

**God's Judgment of the Religious Man<sup>1</sup>**  
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Text: Romans 2:17-29

Purpose: God's judgment of sin is aimed at all areas of life. The wrath of God is reserved not only for the blatant sinner (1:18-32), and hypocrites (2:1-16), but even for the religious person (2:17-29) who assumes superiority over others. We all are sinners in need of God's grace.

A couple was planning to attend a meeting and they were running a little late. The man was ready to go, but his wife was taking entirely too long to get ready. As he stood at the door fuming and trying to encourage his wife to hurry up, he said a few things that, well, maybe he should not have said.



They finally got in the car and were headed to their appointed destination. The way this couple worked through their disagreement at times was the silent treatment. The destination took some time to get to so they sat there in silence. He was mad because they were going to be late, and she was mad at the things he said to her.

Have you ever experienced a similar situation? Don't answer that one. I already know the answer. If you have ever been married longer than 24 hours, then you know exactly what I am talking about.

As they were riding along, he noticed several mules out in a field grazing. Men can say some of the dumbest things, can't they? The man decided he would poke a little fun at his wife in attempts to break the tension that had built up.

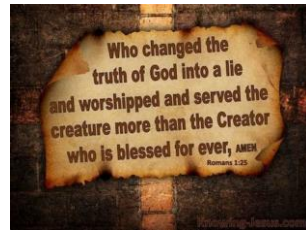


He said, "Are those relatives of yours?"

She said, "Yes, they are! They are my in-laws!"

This husband thought he would take the moral superiority route and attempt to degrade his wife. Instead, he was the one that ended up put in his place. That is often the way it is with moral superiority. We think we are on top of the world, and then the bubble busts.

That is exactly what we see in the Epistle of Romans. Romans chapter one opens with a condemnation against all kinds of moral degradation. We examined and noticed God's wrath was aimed towards those that had turned away from God and in doing so, they opened themselves up to God letting them have their fill of sin. That list included ungodliness, unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil mindedness, whispers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, and unmerciful. (Romans 1:18-32)



## God's Judgment of the Hypocrite (Romans 2:1-16)

Maybe we can sit here and say, "Hey, I am not doing any of those things. All that I am doing must be acceptable to God." But Paul does not stop there. He continues on in chapter two to describe those that are hypocrites in the community of faith. One of the things that people in the church are most accused of being is a hypocrite. Those individuals that say one thing at church, but when it comes to business or family or interaction in the community, they act completely another way.



I can tell you this. The unbelieving world out there may not attend church, but they are watching every move you make. Do you treat them with kindness and fairness? Are you saying "come to church" while you are cheating them or taking advantage of them?

But we are not going to deal with the hypocrites today. Of course, there is not anyone here today that fits that bill. (Well, none of us would admit it if it was true.)

## God's Judgment of the Religious Man

The next group of individuals that Paul begins to address is the religious people of his day. The gentiles that Paul addressed in chapter one did not have the full understanding of God in the way the Jews did. If the gentiles were walking in semi-darkness, then the Jews were walking in full daylight.





Many people believe that being religious is a good thing. However, those same people that are being religious may actually be blind and are on a path towards hell. It is not what we do externally that brings salvation to us; it is what happens on the inside.

As we examine Romans chapter 2, we see that Paul is speaking to the Jewish religious leaders of his day. They claimed moral superiority because of the Law and how faithfully they kept it. But if Paul were speaking to us today, these same words could apply to Baptists as well.



Jesus reminds the religious individuals that, *“Not all that say, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of God.”* Many religious people will get a great surprise on judgment day because they will receive the same judgment as blatant sinners.

### **I. The Spiritual Confidence of the Religious Man (v. 17-20)**

Paul turns his attention to the spiritual confidence of the religious man of that day – the Jew.



