’t *hate* the Jews.

A Jew himself, Paul considered Christianity to be the consistent, coherent, continuation of Judaism that fulfilled God’s promises. But as a Jew, Paul learned first hand that when your faith is in religion you can find yourself religiously pitted against God.

On the authority of the chief priests I [Paul] put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. – Acts 26:10 NIV

Because religion is all about the *external*, it can impair or replace our relationship with God, which all about the *internal*.

Q: Does your religion ever interfere with your relationship?

Paul gives six Religious Warning Signs - indicators that faith may be placed in external religion vs. internal relationship.

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God ... - Romans 2:17 NIV

1. The externally religious like the label

Our label isn't "Jew" it's "Christian" as in: "I don't go to those movies ... I'm a *Christian*."

When I meet church visitors, I rarely tell them I'm the pastor. I don't want unearned credit or criticism. Once, this irate guy wanted to know why I'd *deceived* him. He thought I was ashamed. I said, "Would you have treated me differently?" He said, "Of course!" And I said, "Well, that's why! I want your opinion to be based on my behavior - not my label."

- We should choose showing over telling

I brag about how great the people and the staff here are. And if they ask about the pastor I just say, "Mm, I've heard better."

2. They rely on the rules

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God ... - Romans 2:17 NIV

It's easier to maintain rules than a relationship. And, we fall into the religious trap of thinking that we're earning points with Jesus when we're good ... and getting docked when we're bad. Our behavior should be a grateful response to His free gift

Salvation is not earned; it is simply received through *our faith*, by *His grace*; nothing that I do can help "foot the bill".

3. They assert their status

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God ... - Romans 2:17 NIV

Q: Ever notice how when people start bragging about God, they end up kind of bragging about their own spiritual maturity? "God did it all; He gets the credit. I was just the *vessel*. All I did was pray and fast and trust and not give up."

Q: If a blind man asked you to pray for him, and you did, and he could see, could you imagine whispering into his ear: "Don't tell anyone it was me who prayed for you."

That's what Jesus did. He didn't crave man's approval. We do. And sometimes we try to disguise it as a "praise report". Jesus didn't need to assert His spiritual status

If you really want to brag about *God*, share those secret sins you're still battling. Then we'll rejoice that we serve such a loving, forgiving, patient, grace-filled God.

Q: Who wants to brag about God?!

4. They condescend to "commoners"

... if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the **blind**, a light for those who are **in the dark**, an instructor of the **foolish**, a teacher of **infants**, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth ... - Romans 2:18-20 NIV

- This is how they see others: **blind, shady, stupid, babies.**

They *were* chosen to guide the blind and light the way for those in darkness. They were privileged with access to the truth. They were to be the world's missionaries; a chosen nation blessed to be a blessing.

But, rather than give it away, they held onto it and became more and more separated *from* and contemptuous *of* this heathen world. That's why Jesus called them blind guides (*Mat 15:14*) and declared that His church is now the light of the world (*Mat 5:14*).

- It is a solemn thing – privilege and access to the truth.

Your childhood may not have been perfect. It may have been far from perfect. But consider this:

- A. Think about the year you were born.

Q: Of all the years of human history, back to Adam, what are the odds of being born when you were? What with modern education, science, technology, human rights, and lengthened life-spans.

- B. Think about your physical needs: food, shelter, clothing.

Q: Remember the "Global Income Position" chart? It ranks people from *poorest* to *richest* in the world. If you make \$30,000 your position is clear at the top. There're 5,566,727,941 people less fortunate than you.

- C. Think about this (super-power) country we live in.

Out of nine *billion* people worldwide, you hit the bull's-eye (268 million). 97 out of 100 do *not* get to live in the U.S.A.

- We are blessed to be a blessing

Q: How many of you grew up in a home with a Bible?

It is easy to take these things for granted, and to look down on those not so privileged. If our faith makes us feel superior, it is *not* a faith in the Christ of scripture, but a faith in a religious system.

5. They don't walk the talk

... you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do **you steal**? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do **you commit adultery**? You who abhor idols, do **you rob temples**? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? - Romans 2:21-23 NIV

Stealing, adultery, and robbing temples; they're guilty ethically, morally, and spiritually.

Religious people are easy prey for hypocrisy because they have external standards without the empowering work of God's Spirit.

Q: What do the unchurched criticize most about religious folks?

A: Hypocrisy.

There are only two ways to be a Christian and not a hypocrite: live a life of faultless behavior, or live a life of total transparency. We must let others know that we know when we're not living up to our own beliefs and standards.

Then comes Paul's harshest criticism; they're *so* obnoxious that:

6. Their behavior is blasphemous

As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." - Romans 2:24 NIV

The worst sin a Jew could commit was blasphemy – bringing shame onto God's name.

They claimed to be guides, lights, and instructors. But they took pride in correcting others, got an ego boost from quoting scripture, and used their Bible to beat people up.

In our culture, most of the hostility toward the church is not because of who God is, but because of how His followers act. There are some who think they're persecuted for His name, when in reality, His name is being perverted by their obnoxious behavior.

- Paul is only half-done with the Jews.
- We'll pick it up from here next week.