*“Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the*

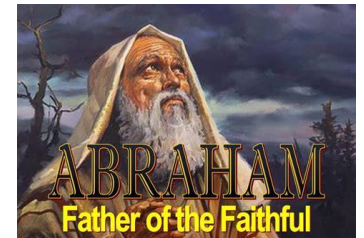
*foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.”* (v.17-20)

The religious leaders would probably cheer Paul on as he first lists those sins of the gentiles. Even today as you turn on the Christian Programming television channel, you can see the self-righteousness of those on the various programs. They spend a great deal of time bashing the culture and the various sins in the world today. Those doing such things routinely are used as fodder for the religious communities’ cannons. You can almost hear an “Amen!” said as these sins are decried.

But when you increase the magnification of the microscope, you can see many things come to light. We need to be sure we are not living under delusion and walking in darkness. One of the sources of blindness was related to their heritage and lineage.

### **A. They Boasted of their Lineage (v. 17a)**

Throughout the centuries the Jewish nation has taken great pride in the fact that they could trace their family heritage all the way back to Abraham. Probably there in Jerusalem, prior to the destruction of the city in 70 AD, you could come and do genealogical research on your family. Paul boasted of his family history and I am sure most were proud of who their ancestors were. They may have felt that since they belonged to a certain tribe or family, that they were assured of salvation! How wrong they were.



But isn't that the same way we operate in many Christian communities? Millions have claimed that since they live in a so-called Christian nation, that they must be a Christian. Some claim their faith through their parents or grand-parents. Some believe that since they were baptized as an infant that they must be a Christian. But a person only becomes a Christian when they personally place their faith and trust in the finished work of Christ on the cross of Calvary.



## B. They Boasted of their Law (v. 17b)

The Jews not only boasted in their lineage, but they also boasted in their law. Paul uses this word "law" 70 times in the Epistle to the Romans. They felt that somehow, they were superior to others because the rituals ordained by God gave them a higher standing before God. They felt that by possessing the law and knowing it, it was enough for a relationship with the Lord.



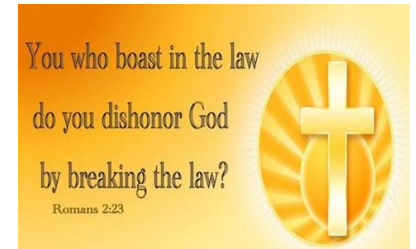
But the opposite was true. Paul tells them (in a few verses later) that having this knowledge holds them to a higher standard than those that have no law. What they thought was a guarantee of salvation, actually turned into a guarantee of condemnation.

It would be like the person that had grown up in the church all their life. You are surrounded by Christian songs, hear Christian sermons and read the Bible and participate in

various Christian rituals. If you are not careful, you will begin to think that because of these things in your life, you are automatically a Christian. What may surprise you is that all that you know will be held against you if you do not believe it and practice in your life.

## C. They boasted of their Lord (v. 17c-18)

Again, the Jews claimed a special relationship based upon their observance of the law and other religious activity. They felt that BEING religious was simply enough to please God.



It may come as a surprise to you, but you cannot do enough to please God! If you memorized the Bible and did all kinds of good things, it still would not be enough to merit God's forgiveness. We are only saved by placing our faith in Jesus Christ.



Romans 10:9 – *"If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*

Ephesians 2:8-9 – *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."*

The bottom line is this; we can say what we want, but until we have been saved by the blood of the Lamb, we are still under condemnation for our sins. Once Jesus' blood has

been applied to our sin, we are made whiter than snow. We are instantly changed from death unto life.

#### **D. The boasted in their Leadership (v. 19-20)**

Because of their lineage, and their law, they felt that they were in a position to tell others that they were superior to all others. This pride led them to believe that they were to be the teachers and guides for all the others around them.

Jesus warned them because of their attempts to convert others to their interpretation of faith. Jesus said Matthew 23:15, *“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.”*



This is played out over and over again across our country. Someone told me of an encounter a young person they had at another church. This teenager was from out of town and had decided to attend church at the last minute with some friends. They were met at the door by a 7-year-old handing out bulletins. The young boy told the teenage girl that it was not appropriate to come to church in pants and that she was lazy for not changing. To make matters worse, that young boy came along to check on the girl. When she opened her bible, she had a New International Version with her. The young boy told the girl that was not God’s word. The only acceptable word of God is the King James Translation. That is God’s word.



This happened right here in North Carolina. A child as young as seven years old can be brainwashed into what is acceptable to God and what translation is acceptable to read. This is legalism at its finest – and I can tell you God hates this! The Jews were experts in religion and the law. Sometimes we can become so focused on the letter of the law, that we forget the spirit of the law.

Our duty is not to correct others in the way they wear their hair, the way they dress, or even in the way they worship. We do not need to get caught up in the externals of worship. We need to be very sure we are not equally guilty of pointing a finger at others in self-righteous superiority. We need to be concerned about introducing others to a Savior who can cleanse them from their sin. Once they come to Jesus and He saves them, He can make them what He wants them to be.

#### **I. The Spiritual Confidence of the Religious Man (v. 17-20) II. The Spiritual Contamination of the Religious Man (21-24)**

Not only did Paul attack the **spiritual confidence of the religious man**, he also pointed out the **spiritual contamination of the religious man**.

*“You therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? “You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make a boast in the law do you dishonor God through breaking the law? For ‘the name of God is blasphemed among the gentiles because of you’ as it is written.” (v. 21-24)*

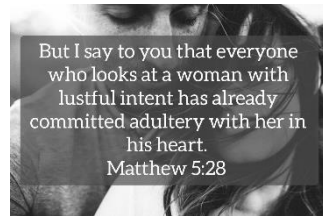


## A. They Were Guilty of Deception (v. 21-22)

These religious leaders were telling everyone else how wrong they were and how they had violated the law. But all the time, these religious leaders were doing almost the same thing themselves. They were busy practicing what they were preaching against.

You and I need to be careful when others are trying to tell us what we need to do to correct our lives. Especially when they are telling us we need to be like them! I have noticed when someone begins to harp on one particular sin over and over again, it may be the very sin they are struggling with themselves.

Jesus warned us in Matthew 5:28 that to think about a certain sin (ex. Adultery) is just as bad as doing it. We can sin in our heart and be just as guilty as if we are practicing the sin. What we think and do in our heart is equally important as what we do on the outside.



## B. They were guilty of Desecration (v. 23)

Because the Jews practice did not match their knowledge of the law, they were actually dishonoring and desecrating the Lord! We need to be careful not to do this act against God. When we sin, we actually sin against God!

**EVERY sin is a sin against GOD.**

When Joseph was tempted by Potipher's wife, Joseph responded by saying that he could not do that because it would be a "*sin against God.*" (Genesis 39:9)

When King David was confronted over his sin with Bathsheba, he stated in Psalms 51:4a, "*Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight.*"

We may think our sin only involves the one which we committed a sin against. But as David realized, when we sin, we actually sin against God.

## C. They Were Guilty of Destruction (v. 24)

Because they lived the way they did while claiming to be God's people, they were guilty of blaspheming. By their false profession, they were destroying the credibility of God. Many individuals have walked away from the institutional church because of its representatives.

This is true even today. It breaks my heart to hear individuals say, "I still love Jesus, but I really don't want to have anything to do with the church. The minister is not relevant, the church members are living in an unrealistic world, and my needs for fellowship and acceptance are not being met. All I find is condemnation and hypocrisy."



We as a nation are losing the next generation because of this very attitude expressed by so many. Our actions and words need to match our words of faith in God. If we are living by faith, why are we judging others by the law? We need a sense of grace living and grace giving towards others.



We need to let the light of God's love and grace shine in the communities we are involved with. We do need to be the salt and light in a darkened world.

**I. The Spiritual Confidence of the Religious Man (v. 17-20)**

**II. The Spiritual Contamination of the Religious Man (v. 21-24)**

**III. The Spiritual Condemnation of the Religious Man (v. 25-29)**

Paul has highlighted the **confidence** and **contamination** of the religious man, now he moves on to the **condemnation** of the religious man.

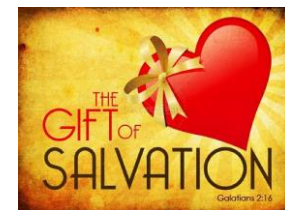


*“For circumcision is indeed profitable if you keep the law; but if you are a law breaker of the law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. Therefore, if an uncircumcised man keeps the righteous requirements of the law, will not his uncircumcision be counted as circumcision? And will not the physically uncircumcised, if he fulfills the law, judge you who even with your written code and circumcision, are a transgressor of the law? For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; 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.”*

**A. Condemnation by the Reality of His Sins (v. 25)**

This conversation concerning circumcision is one that is difficult for us to comprehend today. The Jews felt that if they had observed that ritual and had been circumcised, then God would accept them. The rabbis even taught that Abraham sat outside the gate of Hell and refused to allow

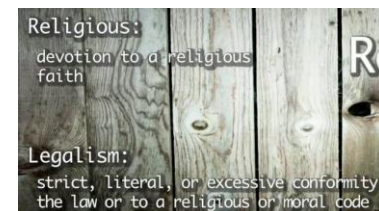
any circumcised Jew to enter. But Paul tells them that it is not circumcision that merits heaven, it is obedience to doing what we know is right. Salvation is deeper than the skin. Paul is telling them that what they do outwardly proves what they are inwardly.



In some ways we do that today. Are you a Christian? I go to church. I was baptized. I participate in the Lord's Supper. My parents go to church. Isn't that proof enough that I too am a Christian? But none of these in and of themselves make us right with God. Genuine salvation is only found in the heart. Holy living springs out of a right relationship with God. Jesus even said, "Therefore by their fruits you will know them." The fruit of life proves where the life is rooted. (Matthew 7:17-20)

**B. Condemned by the Righteousness of the Saint (v. 26-29a)**

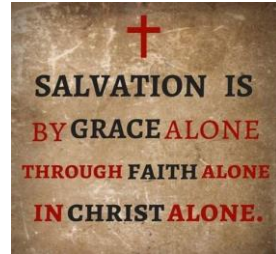
Paul tells the Jews that when the people they despised and looked down on lived lives pleasing to the Lord and had their hearts right with God, that they were accepted by God instead of the Jew! God tells them that the righteousness of these people judged the religious man as a sinner!



Let me say that there is a vast difference between the religious person who keeps the Law and tries to live right to please God, and the saved person who lives right because of a changed heart.

## C. Condemned by the Redemption of the Savior (v. 29b)

Paul's final argument against the religious man is to inform him that true religion is not a matter of the hands, the feet, the eyes, the head or the lips. It is a matter of the heart! God will only accept those who have placed their faith in nothing but the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. God will not praise those who tried to keep the letter of the law, but He will accept those who have loved, accepted, and believed in His Son. Salvation is by Grace Alone, through Faith Alone, in Christ Alone.

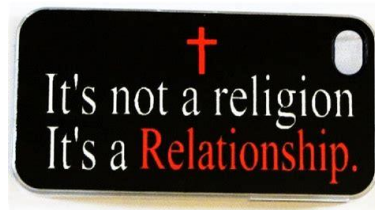


We must not be deceived into believing that we can do something pleasing for the Lord that will be good enough to get into Heaven on the basis of our works. We need to understand that salvation will only be granted to those who place their faith in Jesus.

### Conclusion

How would you describe yourself? Would you say you are a religious person or a redeemed person? There is a difference and that difference will determine where you will spend eternity.

In some ways I wish we could lose our religion and gain a relationship with Christ. We need redemption that can only be found in one person, the Only Begotten Son of God – Jesus Christ.



Are you counting on your religion to save you or are you counting on your relationship with Christ as a redeemed person for eternity? Jesus is calling us to trust Him and Him alone.

### LET US PRAY

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Sermon outline from the Sermon Notebook – Romans 2:17-29, God's Judgment of the Religious Man